

Rely Not on Ourselves but on God

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[0 : 00] Turn your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 1.

! So if you're unlike me, meaning you have a really good memory, and you were with us back in October, I think the first two Sundays in October, like I mentioned, I think that was the last time that Jim and Suzanne were on vacation.

I preached. I introduced 2 Corinthians 1 to our church family. And we spent two Sundays. Usually, it's just what happens. You never plan for a part two, but you just don't have enough time.

And so there ends up being a part one, a part two. So that's what happened back in October, if you remember. So we spent the first Sunday just looking at a general overview and context of 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians is an amazing, amazing epistle. We see so much of Paul. We see so much of his life circumstance in that epistle. And there's a lot of context behind that.

[1 : 20] So we looked at that, and then we dove into verses 1 through 7. So who remembers that from early October? Yeah, maybe one or two of you. Good memory. Three or four of you. That's okay.

We're going to do a very brief review. Usually, when I tell my wife that, hey, if I'm going to preach a part two, then I need to spend a little bit of time reviewing the previous week or the previous time.

And she knows that, hang on, Greg, don't make your introduction 70% of your sermon, right? And leave a little time for the current text. So I have worked hard not to basically re-preach what I preached in October.

But we do need to look at verses 1 through 7. Our main text for today is verses 8 through 11. But since I just didn't preach verses 1 through 7 last week, we need to look at a little bit of context and have a little bit of refresher with verses 1 through 7.

And there's some helpful observations that we can make in verses 1 through 7. So let me read verses 1 through 7 first. We're going to get a running start, if you would, into our main text today, again, which is verses 8 through 11.

[2 : 31] So let me read 2 Corinthians 1 verses 1 through 7 to kick us off this morning. And follow along with me. I'll be reading from the ESV translation.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of the Caia, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Verse 5, For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort also.

If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort in salvation. And if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

[3 : 44] Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. Now, if you notice in those seven verses, and especially after verses 1 and 2, the greeting in verses 3 through 7, you hopefully notice some repeating themes and repeating words, right?

And you may have even marked your Bible when we went through these last time. And so I'm going to pull up verses 3 through 7 here on the screen. And so I just, by way of observation, just want to remind ourselves of some of the key words and key concepts that Paul writes as he opens up this letter to the Corinthians.

And so the first one, if you look closely, you will see that the word affliction and suffering is mentioned, if you count, at least in the ESV, seven times.

Now, affliction, the Greek word behind that, the Greek term behind that word affliction is philipsis. And it literally means pressure, you know, to have pressure on, to be burdened, to have anguish.

And then suffering, which he, Paul uses a couple of other times, both the verb form and the noun form, it's a different Greek word, but it means almost the same thing. The literal meaning for suffering is hardship or pain or calamity.

[5 : 10] And so we see in this opening part of 2 Corinthians 1, a common theme that Paul is going to be talking about affliction and suffering.

All right. So keep that in mind. We're just sort of building some observations as we go through here. Now, you know that Paul was called to suffer, right? We don't have to guess that we see that, right, just in through his writings.

But we know from Acts that God specifically called Paul to suffer for his sake. Turn back, if you would. Let's read that account in Acts chapter 9. So keep your place there in 2 Corinthians, but go back to Acts chapter 9.

And I want to read the first part of chapter 9. And this is Saul. This is Hebrew name, right? So in Acts 9, we know him as Saul and his conversion from being a Pharisee of Pharisees, right, a persecutor of those who are following Jesus, to an apostle, a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And we see that account in chapter 9. So I will read chapter 9, just the first half of it, as we, again, learned more about Paul's character and his experience here and what God called him specifically to do.

[6 : 23] So chapter 9, verse 1, But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, the way being those who are following the way of Jesus, the gospel, men or women, that he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Now as he, Paul, or Saul, as Saul went on his way and he approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And Saul replied, Who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.

The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. Well, Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, his eyes were physically opened, he saw nothing.

He was blind. So they led him, those who were traveling with him, they led him by hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

[7 : 43] Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And Ananias replied, Here I am, Lord.

And the Lord said to him, Rise and go to the street called Straight. And at the house of Judas, look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. For behold, he is praying. And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.

