



gracefellowship

2 Corinthians 1:2-11  
Jesus: Our Neighbor  
March 29, 2020

**:: 2 Corinthians 1:2-11**

The things that seem to be spreading faster and with more intensity than COVID-19 in our world right now are fear, anxiety and worry! Is anyone feeling that? Let me reassure you with something: it's not wrong to feel and wrestle with the emotions you're dealing with right now.

As we adjust to a new normal in life right now we need something the help combat our fears and help us deal with our anxiety and worry. We need, more than ever before, to lean into God's truth. I was talking to another Pastor friend of mine this week, Michael Thomas, from Fellowship North in Knoxville and he said something I believe is absolutely true:

**"I believe in this time the Lord's voice will be louder and clearer than ever before, not because He changed how He speaks, but because we are listening more intently." –Michael Thomas**

So, Christian, let me ask you a question this morning: Are you listening as intently to the voice of God as you are to the newscasters on your TV? Are you listening for God's voice just as intently through His Word, through His Spirit's whisper and through messages like this one as you are to the "experts" on Facebook- by that I mean your 4<sup>th</sup> grade friend who all of a sudden is the foremost authority on transmissible diseases? As things are stripped away from us this is an opportunity to hear from God and to find hope in Him. Bring your fears, your anxiety and your worries and lay them at the feet of Jesus.

I have to tell you that when I was a child and was scared from having a nightmare, there was nothing I found more helpful than running to my parent's room and climbing in their bed to be wrapped up in their protection. Now, as a parent myself, I see the same scenario play out with my kids. There is nothing like being awakened in the middle of the night to a face staring at you in the dark!

**What we long for in times of fear, anxiety, stress and worry is comfort.**

In Matthew 5 Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (v 4)

This morning I want to take us to the book of 2 Corinthians and see how God is working to bring comfort to you through the dark days you face. Let’s look at this passage together.

**:: 2 Corinthians 1:2-11**

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

**3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,**

**4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.**

**5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.**

**6 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.**

**7 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.**

**8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.**

**9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.**

**10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,**

**11 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.**

Paul describes God in two ways in this passage:

**God is...**

- 1. The Father of compassion**
- 2. The God of all comfort**

If you want to know how God desires to act toward you right now and in the future during other times you will go through crisis here it is- He is compassionate and longs to bring your comfort. That word compassion in the NIV is also translated mercy in other translations; it is the Greek word *oiktirmos* (*oyke-tier-moss*) and it means to be moved deeply. The word is linked to our bowels! There’s a word picture for you today! In other words, God is moved to the deepest part of Himself when He sees us in distress and desires for that reason to move toward us as the God of comfort. God always desires to put his

compassion into action! He doesn't just see us in our distress and hurt and pain and look away; God is moved to run toward us and provide comfort in our hardships.

But why does God do that? The answer comes in verses 4-5.

**4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.**

**5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.**

Paul says God comforts us in our troubles SO THAT- underline that in your Bible- we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we received from God.

Here's what we find happening in these verses: **God designs and allows our discomfort so we may learn from Him how to comfort others!**

I know in my life I have been the beneficiary of people who have gone through tragically dark things, but because of how God brought them through they have been able to speak into my life and help guide me through my own painful seasons.

- As I've watched my Mom struggle with Alzheimer's Disease I have had people lovingly speak into my life and give me guidance for how to love her and endure these days.
- As a Pastor who is often asked to help people navigate some of life's toughest struggles, I'm eternally grateful for other Pastors who help me know how to counsel people through issues I've never dealt with.

The things you have been through that may be considered the dark night of the soul may be the areas God uses you in most to comfort others who are now going through what God has brought you through!

Look at someone in the room with you...or if you're alone right now, text a friend!...and say:

**I can comfort someone who is going through what I have been delivered from!**

If God has brought you out of something

- an addiction
- an abusive situation
- a medical crisis
- a financial hardship
- a parenting emergency...

He didn't bring you out of it to simply feel gratitude; He brought you out to comfort others through their nightmare!

Look at verse 8-11 with me and notice how Paul discusses the hardship he went through.

