



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-7

2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] Lord, we continue to lift up those who are caught in these disasters of hurricanes, earthquakes, fires. We know that there are real people in those situations that are hurting and suffering. Our hearts go out to them and we want to lift them up to you for their safety. Lord, we thank you for what you're doing in each of our lives and we want to get to know you better. We're here because we value you and we worship you to that end and we listen to your word being taught and read to that end. So Father, now I ask that you would speak to each person here. Give us open hearts, willing hearts to you and to what you have to say. We thank you so much for you word. In Jesus' name, amen.

There are 66 books in the Bible, each one having a special message. So when we take a book like we took 1 Samuel before, Jonah before that, or Ephesians before that, we're trying to find out what the Bible is saying through that particular book. Because each book has a different emphasis, a different message that all ties into the whole message. When we grasp that, we are able to think differently. Christians think differently than non-Christians. The way we do that is we get to know God's word and we're allowing it to touch us in our heart so we start to think differently. Young people, I would encourage you to grasp the ideas that are in God's words because they will guide the way you think and how you act and how you respond to life. It's powerful.

Today we start a new book in 2 Corinthians. As we do, I'd like you to stand with me as we read the first seven verses. We stand out of respect for God's word. I'm going to read the first seven verses in 2 Corinthians 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:

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

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 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. 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.

Scott Turansky - Calvary Chapel Living Hope

You may be seated.

The book of 2 Corinthians starts like many of the other epistles. There's a typical greeting that takes place at the beginning of the epistles that goes basically like this. First he shares who the letter is from. In this case it's from *Paul, the apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God*. And also tag on there Timothy, who happens to be with Paul. So we've got this mutual greeting. These are the people who are sharing the message. Notice the message is going to the church, which tells us the message is going to believers, people who are Christians already. *To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia*, which is the southern part of Greece. So the letter would be passed around among the different churches and Christians so they could read the message that Paul was sharing with the Corinthians that they needed to hear. And then commonly in the epistles we have a greeting, such as this one. *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Now as soon as we get out of the greeting and into the passage for today, he jumps right in. It's like he's bursting inside with this idea he wants to share with us, this idea that's really important. This idea is going to help us in each of our personal lives. It's going to help us deal with the pain that we experience, the suffering that we experience, the injustice that we experience, the hardship that we experience in our lives. We all experience it. We could go around and each share the challenges that we face because your challenges are different than your challenges and your challenges, but we all have them. We have that in common and we need to know how to process them. We process challenges differently as Christians than non-Christians do.

Paul is going to amplify this whole idea for us so that we get it. He's bursting with this idea. But before he amplifies this idea, he wants to share this one part of it. He wants us to focus in on the character of God. So this is the verse 3, just in a different format. But notice the verse focuses in on God. Any good theological concept that we understand that we're going to apply to our lives starts with the character of God. Who is God and then how does that idea apply to us. So this is verse 3. Where Paul is saying – *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort*.

Father. I could hardly wait to be one. When I became a father years and years ago it was just an exciting thing for me. I wanted to do the best job of fathering that I could do. I love my role as a dad and I really enjoy being a dad. But when I look at this verse, I'm confused at least. I'm actually surprised. Because my idea of fatherhood has to do with things like power, authority, justice, right and wrong, solving problems. That's my idea of fatherhood. So when I come to this verse I'm a little bit confused because in describing God as Father we have two qualities that I don't even view as fatherly qualities. I kind of view them as motherly qualities where he uses these words *compassion* and *comfort*, which really transforms me.

As I came to see this many years ago it just started to work in my heart because I realize that as a dad I have a job to do and it's not just to solve problems. My job is to get close and to help and to comfort as well. My initial response when I'm trying to help children... Let's say my child falls down over there. My typical response would be, "Get up! Dust yourself off. Come on. You're fine." But I think there's something here in this idea of comfort and compassion that says

as dads we also need to get close. I think as dads we need to learn how to do some of this – to get close, to care about people’s needs, to listen to what they have to say.

This really for me is a transforming idea for my manliness. God refers to Himself as a Father of compassion and a God of all comfort. Over the years I’ve really grown in this. I just love people. Everybody has a story. I love to sit and listen to your stories. It’s just great to hear the differences that people have. In the midst of that, I’m drawn to people. I love them. God has grown a lot in my own heart in this idea of comfort and compassion. So Paul wants us to understand first this idea. Because if we get the idea of God as a Father who wants to come alongside us and comfort and has compassion for us, it’s going to change the way we live every day. That’s where He’s going with this idea.

