

Enjoying God's Comfort  
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2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-14

*"What good can come of this?"* It's a question we've all asked in the midst of trying and tragic situations. As believers we quote and cling to Romans 8:28's promise that God will work all things for our good and His glory. Still, we're human and getting through the trials and tragedies of life is painful. Sometimes it feels impossible —like you just might die!

**How does God use trials and tragedies for good? What are some examples?**

The Apostle Paul wrote another letter to his sometimes misbehaving spiritual children in the church at Corinth. Some false teachers were slandering Paul and he was writing to defend his authority and to strengthen the weak faith of the Corinthian believers.

He begins by talking about suffering and trials. It's almost as if he starts this way to say to them: *"Since I last saw you I've been going through some tough times and I've learned some things about how God can comfort His children in the midst of trials and tragedy. I want you to learn from my own experience so when you are suffering (and you will, we all will) you can understand how comforts us in our trials and uses our trials to comfort others and glorify Himself."* Paul begins in praise to God:

2 Corinthians 1:3–7 (NLT): 3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. 4 He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. 5 For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. 6 Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. 7 We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

- Paul reminds us God is merciful to His children and is our source of comfort.
- When we're in pain (physical, emotional, or spiritual) we all want to be comforted, and God "comforts us in all our troubles." The more we suffer (especially for Christ) the more God will "shower us with comfort through Christ."
- Sign me up for that! That sounds like instant relief.
- Question: **Does comfort equal instant relief from our painful situation? If not, then what good is comfort? If comfort doesn't mean instant relief, then how does comfort work?**
- If the comfort of God was simply instant relief from suffering then we'd mentally keep Him in our medicine cabinet and turn to Him only when we need pain relief. At that point our relationship with God would be the same one we have with extra strength Tylenol.
- Warren Wiersbe: *"We must not think of comfort in terms of "sympathy," because sympathy can weaken us instead of strengthen us. God does not pat us on the head and give us a piece of candy or a toy to distract our attention from our troubles. No, He puts strength into our hearts so we can face our trials and triumph over them. Our English word comfort comes from two Latin words meaning "with strength." The Greek word means "to come alongside and help." It is the same word used for the Holy Spirit ("the Comforter") in John 14–16."*
- **What do you remember about Paul's "thorn in the flesh? (2 Cor. 12:7-10)" How did Paul say God used this unknown suffering in his life? What encouragement did God give Paul in 12:9? What was Paul's "battle cry" against this suffering in 12:10? Back to 1:3-14.**
- It's tempting to relate these verses mainly to physical suffering and health problems, but suffering can be financial, emotional, or relational. It can be persecution in general or persecution because of your faith in Christ (lots of that in Paul's day.)
- Sometimes your trial is at the hands of cruel people being used by Satan.

God spoke in Isaiah 51:12–16 (NLT): 12 *"I, yes I, am the one who comforts you. So why are you afraid of mere humans, who wither like the grass and disappear? 13 Yet you have forgotten the Lord, your Creator, the one who stretched out the sky like a canopy and laid the foundations of the earth. Will you remain in constant dread of human oppressors? Will you continue to fear the anger of your enemies? Where is their fury and anger now? It is gone! 14 Soon all you captives will be released! Imprisonment, starvation,*

*and death will not be your fate! 15 For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea, causing its waves to roar. My name is the Lord of Heaven's Armies. 16 And I have put my words in your mouth and hidden you safely in my hand. I stretched out the sky like a canopy and laid the foundations of the earth. I am the one who says to Israel, 'You are my people!' "*

- Paul knew persecution and physical suffering, look at verse eight: 2 Corinthians 1:8–10 (NLT): *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.*
- Paul didn't hide his emotions or deny his trials with a stoic silence. He said things were so bad he thought he was at the end of his life, but look at what his suffering did for him: *But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. 10 And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us.*
- Are you trying to be strong enough or tough enough to weather this storm yourself? Forget it, it can't be done. In a real trial we need real, supernatural power. The same God who is powerful enough to raise Jesus from the dead will give us the strength to get through the worst trials and tragedies. What's more, the closer we press into God during our trials, the deeper our relationship is with Him.
- Another important point: Paul said God will not only give us strength in our trials, He will use our suffering to help others.

4 He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

- **Have you ever experienced that? How have you seen this work in your life or the lives of others?**

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Suffering and trials are a part of the "human condition" that none of us can avoid. However, for the follower of Christ, it's all about how we deal with suffering.
- We can try to face trials in our own strength, but that never works. Instead we have access to the Spirit of God living in us to give us the comfort and strength we need to endure, survive, and thrive. That's another of the tremendous blessings of being a follower of Christ.

- Another truth about trials: The more we press into God during trials, the deeper our relationship with Him grows. In that sense we're actually blessed through trials.
- For a believer, suffering is the price we pay for stronger faith. As awful as trials and tragedies are, we need to remember they grow our faith. Paul wrote to the Roman Christians:

Romans 5:3–5 (NLT): 3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. 5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

- Something else to remember is that God doesn't waste anything and that includes suffering.
- Not only can God comfort us in our times of suffering, He can USE us and our story to comfort others if we'll just be available to others who are in similar trials.

Quoting Wiersbe again:

*“God works out His purposes in the trials of life, if we yield to Him, trust Him, and obey what He tells us to do. Difficulties can increase our faith and strengthen our prayer lives. Difficulties can draw us closer to other Christians as they share the burdens with us. Difficulties can be used to glorify God. So, when you find yourself in the trials of life, remember what God is to you and what God does for you.”*