**8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.**

**9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.**

**10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,**

**11 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.**

I love Paul's honesty here. Sometimes we think of the men and women in the Bible as super saints who flew above everything and weren't touched by trouble. Even the hard stuff they went through probably didn't phase them. But guess what- they were human! They felt the sting of pain when they were attacked and sick and ridiculed!

We don't know exactly what Paul is referring to here, but most commentators think he was either dealing with being tortured or he was fighting an illness. Here's what we do know- at some point through the struggle he wanted to quit. Not just that, he thought he might die from what he was going through. When I read that sentence this week it made me think of two things- what Job must have felt like when his life crashed around him in one day, and how our situation today might compare on some scale with Job's suffering.

In the book of Job God gives Satan permission to test his servant, but he can't physically harm him...at first!

In a matter of minutes here's the news Job receives:

- Your oxen and donkeys have been stolen and your servants killed.
- Your sheep and shepherds were killed by fire.
- Your camels were taken by raiding parties and your servants killed.
- All your children were in one house when a massive wind destroyed the house and your children all died.

What we have gone through isn't quite the same as Job, but there are similarities in our past couple weeks. Our world seems to keep getting smaller all the time.

- Sports were taken away and cancelled for the Spring.
- Schools closed
- Then gatherings of 10 or more were discouraged, so church gatherings were taken from us.
- Then businesses started closing.

With all these things new hardships come and fear and anxiety increase for a lot of people. And we start to look around and ask God why these types of things are happening. Paul offers some perspective as we think back to these last few verses we read together.

“But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,  
11 as you help us by your prayers.”

Paul looked back on the troubles he faced and said, *“this happened to turn our focus to God!”* (my paraphrase) Paul had an eternal focus that brought him comfort: even if what we face brings us to the place of death, we serve the God who brings people back to life! Here’s the ultimate comfort we have in Jesus- death can’t touch us! Even when we die in this world, we join the eternal life promised to us in God’s glory!

Paul finishes the verse by saying: “He has delivered us... and he will deliver us again!

In the middle of hardship and trials it is difficult to get tunnel vision and think this is the end of the world. It’s comforting to look back at how God has been faithful and delivered us from hardships in the past and to recognize that H is completely capable of doing it again! Turn your worry over to Jesus. Give your anxiety to Jesus. Lay your stress down at the feet of Jesus. He is still in the business of delivering us from our troubles.

Keep your focus on Him. Anything else you could look to can’t come close to bringing you the comfort that Jesus offers. If you are full of anxiety and fear and worry I want to introduce you to the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort- His name is Jesus! He available for you to run to just like a child awakened from a nightmare who needs to be held. God is waiting on you with open arms. Run to Him by simply confessing your need for Him and letting Him bring peace to your soul.

Paul ends this section of his letter saying he not only feels helped by Jesus, but also by the prayers of his Christian brothers and sisters. One of the strongest ways you and I can support each other is through prayer. Share your needs with one another. Open up and talk about what you are feeling and let your brothers and sisters pray for you. And my prayer is that in your time of distress you will feel comfort!

- Pray

## Discussion Questions for Life Group

Helpful Guidelines to leading an online group:

1. People will talk over one another more quickly because they aren't sure when someone is done talking. If that becomes a problem, you may ask people to raise their hands and call on them before sharing.
2. Over sharing or under sharing may be an issue when people aren't together. Watch for both and either find a way to encourage people to be aware of how much they are sharing or find ways to encourage more participating by calling on people to share their thoughts. It's easy to disengage when not actually in the room.
3. Ask people to be present and limit distractions around them. It would be easy for people to think of something they need to do in the other room, leave to go get a drink, etc...
4. The same ground rules apply to these gatherings as our normal Life Groups. If you have new people join you please remind everyone of the group guidelines.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11 together as a group.

There was a quote in the sermon this week: "I believe in this time the Lord's voice will be louder and clearer than ever before, not because He changed how He speaks, but because we are listening more intently."

—Michael Thomas

- a. What kinds of things is God saying to you through these days of social distancing?
- b. What are your personal observations from this passage of Scripture?
- c. Would anyone be willing to share a personal hardship you have gone through and how God has comforted you through that time?
- d. Is there anything that has been taken from you during this time that you haven't missed as much as you thought you might?
- e. What ways have you been comforted by Christian brothers and sisters in times of discomfort?
- f. Are there ways we can be a comfort to others this week?