So what was Ananias' response? But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name.

Verse 15, But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

And here it is, verse 16. Pay attention. For I will show him, Paul, or Saul, I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

[8 : 53] Purposeful suffering for the sake of my name. And so if we follow on down through chapter 9, we see that almost immediately Paul regains his sight.

And then just verses later in verse 20, he goes into Damascus. He boldly proclaims Jesus in the synagogues. And verse 22, Saul increased all the more in strength.

He confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. Things are going great. And verse 23, When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him.

Suffering, affliction, right? Saul or Paul didn't have a honeymoon period, right? When God called him. God told him, You will suffer, but you will suffer for my name.

And so Paul was well acquainted with suffering and affliction. And we see that in his letter to 2 Corinthians in this chapter 1 that we're looking at this morning.

[9 : 55] So that's one key concept as we look at the first part of this chapter. Another key concept is the word comfort. All right. So Paul uses the word comfort 10 times in these five verses.

Comfort, the Greek word is parakaleo. I remember we went over that in October. And it means more than just to console someone, right? It certainly means that, but it means more.

This particular term and use of the word comfort is not only to console, but it literally means to come alongside, right? To come alongside, to strengthen, to be there, right?

To encourage. And so as Paul writes these verses, Paul says, hey, first of all, God is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all of our affliction.

God is the one who consoles. And not only that, He comes alongside to strengthen, to strengthen us through the affliction, through the trial, through the storm that we're going through, right?

[10 : 56] To console, to comfort, to strengthen, to come alongside and to encourage. And we see that in these verses, who is the source of the comfort?

Well, it says right there at the beginning, right? The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort. He is the source of comfort.

And I think I underlined that. But it's not just God who is the source of comfort, right? What else does Paul write? Who does God use to comfort one another? Well, He uses you, right?

He uses you. So that we, who comforts us in all of our affliction, so that we may be able, we, those who have been comforted, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.

Right? Aren't you encouraged? Aren't you comforted at times? Do brothers or sisters come alongside you to encourage you when you're going through tough times, through trials, through affliction, as we do the one another's?

[11 : 57] Absolutely. The church is God's glove, if you would, is God's hands to comfort you in times of affliction. The source is God, clearly, Jesus Christ.

But He uses you to comfort one another. And this is what Paul says. There is purpose to that affliction. And one purpose is so that we may comfort those with the same comfort that we received as well.

Now, one more thing about this particular first few verses is that this is just not any affliction, right? This is not affliction that you would have if you broke the law, if you were doing evil works, if you were doing selfish works, right?

There's a parameter, if you would. There's an association or a condition that comes along with this comfort, right, that we receive. And we see that in the blue underline.

Look at verse 5. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort also.

[13 : 03] And down later in verse 6. It is for your comfort which you experience when? Well, when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

Our hope is for you, our hope for you is unshaken. For we know that as you share in our suffering, so three times, right, in these five verses, Paul is associating the sharing of comfort based on the sharing in Jesus' sufferings.

And that's an important thing to note as we look at these verses. When we unpack a little bit more verses 8 through 11, you'll see this even ring true. The comfort that we receive from God, from Jesus, and from our brothers and sisters in Christ, we share abundantly in that comfort as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings.

God comforts His people through Christ and through believers. Now, before we sort of summarize that, there's one additional perspective that I think is probably appropriate right now to share with you.

Our individual afflictions are sovereignly bestowed by God's loving hand just as Paul's were. Okay? We believe this, right?

[14 : 25] We believe that God is sovereign, that nothing is out of His control. Right? So the afflictions that you go through aren't coincidental. They're not happenstance. As you live for Christ, right, those are sovereignly ordained by the Lord.

We all live under the good providence of God, and His unstinted goodness towards us never diminishes, regardless of what sovereignly He, or what He sovereignly ordains in our lives.

When my wife and I talk about affliction and suffering, she is quick to go to Psalm 119.68. Psalm 119.68, right? I don't want to put you on the spot, but Psalm 119.68, the psalmist proclaims, God, you are good and you do good.

That's a great verse to memorize, you all, in times of suffering or frustration or impatience. God, you are good and you do good. The psalmist actually says, he's talking to the Lord, and he says, you are good and do good.