He starts with the word *compassion* and that’s the Greek word for compassion when someone’s in distress and a desire to help them. That’s compassion. The word *comfort* is a classic word in the Bible. You need to know this. Because this word is the word *parakaleo*. It’s the word used to describe the Holy Spirit. *Parakaleo* means come alongside to help. The Holy Spirit comes alongside to help us in our lives regularly. Here we have the Father as the God of all comfort, the God of the one who comes alongside to help us. Your view can’t be a distant one that He’s way up there telling me what to do. He’s right next to me, comforting me, carrying me along.

When I understand that God cares for me in that very personal way, I make a difference when I come to my own pain and my own sufferings and my own hurts and the challenges that I face in my life. It changes the way I think, the way I feel about life situations. So Paul is starting this idea of who God is and His character, and then he’s going to take us a little further into the passage. When he does, I want to show you I’ve highlighted all of the words that refer in some way to pain or suffering in the passage that we’re looking at today so you can see here that God comforts us in our troubles.

Troubles are the problems that come up. They can be small troubles like I lost my keys today, or I ran out of checks in my checkbook and didn’t order them. Or it might be some major thing that I lost a loved one, or that we’ve got some trouble with the bank or in our job. Those are the troubles that we experience. Another word used to describe this hardship that we have is the word *sufferings* and that’s the word that kind of indicates things that go on for a period of time. You might have a health issue that’s going to take a while for you to overcome or to live with, or to learn how to deal with, or that you’re in a situation in your life where it’s going to take a while. There’s some suffering, some hardship that’s in the midst of that that you must go through.

The word *distressed* is this word about feeling overwhelmed because there are those times when we just feel like we’re at the end of our rope and we feel overwhelmed by the trials of life that exist. So the sufferings that we suffer, the sufferings that are there, I just want you to see that they’re mentioned several times in this passage because those are real. Each of us has that bundle that we come to life with. Nobody is exempt from that. Everybody experiences their own kind of pain and suffering and trials in their lives. It’s important to understand that God, as He’s going to work with us, does not always take those things away. We can pray and ask Him to take them

away. Sometimes He does. But I would suggest that more often He doesn't take them away, but teaches us how to live within them.

It's in this book of the Bible in 2 Corinthians 12, several chapters from now, where we'll visit this idea again that Paul prays to God, "*Lord, take this thorn in the flesh from me.*" Three times he prayed that God would take this problem away from him. We don't exactly know what it is, but it's obviously bothering him. God, would you take it away. And God's answer to him is – "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*"

Part of your theology must include this idea that living with problems is part of our calling and that God empowers us in the midst of the trials, not just taking us out of them. If we get our theology right and we understand that God works with us in the trials, it opens a whole new pathway or avenue for dealing with life's challenges and problems. They become now opportunities and a different way to look at life than we looked at them before.

So I'd like to overlay the passage now with the words for comfort. Just notice that comfort is all through this passage. First we have the word *compassion of God* and then we have this word *comfort*, the same word *parakaleo* where its various forms are used nine times elsewhere in this passage. It's coming alongside to help.

Notice what it says there in verse 4. He *comforts us in all our troubles*. It starts there. You go here and you get this comfort from God in the midst of the struggle, in the midst of the challenge, in the midst of your troubles. Whatever you define the troubles. It may be a person, a thing, a health problem. Whatever it is, you define it. But God is the one who comforts us in those troubles so that you can comfort.

Do you see that this isn't all about me? This is so I can experience something from God and then share it with other people. Verse 4 says *so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God*. You receive something in order to give it. That's the whole message of the gospel. We receive something so we can give it. We don't abandon our problems. We don't often get rescued from all of our problems, but we learn to live with our problems in a victorious way. That's powerful.

Just notice the word *comfort* and how it's used throughout the passage and what it does inside of our lives. Down in verse 6 it says it *produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer*. It does something inside of us. It's really, can we say, a good thing. That's what James would say. *Have joy, my brothers, whenever you face various trials*. Joy? How can you experience joy? Well you can only experience joy when you face problems if you realize that God is going to raise you to a new level of comfort in your life. It's a different way of thinking and Paul wants to make sure they get this idea. It's going to form a basis for many of the things he's going to talk about in the whole book. But for us it's an opportunity to look at our own hearts and imagine what does God want to do in our own lives.

I've shown you this diagram before, but I'm going to show it to you again because last time we focused in on the anger side of it. But I want you to see there are two primary ways that people respond to the pain and hurt of our lives.

First of all we have to understand we all experience this hurt, like we've talked about. Everybody experiences it. But there are some people who respond to the hurt with anger and that anger is a way of putting a crust or a covering over our heart to prevent any more hate from getting in. I'm not going to get hurt from anybody else. I'm not going to be damaged by anybody else. I've been hurt so many times in the past that I'm not going to let it happen again. So I'm going to put this protective covering around my heart and it's called anger. That anger forms this protective wall. It does in some ways protect the hate from getting in, but it also protects the comfort from getting in. It protects the love from getting in, the things that are so valuable that we need for healing inside of our own hearts.

