



SESSION 4

A CHANNEL OF COMFORT

The Point

God's work in our lives makes us channels of His comfort to others.

The Passage

2 Corinthians 1:2-7

The Bible Meets Life

No one is immune from trouble. No one wants to go through hardships, but sometimes life rains on us. Thankfully, God never abandons His children, and we can know the power of His presence in the challenges we face. When we've walked through a hard season of life with God's comforting grace, we can walk with others undergoing the same difficulties. We can encourage them with the love, grace, and comfort of Christ.

The Setting

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in about A.D. 56. He wrote to the church in Corinth in response to false teachers who had infiltrated the church. In the process of promoting themselves, these false apostles had sought to discredit Paul in the eyes of the Corinthian believers and questioned his position as an apostle. In writing 2 Corinthians, Paul sought to both defend his apostleship and expose his accusers as false teachers.

What does the Bible say?

Comfort (v. 5)—Occurring 10 times in verses 3-7 (including “receive” in v. 4), the Greek term means to stand alongside someone encouraging the person as he or she undergoes severe trials.

2 Corinthians 1:2-7 (CSB)

² **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

³ **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.**

⁴ **He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.**

⁵ **For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.**

⁶ **If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer.**

⁷ **And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort.**

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss **Question #1** on page 105 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): “**What is your favorite comfort food?**” Allow time for each person to respond.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): To introduce today’s topic in a creative way, prepare a sign for each of the following foods and post them around your meeting area: grilled cheese sandwich, pizza, macaroni and cheese, pasta, and fried chicken. Ask

group members to choose their favorite comfort food and to go stand by that sign. Take an informal poll to rank the top five favorite comfort foods among your group members. *(Note: You may need to temporarily move chairs out of the way for this activity.)*

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 106): I was never a good source of comfort. When someone was facing sickness or death, I’d offer sympathy because that’s what you’re supposed to do. I might even offer a prayer, but seldom would I want to visit them or attend the funeral. What good would it do for me to be there? Then my niece died. Suddenly and without warning, something changed inside of me. Now, when someone is sick, instead of just praying *for* them, I pray *with* them. I try to help in any way I can, even if that means just sitting with them in the hospital or funeral home.

SAY: “In his Letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul showed us the comforting role we can play in the lives of others.”

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point** on page 106 of the PSG: “**God’s work in our lives makes us channels of His comfort to others.**”

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer. Pray for the sensitivity to see the opportunities God places before you to extend His comfort to others.

TIP: Make it a habit to pray regularly for your group members, their spiritual growth, and your time together in Bible study.

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PACK POSTER:
Pack Item #11
“Comfort” poster
PLAYLIST PICK:
“Home”
By Chris Tomlin



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

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2 Corinthians 1:2-3 (CSB)

² **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

³ **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.**

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Corinthians 1:2-3.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 107): Paul followed the Greco-Roman practice of beginning his letter with a greeting, but he used two words that made this greeting unique: grace and peace.

- » **Grace.** The common Jewish prayer combined mercy and peace, but Paul used grace instead of mercy. Mercy is certainly encompassed by God’s grace, but grace is the foundation for all we have in Christ. Grace expresses what Christ did for us in giving us salvation.
- » **Peace.** Paul wrote to the Corinthians in Greek, but as a Jew, he was surely familiar with the Hebrew word for peace: *shalom*. *Shalom* was the common greeting, expressing a wish for health, completeness, and wholeness in a person’s life, both physically and spiritually. Paul intended an even deeper meaning for the word: what we experience in Christ as a result of His grace.

SAY: “Paul used this new greeting to remind the church that God’s grace will redeem their hurt and pain and God’s peace will fill them with His comfort.”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 107): When we experience pain and loss, God showers His grace and mercy upon us. He redeems us and restores us in His timing through His grace. God’s grace also comforts us as God is the “Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” (v. 3).

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 107 of the PSG: **“How specifically does God comfort us in our troubles?”**

TRANSITION: While anyone can show comfort, it is most perfectly seen in the actions of God.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What can we learn from these verses about God’s nature?

2 Corinthians 1:2-3 Commentary

God is the source of comfort. Verse 2: Since Paul usually wrote to people from Jewish as well as Gentile backgrounds, it was common for him to include the dual greeting—grace and peace—in his letters. “Grace” was a variation on the typical Gentile greeting while “peace” was a typically Jewish greeting. They represent all it means to have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Grace refers to the undeserved kindness and forgiveness we receive from God that saves us from sin and allows us to become part of God’s family. But the word also refers to the ongoing strength that enables us to live for Christ.

