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2 Corinthians 1

“What Suffering Produces”

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Since this is the first study in 2 Corinthians, it's important to know some of the historical background. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians probably within a year or so of his first letter. The approximate date would be about 57-58AD. Corinth is in the southern province of Achaia. Paul wrote from Macedonia, which is in northern Greece. His purpose in writing this letter was to refute false teachers and to defend his apostolic ministry. His first letter was met with stiff opposition so it was necessary for him to defend his ministry and calling.

He begins the letter with words of real comfort and encouragement to the church. We'll also see that Paul is much more open about his own struggles and hardships. He understands that you don't have to look very far to find broken hearts, broken lives and broken homes, and he knows that life takes a toll on everyone. He will share evidence in his own life that demonstrates this world can be a pretty cruel place. Trouble will come and go, and trials and adversity are a part of life. Paul starts this letter by helping the church learn about suffering from God's perspective.

In [2 Corinthians 1:4](#), the word used in the NIV is “*troubles*.” In the KJV the word is “*tribulation*,” which comes from the Latin *tribulum*. During the days of the Roman Empire, a tribulum was used to separate the wheat from the chaff. It was basically a wooden threshing sled with flint teeth on the underside. After harnessing it to a horse or an ox, a person would stand on top of the sled so it could be driven overtop of wheat that had been laid out on a hard surface. The combination of the weight, pressure and the flint teeth would crush the husks and separate the wheat from the chaff. From this we get the word tribulation, which speaks of a crushing weight, an intense pressure, and something in life that seems almost unbearable.

Paul is so honest and so transparent about his own hardships that he says in [2 Corinthians 1:8b-9a](#): “*...we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.*” It's not clear if he means that things were so severe that he *wanted* to die or that he *expected* to die. Either way, what is clear is that he had come to the end of his rope, so to speak. He described the crushing weight of his own hardships.

We see in Paul's life that even Christians – like the apostle Paul – can feel despondent, helpless and hopeless. Still, he held fast to the Lord, because he considered these events with an eternal perspective. He wrote in **2 Corinthians 4:8–10, 16–18**) these words that have encouraged Christians for centuries: *“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

2 Corinthians 11:24–28 gives an incredible list of what Paul had been through and what he deemed to be *“light and momentary troubles.”* Just look at his list of beyond belief experiences! He writes: *“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”*

His letter is not written from a theological or theoretical point of view; he's writing from personal experience and a desire to bring practical application to the lives of believers in the church. We'll see in **2 Corinthians 1:3–11** that Paul will explain what suffering produces *in* us, and what suffering produces *through* us.

Suffering Produces Greater Gratitude For The Tenderness Of God

1. In **2 Corinthians 1:3**, Paul states that the Lord is the *“God of all comfort”* and the *“Father of compassion.”*
2. When we go through times of personal difficulty, it's a real comfort to know the God of the Psalms.
 - a. **Psalm 34:18** – *“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*
 - b. **Psalm 46:1** – *“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”*
 - c. **Psalm 119:76** – *“May your unfailing love be my comfort...”*
3. The word *“comfort”* is used nine times between verses three and seven!
 - a. The Greek words are *parakaleo* (verb) and *paraklesis* (noun). Para means beside and kaleo means to call.
 - b. This is the same word (*parakletos*) used for the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, who comes alongside us.
4. In his tenderness and mercy, God will come alongside us to sustain us and carry us when we feel we can't go on.

Suffering Produces Greater Empathy For Other Hurting People

5. It's been said, "Your misery will become your ministry."
 - a. Every believer is not called to full-time, paid Christian ministry, but every Christian is called to ministry.
 - b. One of the ministries that God has called believers to is that of comforting the broken.
 - c. Even though you may not see yourself as one who is gifted in the area of comforting others, nevertheless, God calls every Christian to it.
 - d. God equips Christians for this ministry out of their personal trials and life experiences.
 - e. People will listen to those who have been "tried by fire."
6. Paul saw himself as a funnel of God's comfort, so that what he received, he passed on to others who needed it too.
 - a. **2 Corinthians 1:4** – "...so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."
7. Your example of how God has sustained you and comforted you through your trials will be like medicine on the wounds of other hurting people.

Suffering Produces Greater Appreciation For Christ's Suffering

8. When you are going through some crushing experience, remember the cross.
9. Jesus knows what suffering is all about, and he endured far more than any suffering we might experience.
10. **Isaiah 53:3** says, "*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.*"
11. Jesus knew what it was to be completely alone in his suffering; wracked with pain; falsely accused and abandoned by friends.
12. He knows what you're going through and he will comfort you so you can comfort others.

Suffering Produces Greater Dependence On God Rather Than Self

13. When we become too self-reliant, too self-sufficient, too self-absorbed, God will allow trials to come our way to strip us of those things in order to create a greater dependence on God.
14. The world's philosophy says that we should esteem those who are "self-made" or the "captain of his ship" or the "master of his destiny."
15. These clichés are symptomatic of a bigger problem – man's attempt to live independent of God.

Suffering Produces Greater Need For Prayer

16. Tribulation moves us in the direction of God and stirs in us a greater need for prayer.
17. **2 Corinthians 1:10b–11** – *“On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 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.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **2 Corinthians 1:1–11** to provide an overview for this study.
3. Read and discuss **Psalm 34:18, 46:1 and 119:76**.
 - a. Allow the people in your group to share specific experiences, which demonstrate the Lord is always true to his Word.
 - b. Spend time talking about people in the Bible who experienced God’s comfort and ministry.
4. Pastor Gary said when he prays with someone going through a terrible time that he often thinks to himself: “A wonderful ministry will emerge from this, if only the person will allow God to carry them through. They will have a powerful and special ministry to other people.”
 - a. Allow the people in your group to share a specific experience that God brought them through that allowed an opportunity for ministry to others.
 - b. Are there experiences you’ve had that you could use to minister to others?
5. Read and discuss **2 Corinthians 4:8–10, 16–18**.
6. Read and discuss the incredible list of “*light and momentary troubles*” Paul experienced. (**2 Corinthians 11:24–28**)
 - a. It’s easy to see that Paul would be right in saying “...*we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.*” (**2 Corinthians 1:8b–9a**)
7. Read and discuss **Isaiah 53:3**, focusing on the suffering Savior.
8. When you’ve gone through difficult times, did you find yourself sensing a need to draw closer to the Lord?
9. Close your time by allowing everyone in your group to: to recognize the Lord is compassionate and he’s the “*God of all comfort*” and to know that the Lord can be trusted to help them deal with every difficult and troubling event in their life; to trust the Lord and personally know that they have not been abandoned or forgotten, even though their circumstances may be difficult and almost unbearable; to trust the Lord for his perfect timing; to trust the Lord to bind up the brokenhearted

and sustain those who feel as though they can't go on; give their burdens, cares, concerns, worries and fears to the Lord; allow the Holy Spirit to minister to each person as they quietly bring their needs to the Lord, whatever they may be.

TIME FOR PRAYER IS A VITAL PART OF EVERY K-GROUP MEETING!