That anger then is often a response to some form of injustice. This isn't fair, this isn't right, this shouldn't be this way. So then there becomes this internal lashing out of wanting to get revenge or maybe it's just being critical and negative, closing the heart off so it can't be used in a different way. I'm not going to get involved in that relationship again. I'm not going to let somebody hurt me again. I'm not going to get close because bad things will happen to me. There's this revenge that takes place. What that does is it really creates this internal bitterness inside of a person's heart and that bitterness starts to eat them away. That bitterness, I would suggest, turns that person into an unhappy person.

In fact I regularly say to people this very important statement that angry people are unhappy people. Angry people are unhappy people. They are characterized by anger because they develop a lifestyle of anger up here in this part of the lifecycle. I tell you why people stay up here, as I've told you before. The reason people stay up in this upper cycle is because here's what they say to themselves: "I'm right." And they are right. They have gone through terrible things in their lives and the other person was wrong and they're right, so they feel justified to stay up in this upper cycle. So people lash out. We all know older people, maybe even younger people who just develop such a crust on their heart that they are just negative all the time. So they're whining about life, they're complaining about life, they're critical about other people. It's just a negative place to be. "I'm right" is what they say. And they are.

Which leads us to this other important statement which is it's not good enough to be right; you also need to be wise. It is unwise to stay up in that vicious cycle of anger, damaging bitterness that exists inside the human heart. So God has given us another alternative. It's described in this passage and it's a response to hurt or troubles or pain or suffering or being oppressed or whatever it is, and that other response is a sorrow. The difference between sorrow and anger is sorrow softens the heart. Anger hardens the heart. When the heart experiences sorrow then it opens the door for comfort.

But we've got to talk about this comfort thing for a minute because our world is all about comfort. There's lots of ways you can get comfort today. There's a lots of substance abuse that takes place today because people want to be comfortable. They're unhappy with life, so they go find it somewhere and often in a substance of some kind they're trying to find comfort.

I mean with the latest ads (I don't know if you've seen them), you can sit in your comfortable chair and you can talk to this device (an Echo) on your little mantle over there and it can do all

kinds of things. It can adjust the lights in your room. It can adjust the temperature in your house. You can ask it questions. If you want to talk to somebody, it will give you answers. It will tell you the time of day or the weather outside. It will lock your doors if you want. You can order pizza just by talking to this thing. Just today I saw you can make phone calls now anywhere in the United States by talking to your Echo. You can even order your groceries through Amazon and have them delivered to your house. There's nothing wrong with any of that. It's just amazing to me that our world thrives on comfort. Let's be comfortable.

I want to suggest that God would want us to be comfortable being uncomfortable. Can we be comfortable being uncomfortable? In other words, can we still experience the problems of life and still be comfortable in them? That's what God is talking about in this passage. He wants us to understand a different kind of comfort, a comfort that comes from Him.

Ever since we were born we wanted comfort. A baby cries out and then we satisfy that baby so he stops crying. We're comforting. Each one of us has this deep need to be comforted. We sometimes fill it with the wrong stuff. Or we cover it with anger and then we get ourselves in trouble so then we don't need to be comforted anymore because we've got this crust on the outside that makes us a hard person, so we don't need comfort anymore.

I would suggest that this comfort creates this gentleness inside of us. Instead of a hardness inside, it creates this gentleness inside of us and that's what creates this ministry, which is what 2 Corinthians 1 is saying. When you're comforted by God you have something to pass on to somebody else because then you can turn around and comfort someone else in the troubles that they're experiencing with the comfort that you've received from God. You have something to give. It turns into a ministry, and, of course, that makes you a happy person or a joyful person if you want.

The idea here is this comes from our passage in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. So when we look at the passage of scripture and we see all of the comfort that God wants to give us, it's almost overwhelming to see all of those comforts all in the same place. That's why I brought them up there and made them all blue so you could see that there's a lot of comfort in this passage.

But the question I think we have to ask ourselves is how do we get it off the screen or out of our Bible into our hearts. What do we do to bring that comfort into the heart of ourselves or the person that we love? What is the process of moving that through? So the question of how I think is a very important question. Of course we're asking that question regularly here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. How do we take Jesus home? "How" is the question. So I would suggest there are two things in particular that we want to look at that are going to help us.

One – we want to meditate on the comfort and compassion of God. We want to imagine what this looks like, imagine who God is, and imagine Him being close to us, imagine him touching us in this very specific way. We want to meditate on that idea. We want to enjoy the idea of who God is and we want to dwell on that.

Think about it. God wants to be right next to me. He's going to carry me along when I can't carry myself. He's going to help me when I'm upset, to physically help me when I'm upset.