The Hebrew word for “peace” for the Jews referred to wholeness and prosperity, especially in a spiritual sense. In the New Testament, the greatest peace is peace with God—what we experience in Christ when, as a result of His grace, we are no longer enemies of God. This peace is a result of both Christ’s work of salvation on our behalf and the presence of the Holy Spirit living in us (Philippians 4:7).

Paul noted that both grace and peace come from “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul experienced and emphasized God as a forgiving and merciful God who gives grace so we can experience abundant and eternal life. We experience this life when we accept the salvation freely offered to us because of the death and resurrection of God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 3: Later in this letter Paul reminded the Corinthians of the hardships he had experienced because of his commitment to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Those physical and emotional trials were such that anyone who heard about them would have wondered how a person could even survive the trials. But Paul not only survived, he actually thrived despite the difficulties because of the mercies he received from God, his Father.

The Greek word for mercy means to relieve one’s sorrows and/or meet their needs. Paul presented our Heavenly Father as “the God of all comfort” who gives us what we need to continue our journey through this life when we think it’s impossible. “Comfort” in the New Testament refers to the actions of one who stands beside another who is going through pain or trouble. This partnership brings encouragement and especially strength to keep going regardless of the hardship. Comfort does not end the difficulty; rather, it gives a person the necessary strength to endure it. While any person can show comfort, it is most perfectly seen in the actions of God.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes

2 Corinthians 1:4-5 (CSB)

4 He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Corinthians 1:4-5.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGES 108-109): Suffering and hardship may be our current reality, but so is God’s presence.

- » When we go through affliction and hardship, God promises that He will comfort us. “He comforts us in all our affliction” (v. 4).
- » God comforts us because He loves and cares for us deeply and “so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (v. 4). God comforts us so that we are equipped to comfort others!
- » While God definitely supplies a sense of inner comfort and peace through His Holy Spirit, God also loves to comfort His children through His church, the body of Christ.
- » As broken vessels and followers of Christ, we are connected to Him, who suffered and died for us. Paul made this connection in verse 5: “For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.”

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 108 of the PSG: **“In what ways has God shown Himself to be ‘the God of all comfort’ in your life?”**

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 109 of the PSG: **“What do these verses teach us about God’s intention for the body of Christ?”** (Note: Highlight God’s desire for His people to love, pray for, and encourage each other. This demonstrates His deep love for His people and His ongoing work in and through the body of Christ.)

TRANSITION: Since we have comfort in Christ, we can and should be a comfort to others.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What obstacles prevent us from serving as channels of comfort?

2 Corinthians 1:4-5 Commentary

We are called to be channels of God's comfort. Verse 4: God cares about us, His children, especially when we experience affliction. The Greek term pictures great pressure being exerted on something or someone. The affliction could be either physical or emotional difficulty. Though believers will experience such struggles, we don't go through them alone. God is with us, to encourage and strengthen us, so we can continue even in the midst of these afflictions.

Paul emphasized that God comforts us "so that we may be able to comfort" others who experience "any kind of affliction." Notice that this comfort we give to others doesn't come from ourselves. Rather, it comes from God. We don't have to provide the strength or encouragement others need in their times of distress. We only need to receive it from God and then be available so He can provide His comfort through us to others.

In our culture, comfort is often thought of as being freed from pain, suffering, and anxiety, accompanied by an emotional sense of relief and well-being. However, the comfort that comes from God is "a stiffening agent that fortifies one in heart, mind, and soul. Comfort relates to encouragement, help, and exhortation. God's comfort strengthens weak knees and sustains sagging spirits so that one faces the troubles of life with unbending resolve and unending assurance."¹

Verse 5: Commentators have had differing views on exactly what Paul meant when he referred to "the sufferings of Christ." One possible explanation is that they refer to the difficulties believers face because of their commitment to follow Christ. Paul emphasized that Christ's sufferings will "overflow to us," that is, we will have an abundance or surplus of them. Paul went on to explain that these sufferings will be balanced out by the comfort we receive through Christ. It also overflows to us through Christ, thus we receive a surplus of His encouragement, strength, and motivation. For Paul, the surplus of comfort far outweighed that of the sufferings. Part of that comfort was the final, future promise and hope of God in Christ (Romans 8:18). Because of this abundance we receive, we, like Paul, are able to be channels of God's comfort to others.

