

## 1. Learning to Deal with Suffering

Today, we are beginning a new series of topics that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand and apply in their lives from the book of 2 Corinthians. Paul wrote this book to the Christians in Corinth at a time when many of them were rejecting his ministry to them. As a result, Paul teaches us many lessons about the way to deal with suffering and rejection in this book. This is one of the things that we want to help our children learn to understand and know how to deal with if they are going to become godly, reproducing Christians.

Paul began this letter by saying in 2 Corinthians 2:1-2, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Here, we see that Paul was an apostle because that was the will of God. In 1 Corinthians 15:8-9, Paul said, “Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” Paul realized that he was an apostle by the will of God even though he did not meet all of the qualifications. The Lord also chooses to work through our lives even when we do not feel qualified. Timothy joined with Paul in sending this letter to the Corinthians.

This letter was sent to the church at Corinth and to all of the Christians that lived in Achaia or what is today southern Greece. Here, we see that Paul and Timothy focused on the whole region and not just the city. This is an important lesson for us also. We need to learn how to minister to a region in the same way. Wherever we are, the Lord wants to work through our lives to reach out to the whole surrounding region. Paul and Timothy wanted all of the Christians to experience both the grace and the peace of the Lord.

As we begin the first chapter of this book, we see that Paul and Timothy were going through a time of tribulation and suffering. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” The word that is translated “tribulation” speaks of going through a time of pressure, distress or oppression. However, instead of complaining, Paul and Timothy looked at what God was doing in their lives through this tribulation.

God understood the pressures that they faced in their lives because He is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. God had provided comfort to them in this time of tribulation. However, they explained what the Lord was doing in their own lives during this difficult time. They were experiencing the comfort of God, but they also realized that the Lord was equipping them to comfort others as they went through times of suffering. Here, we see a key lesson about suffering. The Lord allows suffering in our lives to prepare us for ministry to others during their times of suffering. This is why James 1:2 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” The Lord is working through the trials that we experience in our lives to equip us to share the comfort that God has given us. As a result, we can have joy even in times of suffering.

2 Corinthians 1:5-7 says, “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you *is* steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also *you will partake* of the consolation.” A key thing to notice here is that the word translated “comfort” in verses 3 and 4 is the same word that is translated “consolation” in verses 5-7 so that word is used six times in these verses.

The word that is translated “consolation” or “comfort” means *a calling near for help or that which provides encouragement, comfort or refreshment*. Paul and Timothy were experiencing suffering for the sake of Christ. However, at the same time, Paul and Timothy saw that the Lord was giving them strength and boldness even in the middle of their suffering. Here, Paul makes it clear that the Lord is allowing them to suffer these things so that they can provide encouragement and comfort to the Christians in Corinth and other places. In 2 Corinthians 7:6-7, Paul and Timothy wrote, “Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.” Paul and Timothy had experienced comfort both from the coming of Titus and from the report that he gave about the church at Corinth.

At the same time, Paul and Timothy said that if they were comforted, it was for the encouragement and salvation of the Christians at Corinth. Here, we see that just as the message from Titus brought encouragement to Paul and Timothy, they wanted the Christians in Corinth to experience this same encouragement. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 8:16-17, Paul wrote that Titus had developed this same concern for the Christians in Corinth. Those verses say, “But thanks *be* to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord.” Here, we see that Paul also realized that many of the Corinthian Christians were also suffering for their faith.

That is why 2 Corinthians 1:7 says, “And our hope for you *is* steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also *you will partake* of the consolation.” Here, we see that Paul and Timothy were concerned as they heard about the suffering that the Christians in Corinth were experiencing. We see that Paul and Timothy wanted to be a help and encouragement to these Christians that were suffering by bearing their burdens with them. Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Paul and Timothy wanted those who were suffering to know that their hope for the Corinthian Christians was steadfast. The word that is translated “steadfast” means *firm or sure*. Here, we see that Paul and Timothy wanted the Corinthians to know that they had a firm desire for God to give the Christians the same comfort and encouragement that they were experiencing.

Paul went on to explain more about the deliverance that they had experienced in Asia. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 says, “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves

but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver *us*, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift *granted* to us through many.” Here, we see that they had experienced great suffering and trouble in Asia.

Paul said that they were burdened beyond measure. The problems they experienced were so difficult that they even wondered if they would survive. Paul said that it seemed like it could become more than their strength could even bear. They felt that they would not even escape with their lives because these problems were so difficult. Paul even said that they had the sentence of death in themselves. Here, we see Paul felt that they had a death sentence from which there was no escape through their own efforts. Paul had written earlier to the Galatians in Galatians 2:20 which says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Paul knew that they could not depend on themselves but had to live by faith in Christ.

As a result, Paul realized that they could not trust in themselves but had to trust in God. Here is a key lesson that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand when they are going through difficult situations and problems. At that point, our children need to be reminded that they serve the God who raises the dead. Paul had reminded the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:56-57, “The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We want to remind our children that we serve the One who raises the dead.

Paul went on to speak of the way that the Lord delivers us from death. Paul said that the Lord had delivered them in the past. Paul said that the Lord delivers us day by day. Paul said that as a result we can trust the Lord to deliver us from whatever may come in the future. We want to remind our children of this same thing when they are suffering or going through very difficult periods in their lives.

Paul also reminded the Corinthians that they had a part in this deliverance through their prayers for Paul and Timothy. Here, we are reminded of the power of prayer. Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” We also want to help our children learn to pray with thanksgiving. As they learn to give thanks for the way that the Lord will answer their prayers, they will experience the peace of God in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children look to the Lord who raises the dead when they suffer.