

How God Uses Our Suffering

2 Corinthians 1: 1-11

2 Corinthians



Fujian Evangelical Church
溫哥華基督教閩南堂

35TH Anniversary

Doing Life Together
Carry Each Other's Burdens

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction.

2 Timothy 4:2

Why 2 Corinthians ?

- Paul addresses lingering concerns in that church
- Also reveals truth about himself & his ministry
- “letter of the transparent apostle” – most autobiographical of Paul’s writings (13/27 NT books)
- Under influence of false teachers, church has started a movement to discredit or “impeach” Paul

- Impeach: to cast doubt on
- *especially* : to challenge the credibility or validity of a public figure

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- Under influence of false teachers, church has started a movement to discredit or “impeach” Paul
- Strong & forceful style; least systematic of his letters
- Rare & beautiful mix of strength & compassion
- Key Themes: suffering; forgiveness; reconciliation; ministry; servanthood; giving; (a glimpse of what happens after death)

2 Corinthians

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Invest your time by reading God's Word

<i>3 John</i>	<i>219 words</i>	<i>2.2 minutes</i>
<i>Colossians</i>	<i>1,582</i>	<i>16 minutes</i>
<i>Micah</i>	<i>2,118</i>	<i>21 minutes</i>
<i>2 Corinthians</i>	<i>4,477 words</i>	<i>45 minutes</i>
<i>1 Corinthians</i>	<i>6,830</i>	<i>68 minutes</i>
<i>Mark</i>	<i>11,304</i>	<i>113 minutes</i>
<i>Psalms</i>	<i>30,147</i>	<i>301 minutes</i>
<i>Jeremiah</i>	<i>33,002 words</i>	<i>330 minutes</i>

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia:

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

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 6 If we are distressed, 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 we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

Question asked when trouble comes ?

WHY?!!

WHY ?

- Not answered in the OT
- NT: not a problem anymore
- Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ... (Hebrews 5: 8)
- For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.. (1 Pt. 4: 18)

Why God allows suffering into the lives of His Children

- Suffering transforms our attitude toward ourselves
- Suffering prepares us to be of real help to other sufferers
- [Suffering strengthens our relationship with God (and with one another) as nothing else can]
- Suffering drives us to pray to God as we never would otherwise

Transforms our attitude toward self



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9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. (vv. 8-10; NIV)

We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. 9 In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. (NLT)

Transforms our attitude toward self

- Humbles us; strips away unrealistic self-confidence and pride
- Shows how “fragile” we are, how little control we have
- Reminds us of how dependent we are on God, and helps us live accordingly
- Helps us see our weaknesses and to start working on them

It was so bad we didn't think we were going to make it. We felt like we'd been sent to death row, that it was all over for us. As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally—not a bad idea since he's the God who raises the dead! And he did it, rescued us from certain doom. And he'll do it again, ... (2 Cor. 1: 8b-10a; MSG)

Transforms our attitude toward self

- “Suffering also leads us to examine ourselves and see weaknesses, because it brings out the worst in us. Our weak faith, sharp tongues, laziness, insensitivity to people, worry, bitter spirit, and other weaknesses in character will become evident to us (and others) in hard times. . . . Suffering will throw these inner flaws into relief during times of stress in a way that enables us to get out of denial and to begin working on them.” - Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Dutton, 2013; p. 191.

Suffering prepares us to be of real help to other sufferers

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. (2 Cor. 1: 3-7; ESV)

For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. (2 Cor. 1: 5)

For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (2 Cor. 1: 5; NIV, 1984)

How do Christ's sufferings continue in us ?

- We are “members” of the body of Jesus Christ
- There's intimate mystical union between the church and Jesus Christ in suffering
- In our sinful, fallen and broken world, some face severe physical pain; others experience intense emotional battles
- Because Jesus lives within us through the Holy Spirit, He shares our pains, sorrows & frustrations
- He offers us comfort

Christ's comfort overflows to us ...

- through other believers
- They encourage us with physical presence, share our pain by listening, offer comfort in practical ways
- Their empathy, confidence & hope in Christ will lift us
- We will go through tough times; but God never intended for us to go through them alone

Suffering prepares us to be of real help to other sufferers

- comfort = *parakletos* = *para* + *kaleo*
- *para* = alongside
- *kaleo* = to call
- *parakletos* = **called alongside to help**
- John uses *parakletos* to refer to the Holy Spirit (the Comforter, the Advocate) – The Paraclete

- “Following Jesus isn’t ... about being strong; it’s about being weak. It’s not about rules and perfection; it’s about forgiveness and grace. ... [People] have heard enough from Christians who condemn them from afar; what they are looking for is followers of God who come alongside to help. Who is qualified to offer such help? ... The one qualified to comfort ... is the person who has first been comforted by God. And who does God comfort? Those who have it all together? No. God comforts the suffering.” – Donna Partow, *Extracting the Precious from 2 Corinthians*

Suffering strengthens our relationship with God; it also strengthens our relationship with one another

- “God does not comfort us that we may be comfortable, but that we may be comforters.”

- Alexander

Nowell

- “God allows suffering so that we might have a capacity to enter into another’s sorrow and affliction. God gives His children the capacity to empathize, to understand, by bringing similar sufferings into our lives.” – Charles Swindoll

Suffering drives us to pray to God as we never would otherwise

9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

(2 Corinthians 1: 9-11)

- v. 11 – “as you help us with your prayers” is a dull translation of a very rich Greek phrase
- “You (plural) also helping together on our behalf”
- Prayer is hard work in which we all cooperate together to support someone else
- On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers.
- Corporate intercessory prayer increases the thanksgiving of God’s people

9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. **On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many. (2 Corinthians 1: 9-11)**

What have we learned ?

- Suffering transforms our attitude toward ourselves
- Suffering prepares us to be of real help to other sufferers
- [Suffering strengthens our relationship with God (and with one another) as nothing else can]
- Suffering drives us to pray to God as we never would otherwise

Word of caution

- “Suffering is an important way to grow. People who have not suffered much are often shallow, unacquainted with both their weaknesses and strengths, naïve about human nature and life, and almost always fragile and unresilient. But we know that suffering does not deepen and enrich us automatically. ... An old saying goes, “The same sun that melts wax hardens clay,” and so the same traumatic experience can ruin one person and make another person stronger and even happier.”
- Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Dutton, 2013; p. 205.

What determines the outcome of suffering?

- Walk with our Lord through our suffering ?
- Walk away from our Lord when we suffer ?

Homework question

- Since 2 Corinthians was written to counter the attacks of the “false teachers” and to re-establish Paul’s credibility as their legitimate leader, why would Paul plunge into an account of his recent troubles right at the beginning of the letter? Wouldn’t it just show how weak a leader he was?

