



April 10 & 11: Encouragement

Overview

There are times in life when we all feel like people have deliberately run over us, when we have been knocked down or deeply wounded. In the book of *2 Corinthians*, Paul emphasizes the special resources available to those who are Christians and who are hurting. This letter was written to a troubled church and a hurting people. Throughout the letter Paul encourages the church to remain faithful. Paul himself had faced many hardships; he was able to encourage them because Jesus Christ had transformed his attitude. As we look through *2 Corinthians*, we will see how God can change our perspective and take us BEYOND the blues.

Goals of the study guide:

- To recognize that hardships are a normal part of life.
- To realize that God's comfort is felt most in times of hardship.
- To learn how we can use our experiences to help comfort others and to be a demonstration of our faith in God.

Key points:

- Suffering is an expected part of life and of our Christian experience (*1 Peter 4:12*).
- We learn from Christ's sufferings and we are also comforted by Christ's sufferings.
- We learn to rely on God as we face hardships.



Take a second look ... Sermon Summary

The word, "encouragement," is a key word in *2 Corinthians*. The verb "encourage" or "comfort" is used 18 times and the noun is used 11 times in the letter. In spite of all the hardships he faced Paul was able to write a letter of encouragement because Jesus Christ had transformed his attitude.

Here are four truths that should comfort all of us when life runs us down.

1. Hardships are a *normal* part of life.

In verse 2, Paul points out the two greatest human needs that are met by God. The first is the need for forgiveness. Every person is a sinner, and we need God's *grace*. The second is the need for comfort. Every person is a sufferer, and we need God's *peace*.

Much of our advertising today promises exemption from suffering. But from the very beginning, the Bible teaches us that suffering is a natural part of every life in this contaminated world. *Genesis 3:16-19*

In *2 Corinthians 1*, Paul uses two examples of suffering.

- Jesus suffered. (verse 5)

From the beginning of His life He was lonely, rejected, the victim of criticism and He knew grief. Jesus was perfect and He suffered, so how can we expect to be exempt?

- Paul suffered.

2 Corinthians 1:8, We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.

2. Hardships provide an *opportunity* to receive God's comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:9, Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

We think we can be self-reliant. If we can just make enough money, buy enough insurance and have enough savings so that every future need will be covered, then we won't have to depend on God. No matter how much you may think you've got it together, there will be times when suffering comes into your life and you will have no place to go. We *all* need the Lord.

All troubles are not a result of God disciplining people. Many of our troubles are just the natural consequences of living in a sinful world. So we shouldn't interpret every hardship as God's discipline, but God can discipline us directly. He can always use hardships as a means of growing us. *Hebrews 12:7-11*

3. Hardships equip us to *comfort others*.

2 Corinthians 1:4, *Who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

2 Corinthians 1:6-7, *6If 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. 7And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.*

4. Hardships enable us to *demonstrate our faith*.

2 Corinthians 1:11, *...Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us...*

Any kind of hardship you go through puts a spotlight on your faith. The world is watching to see how you react in trouble.

When you really surrender to Jesus Christ, the Comforter comes to pick you up when you fall ... to soothe you when you hurt ... to strengthen you through the suffering.



Take it to the source ... Bible Study

Introductory question: What's the biggest encouragement you can remember receiving? What was the situation and how did it affect your outlook on life?

Opening thought:

Difficult experiences in our life often become a later opportunity for us to be a comfort and encouragement to others. Use this question to get your group thinking how they have been encouraged by others and how they can become a channel of God's comfort in other people's lives.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, Hebrews 5:8; 4:15 and John 15:18-21.

1. What kind of suffering did Christ endure? How would such suffering have helped Him to learn obedience?
2. Why should Christians not be surprised if they encounter times of suffering?
3. How does knowing that Jesus has faced everything that we may face act as a source of comfort?
4. What is your reaction to the words in 2 Corinthians 1:5, *...through Christ our comfort overflows*? What do you think of when you think of comfort overflowing or being abundant?

Key points:

- Suffering is not foreign to the Christian life. Even Jesus suffered while He was here on earth. We should also expect times of hardship.
- Lessons learned from our suffering can become a source of comfort to others, just as Christ's suffering is a source of comfort to us.

Points to ponder:

- *Hebrews 5:8* says that Christ learned obedience from the things He suffered. In every trial He submitted to God and learned the lesson God had for Him at that time. He never failed or disobeyed God's plan.
- *Hebrews 4:15* says that Jesus faced trials that are common to the experience of all people. He has faced what we are facing, so He understands and identifies with us.

Read Hebrews 12:7-11.

1. Why would God use times of hardship as a way of helping us to grow?
2. How can times of hardship or suffering help us to grow and mature spiritually?
3. Why is it important to stop and be still so that we can hear what God is trying to say in difficult times?
4. What practical things can you do to turn difficult times into positive times of spiritual and emotional growth?

Key points:

- Not every hardship should be interpreted as God's discipline. Many difficult times are just the natural consequences of living in a sinful world.
- Part of maturing in our relationship with God is learning to understand when God is using a situation to help us grow. Many times we have to stop and be still in order to hear His gentle voice as He guides us in ways that help us to develop and mature.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:6-11.

1. Has there ever been a time in your life when somebody was able to be a comfort to you because of a hardship they had already faced? How did their experience help you?
2. How do trials and difficulties cause us to rely on God?
3. Why is it important to realize that we live the best life possible when we learn to rely on God in our good times and our bad times?
4. How can living a life of dependence on God in difficult times act as a demonstration of our faith in Him?
5. How will the kind of life talked about in these verses attract others to the reality of the message of Jesus Christ?

Key points:

- Dependence on God helps us to realize that without Him we are nothing. We learn true trust and comfort when we trust God to be our source of strength in every situation that we face in life.
- Our life can be a testimony to others around us when we are able to display our confidence in God and His goodness to us, even in the midst of difficult and challenging circumstances.



Take it home ... Practical Applications

Make a decision this week to be a source of encouragement to someone else.

- Pray for someone that you know is facing a difficult time.
- Look for a practical way to be an encouragement to them.
- Ask God to allow your life to be a demonstration of His comfort that overflows to each one of us in the difficult times of life.

Sermons are just a click away! Watch or listen to sermons online @ ConnectionPointeChurch.org.

All Bible references are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

© Connection Pointe Christian Church 2010