Here's what I would suggest about the end of the rope analogy: When you're at the end of your rope, you are at the beginning of the pathway that God has for ministry for you. Isn't that what the passage is saying? When you're comforted by God (you're distressed, you're really bothered by what's going on, you're at the end, and you receive the comfort of God), you're right at the beginning at the pathway for ministry that God has for you. He has this huge door that He wants to be able to work through you. Do you have to be out of the problems of your life to help other people? No. Right now as you're being comforted in the midst of your struggle you have a message to share with someone else. That's the idea that's being taught in this passage.

So the first thing I would suggest we want to meditate on this idea of compassion and the comfort of God. That we're coming before the Lord and asking Him to make that real in our lives, to understand what that looks like in practical ways.

And then comes the hard part, I would suggest. The second thing we need to do by faith release the anger and accept the comfort of God. Now I just got to say it's by faith. I don't know how to do this. Maybe you can go to counseling and work it out (I'm not opposed to counseling – obviously I believe in counseling, I believe it's important), but it's not the counseling that heals a person. Of course if it's biblical counseling, the counselor is drawing the person to the Lord so the Lord can do the healing in a person's life. But there is something about faith that says I'm going to get out of this boat of protection that I'm in that I need to leave in order to enjoy something that God has for me that I'm not experiencing yet. I need to do something that is by faith. I need to let it go.

There are some that just have a hard time with this anger. They hold onto it because it has this protective benefit. If I'm angry then I don't have to open myself up because if my heart is soft I could get hurt again. So opening the heart is I think just a step of faith. There's no real way to look at this. It is a step of faith that we take that moves us into something that we don't have yet. By faith we let the anger go and we then receive the comfort of God and ask Him to do something deeper in our heart so that we can go forward. And then God speaks to each one of us about what that act of faith is because it's receiving the comfort of God so that we can make progress.

Sometimes that progress is talking to someone else and helping them with their hurts and trouble. Sometimes it's taking the next step. You know what that is for you, what that next step is, of reaching out or taking action or whatever. But often that can't happen until there's this act of faith where we say, "Okay, I'm going to do something different. I'm going to respond to what God has for me."

I would suggest that the passage that we're looking at today is so strategic because what it does is it reveals this very important concept, this idea. Paul wants us to get it. He wants us to understand that the reality of pain that we experience is common and we need the comfort. We need the comfort. What does that look like? How can we grab that? How can we take hold of that so that we can experience this *all things new*? He's going to be talking about all things new in the passage in 2 Corinthians. God wants us to experience those good things in our lives. But it takes some steps of recognizing who God is and then applying that in our lives every day.

You see, the reality is this: God has given you something. He's given you something that you need that's going to help you be able to care for other people. I don't want to say that He causes pain, but when pain comes into our lives, He gives us the comfort. But recognize that the pain that you experience is your ticket to ministry. It will help you have a softer heart, be more compassionate.

I think we're drawn to this passage in Psalm 23 because of the word *comfort*, but it starts with this: *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*. I mean that's a pretty dark place to walk. But then the last part is – *your rod and your staff they comfort me*. That's why we like the passage because there's comfort there and we all need it. We want the comfort of God. We want to embrace it in our lives and we know that we can't find it from these other things that are available to us. We've got to find it from the Lord.

So I want to challenge you today if you're a believer (because the passage is written to Christians). If you're a believer today, exercise this part of your heart that may need to be exercised where the pain is starting to make it atrophy. It needs to be exercised with the comfort of God so that it can turn into this ministry for you.

If you're here today and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, if you don't know God personally, you view Him as a distant God, then God says, "I want to come in and live in your heart. I want to walk along with you. I want to be with you. *Parakaleo*. I want to come alongside to help you." If you've never made that commitment to God and asked Him to come into your life I want to invite you to do that today. Come on up while we sing our final song and we'll pray with you and help you understand more about who God is and how He wants to have that personal relationship with you.

The comfort of God. This is only the beginning. There's a lot of new stuff in 2 Corinthians that can enable us to experience the power of God in some new ways.

Lets stand together and pray.

[PRAYER] Father, I thank you that you have a desire to care for us like a loving father who is right there next to us, caring for us, wrapping your arms around us. Lord, we know we need that, each one of us. I pray for each young person here, each husband or wife, each person who's lost as loved one, or a person who's struggling at work, struggling with finances, or health, or relationships. Lord, I ask that you would turn those things to victories, into ministries in our lives so that we could be that light that you've called us to be. As we go out in our world we know that people cover up their pain and they look really nice on the outside. But each person is hurting on the inside and needs this message. So we ask that you would give us wisdom to know how to share it in some powerful ways with others. In Jesus' name, amen.