1. David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 60.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

2 Corinthians 1:6-7 (CSB)

⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort.

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity on page 111 on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses aloud.



GRACE AND PEACE:

» In which of the following ways has God provided comfort to you in the past?

Check all that apply.

His Word

Music

Christian friends & family

Sermons/ Books/ Podcasts

Other: _____

» Which Scripture passage brings you the most comfort? Rewrite it in your own words below.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Corinthians 1:6-7.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 110): God wants to use the challenges you face and the difficulties you have endured in your past to comfort others.

- » Suffering and comfort both are shared experiences for all believers in Christ. As Paul wrote in verse 7: "And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort."
- » Only when we learn how to share in one another's sufferings can we truly grasp what it means to share in one another's comfort and joy.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What do you find hopeful in these verses?

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 110 of the PSG: "How can these verses influence the way we serve one another?"

TRANSITION: We have a great opportunity for God to use us—to be a source of His comfort—as our own journeys through afflictions and the comfort we received prepare us to bring comfort into the lives of others facing similar affliction.

2 Corinthians 1:6-7 Commentary

We can use our difficulties to comfort others. Verse 6: The Corinthians could have been among those who thought suffering was inconsistent with the Christian life. Apparently they had questioned Paul's claim to apostleship because of his sufferings. Paul sought to correct this wrong thinking as he emphasized God had a purpose for his suffering. He noted that his afflictions were for the Corinthians' comfort and salvation. Paul was willing to endure pain and hardship to fulfill God's mission for his life. The Corinthian believers had been among the many who had benefited from Paul's sufferings, in that through those sufferings they had heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and received salvation. But rather than being grateful for the part Paul played in their salvation, they had turned away from him and embraced false teachers.

The "patient endurance" Paul mentioned does not refer to a reliance on some type of self-determination to get through a hard task or difficult situation. In the pagan world, the Greek term was used of a type of courage that was dependent solely upon oneself, that faced trouble without the expectation of receiving help from anyone else. However, in Scripture the Greek term translated "patient endurance" refers to an unwavering confidence (usually directed toward God) that help is coming from someone else. Especially here it means trust in God—patiently waiting on His promised strength and help. This divine empowerment is what the Corinthians would need as they followed Christ, because as they lived for Him they would undergo the same sufferings Paul had experienced.

Verse 7: From Paul's words in 1 Corinthians it often seems the Corinthians were not really living for Christ. Their lives showed little contrast to the lives of pagans in Corinth. It doesn't appear the Corinthian believers were actually experiencing any significant difficulty or opposition from unbelievers as a result of following Christ. Even so, Paul's hope for them was firm. This hope was based on God's work in them. Just as he emphasized to the Philippian believers (Philippians 1:6), Paul was certain God would finish what He had begun in the Corinthian believers—the completion of their salvation. This would certainly include the sufferings of Christ.

With the closing words of this section, Paul again emphasized the connection between comfort and sufferings. Only when believers experience the sufferings of Christ can they likewise experience the comfort of Christ. It is through these sufferings and the comfort God provides that believers are conformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-39; James 1:2-4). And when believers receive comfort from Christ, we not only have strength and endurance to keep going through our sufferings, but we also are able to both comfort others who suffer as well and serve as examples to a watching world.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes



Dotted lines for taking notes.

LEADER PACK: Bring your group’s attention to **Pack Item #11**, “Comfort” poster, to reinforce the main idea of today’s session.

SAY: “How will you live out the truth found in 2 Corinthians 1:2-7?”

GUIDE: Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 112 of the PSG.



- » **Memorize 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.** Pray this passage when you are experiencing suffering and affliction. Praise God for being the source of all comfort.
- » **Be available.** Consider how your own experience with suffering can be used to encourage others. Write out your story and pray for an opportunity to share this with someone else facing a similar situation.
- » **Learn more about Christian suffering worldwide.** Check out the Voice of the Martyr’s organization website, *Persecution.com*, to learn more about Christians facing persecution for their faith. Commit to pray for these believers and ask God to sustain and strengthen them.

Wrap It Up

SAY: “We each face difficulties and adversity. The good news is that God Himself can use our experiences to prepare us to minister to others facing similar circumstances. **God wants to use you to share His comfort with others.**”



Additional ideas for your group are available at
BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra