



COMFORT THROUGH SUFFERING

Pastor Dillon Barber // August 17, 2025

Text: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Big Idea: Suffering leads to God's comfort,
for ourselves and for others.

Good morning Foothills Church and welcome back. My name is Dillon Barber and it is good to be here with you this morning. I want to greet our (9:30 Classic/ Online community) this morning. Thank you for joining in for our service today. Summer is officially over at the Barber house. Like many families, our kids started school this past week so we are back to the hurry and the busy. Full speed ahead. I think it's going to be a good year. As you may have guessed from our bumper video, this morning we are going to jump back into our Corinthians series. Last spring we finished up 1 Corinthians, took a break for the summer and now we are going to be in 2 Corinthians through the Fall all the way up to the Christmas series. I thought it might be a good idea to do a quick review of the historical and cultural context of the letter since it's been a while, and maybe you are new to Foothills and weren't here last Spring.

The city of Corinth is an ancient city in Greece with its roots stretching back to around 600 AD. It was a wealthy and influential city in Greece situated at a major crossroads of trade on a narrow isthmus, a narrow strip of land only 3 miles wide which separates the Peloponnese peninsula from mainland Greece. To the west of Corinth is the Ionian Sea and to the East the Aegean. Merchants and traders would ship their goods from Italy in the west, unload it in Corinth, cart it across the isthmus, and put it on another ship to head across the Aegean sea to markets in Asia or visa-versa. So Corinth sat at a major trade crossroad, both north and south as well as east and west. Trade meant wealth and culture and influence, and Corinth became one of the most important cities in the region. Corinth also hosted the Isthmus games, similar to the Olympics but were held on alternating years. This brought thousands of visitors from across Greece and beyond.

Well, as they did back then, the Romans destroyed Corinth, total sacked it, and then a few centuries later rebuilt it as a Roman colony, and settled it, not with retired soldiers which was their custom, but with merchants and tradesmen. It became a wealthy city again very quickly but always had a bit of a salty reputation. Corinth was a Roman city packed with temples, idols, merchants and travelers and every sin and temptation that a pagan city had to offer.

Paul planted the church in Corinth and visited the city several times while on his various missionary journeys. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in the year 52AD, it was actually his second known letter to the church, the first letter was lost. The church in Corinth had written to Paul with a list of issues, challenges and questions, and Paul wrote them back to encourage them, particularly regarding matters of division with the church, what to do about eating meat sacrificed to idols and proper expressions of worship. If you missed any of our 1 Corinthians sermons or want to revisit them, please check out our website foothillscp.org/sermons.

Now, what happened in the year or so between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians? We have some clues. Something happened in the church that prompted Paul to return to Corinth ahead of schedule and to address the issue. We don't know exactly what it is, but there is some suspicion it had to do with sexual immorality. Paul's visit did not go well. There were apparently some in the church that challenged Paul's authority as an Apostle and things got ugly. Paul didn't stay for very long. He left and visited some of the other churches in the region. He then wrote another letter which is referred to as his Painful letter or Severe letter. This letter has also been lost. In it Paul used some very serious words, some harsh language to hold the church accountable and call them to repentance. Apparently the letter worked, because when Titus caught up to Paul a few months later he had news of a change of heart within the church.

Finally, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians (it's really 4 Corinthians) to restore relationship, to defend himself, to update the church on his change of

plans regarding his next visit, and to explain why he was facing so much hardship and difficulty in his ministry.

As we begin 2 Corinthians, we are going to encounter the problem of suffering. It is a recurring theme throughout the letter. There were people in Corinth, just as there are today, that believed that a true Christian, a truly spiritual, godly person won't struggle or experience hardship or suffering. Unfortunately, this simply is not true. Jesus promised us in John 16:33 "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Part of living in a broken world full of broken people means we are guaranteed to experience suffering. But what is the point of suffering? Where does suffering come from? Does God cause us to suffer? All of these are reasonable questions.

I won't have time to wrestle with all of them today but I want to acknowledge these questions because we all get to wrestle with them.

Why do we suffer? I think there are three basic sources of suffering.

First, we suffer the consequences of our own choices and mistakes. I think we can all own this one. We humans do some really dumb stuff some times don't we? Just watch a few fail videos on YouTube and you will see just how dumb we can be. You will be laughing and groaning at the same time. We say things, we make poor choices, we mess up and then we pay the price. I think Dave Ramsey calls it the stupid tax. And sometimes the consequences of our mistakes are small, and sometimes they are so severe that they are life changing or even life ending. We all have our regrets don't we?

Secondly, we suffer the harm caused by others. Whether it is intentional harm or unintentional harm, other people have the ability to hurt us. This ranges from something as small as a hurtful remark all the way up to something as catastrophic as war. We have Christian brothers and sisters around the world that are being violently attacked because of their faith,

others are being dragged into war by powerful countries. People suffer every form of abuse and neglect and harm every day. Every one of us has suffered because of the hurt caused by others.

Thirdly, we suffer from natural causes in a broken world. We suffer from things that are outside of anyone's control. Natural disasters, diseases, accidents, economics, things that no one intended, or caused, but we get to suffer anyway. Life in a broken world means we experience the pain of living.

Any day of the week, any time we may be struggling because of one or more of these reasons for suffering, and I want to remind us this morning that God does not cause any of these things to happen but he does allow them to happen. The next question to ask is why? Why does God, who loves us allow us to suffer? Isn't God all powerful and loving and good and just? Why does he allow bad things to happen? Paul gives us three reasons in our text today that help answer the question of why God allows us to suffer and struggle. These aren't exhaustive answers but answers none the less. [Let's read 1:1-7]

1. Through suffering we experience God's comfort. Some of you might be thinking, hold on now, if we didn't suffer we wouldn't need God's comfort, and that's true. But the world is broken, and we do suffer, and it is through suffering that God reveals to us a part of his nature and his love and mercy in a whole new way as he comforts us.

We see this word comfort a lot in this passage. Nine times to be exact in just five verses. It means to encourage, to comfort and to lift up. God is the God of comfort. It is part of his nature and identity. In the second half of Isaiah, after God spent 39 chapters explaining the consequences of Israel's sin and the coming judgment, God says this: Isaiah 51:12 "I, I am he who comforts you." God comforts us, encourages us, lifts us up. He is the father of mercies and God of comfort. In Psalm 40, David proclaims: "I waited patiently for the Lord;

he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.”. In Romans 15 Paul says it is God who gives perseverance and encouragement to us, and In John 14:6, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit saying “And I will ask the Father and he will send another helper, to be with you forever.” Helper in the Greek is the same word as comforter used here in 2 Corinthians. God is the God of comfort.

Only through suffering and hardship, through struggle are we able to experience the power and encouragement of God’s comfort through his Holy Spirit. There is no other way to know this side of God’s character than through suffering. I have never had cancer or been hospitalized for serious illness or anything like that, at least not yet. But I have good friends who have had cancer. And you know what they have told me about their experience? They wouldn’t trade it for the world, because God used that suffering to minister to them with such gentleness and intimacy and closeness, and never in their lives felt closer to God than during that time. I do not wish for difficult things in my life or in your life, but I do want that kind of closeness and intimacy with Jesus and as far as I can see, it only comes through our struggle, and our seeking God for his care and comfort.

2. Through suffering we can comfort others. Look again at verse four. Any person who has experience in trials and struggles, who has experienced God’s gentle reassurance, his tender love toward us, is capable of comforting and encouraging others who are going through it. That is part of the beauty of being part of the body of Christ. We get to encourage one another. 1 Thes. 5:9-11. “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live for him. Therefore, encourage (comfort) one another and build one another up just as you are doing.”

Through our trials and struggles we experience God's comfort and are better able to comfort and encourage others as they struggle through life's challenges. This is part of every ministry and small group at Foothills Church, but specifically this is why we have ministries like grief-share and Celebrate Recovery. So that we can walk through grief and loss together, so that we can wrestle through our heartache and hangups in an environment of encouragement and grow together in the process.

How can God use you and your experience to encourage someone else?

You don't have to have experience in every kind of suffering in order to comfort someone else. You don't have to be a veteran to try to understand what a veteran has experience and encourage them. You don't have to be a cancer survivor in order to comfort someone who is fighting cancer. But it is really beautiful to see when a veteran comes alongside another veteran, when a cancer survivor comes along side someone fighting cancer and they walk that road together. How can God use you to be a comfort to others? Are you willing to be used by him for that purpose? It is even on your radar?

3. Through suffering we learn to rely on God. (Read v8-11).

Paul recounts his frightening experience in Asia which corresponds to the story in Acts 19. While Paul was in Ephesus, a group of silver smiths blamed him and the Christians for the drop in idol sales, so they started a riot. It scared Paul enough that he was fairly certain that he and his friends were going to die. The rioters filled the theater with thousands of angry people who shouted for several hours. It was scary. Notice what Paul said. "that was to make us rely, not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."

Through suffering we learn to rely on God. I don't know about you but I like to be in control of my life. When things get tough or go wrong my first instinct is to do everything in my power to fix it and get things back in

order. Are any of you like that? But what happens when we can't put things back together? When strength, power, intelligence, resources, money simply aren't enough? Where do we go from there? Sometimes the only way to learn to rely on God and not on ourselves is through suffering. Through suffering we finally realize that our circumstances are truly out of our control and we are able to fully submit ourselves to God and his mercy and comfort. God promises to meet us there. Now to be perfectly honest, we might not survive. We might lose the fight, we might lose our marriage, our home, our child our very lives, and that's ok because our hope is not in our health or our bodies or our families or in our money, our hope is in Jesus Christ, who gave his own life for us, so that we can be with him for eternity. Paul had to learn this lesson himself in Ephesus. "Though we despaired of life itself, that was to teach us to rely on God." What an incredible lesson.

So what can we do? How do we respond? What can we do about all the suffering in our lives and all around us? I don't imagine any of us here will be asking God for more suffering so we can experience more comfort, I wouldn't recommend that prayer. But what can we do?

Here are three things to practice:

1. Remember how God has cared for you. Look at verse 10 again. "He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again." When we look back at what God has done to deliver us and comfort us in the past it strengthens our faith and our trust in him. I know that many of you have been through some really rough seasons. I know some of you are going through one right now. Remember what God has done in your life. Remember how he has shown up again and again. How he carried you when you couldn't carry yourself, remember how the Spirit interceded on your behalf when you didn't even know how to pray. And when you remember, be strengthened.

2. Practice being a comfort and encouragement to others. This one can be very simple. As simple as practicing holding back your critical thoughts and words and intentionally sharing words of encouragement. As simple as reaching out to a friend that you know is struggling right now and encourage them. You don't have to be an expert to say a kind word or send a short text that shows you care. We are working to re-build our compassion team and we need people to help cook a meal or two for someone in crisis. If you would be willing to help please call Jennifer at the church office. There is a reason we call it comfort food you know what I mean?

3. Finally, we are to pray for one another. Verse 11. "You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many." Prayer is so important. God invites us to seek him with our needs and hurts and heartache, he welcomes our prayer and he listens. And God invites us to intercede on behalf of others and pray for them. Even if there is absolutely nothing else that we can do to help someone, we can always pray for them and the Lord promises to hear. Our team thought it would be a good morning to practice this, so we are going to take some time to pray for one another.

I know some of you are going through some really hard things right now. You have very real grief and loss, you have brokenness in your families, brokenness in your bodies, economic difficulties, and every other kind of heartache. Maybe you are at a place today where you are ready to surrender control and trust God. Maybe you have been in this place for a long time and you are ready to ask for prayer and receive the encouragement of the church. We want to pray for you and encourage you this morning.