Teach me your statutes. And that's good to remember. Some committed Christians do live relatively more tranquil lives, tranquil lives, maybe not as much affliction than other believers with like commitments to the Lord.

- [15 : 45] Right? So we don't want to fall into, as we read verses 3-7, we don't want to fall into the comparison game. Right? Have you done that? Have you done the comparison game?
- Like, wow, well, you know, this couple over here that I go to church with, man, they're always under some kind of affliction, some type of burden. They must really be at it for the Lord.
- Man, my life feels, you know, in this stage of my life feels relatively easy. I'm not persecuted. I'm not under affliction. Am I doing something wrong?
- Right? Am I not saved? Am I not genuinely serving and walking in the Lord? Well, we can't do that. We can't do that. That's a bad application.
- Right? Usually we'll end sermons with a list of do's, you know, applications. That's not one of them. And we just can't slip into playing the comparison game, if you would.
- [16 : 41] We should not do that. We also shouldn't try to go out and create suffering. Right? It's like, all right, well, my life is too easy. You know what? I'm going to force the issue.
- I'm going to go out and do something crazy for the Lord, but that will guarantee some sort of persecution or some sort of suffering. Right? There's nowhere in Scripture where we are commanded as Christ's followers to go seek suffering.
- Right? You all know that, right? Paul never glorified suffering. As we go through these verses, watch and listen very closely. You'll see that Paul does not glorify suffering at all.
- And Scripture does not encourage people to seek out suffering. suffering. There's a great quote that sort of crystallizes some of these, some of these, ah, where is it?
- Where is it? Ah, okay. I'm going to slide ahead. There's a great quote here that crystallizes what we're saying here.
- [17 : 44] It says, for Paul, and this is a Bible commentator, for Paul, suffering is not intrinsically good, nor is it a Christian value. Rather, suffering is a page in the textbook used in God's school of faith.
- Isn't that good? I think some of y'all can probably give testimony to that. Like, yeah, Greg, that quote was spot on. Right? Suffering is a page in the textbook used in God's school of faith.
- And I so much appreciated that quote from Scott Haffman. Well, let me go back to sort of the summary. Again, I'm trying to keep it short, right, these first few verses in 2 Corinthians 1.
- But these are some of the summary observations that if we had to sort of bundle these first few verses up, this is where I would sort of land. Right? Number one, there will be afflictions and sufferings when living for Christ.
- You remember what Jesus said to his disciples in John 15 in the upper room? Right? Jesus said, I chose you out of the world. So the world is going to hate you.
- [18 : 52] Right? They hate me and because you're my followers, they're going to hate you. So as you live for Christ, there's going to be affliction. There's going to be suffering. But to each one is allotted his or her own amount.
- So don't play the comparison game. All right? There will be afflictions and suffering. When you live for Christ. And that's sort of what Paul means in the phrase sharing in Christ's sufferings.
- That could apply to full-time ministry folks. Right? Evangelists, missionaries, pastors and elders, those who are 100% full-time in ministry. Or it could be you.
- You know, you're going to your job. You're managing your home. You're traveling for work. You're living for Christ in your context. And in living for Christ, you're going to eventually share in Christ's sufferings for doing what is right.

Because why? Because like Jesus told His disciples, the world will hate you. They're going to hate what you stand for. They're going to hate truth. Well, number two, here's the good news, right?

[19 : 58] As we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, we will share abundantly in His comfort too. Please be encouraged by that. Please be encouraged by that. That's just not, that's not a short little quip.

That's not some sort of rah-rah, make you feel good. Right? This is God's truth. Right? The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write these words. And so we can take that to the bank.

Right? We can rest in that. We can have confidence and assurance in that, that as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, we will share abundantly in comfort as well.

And then thirdly, just in summary observations, God comforts His people through Christ. He also comforts His people through the one another, through other believers.

As the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, God is the ultimate source of comfort. All right. Well, with that in mind, that's our running start as we go into verses 8, 9, 10, and 11 this morning.

[21 : 01] All right. All right. So let me read 2 Corinthians 8, 9, 10, and 11. We'll unpack these verses. If you're in Acts, you can go ahead and turn back to 2 Corinthians.

So Paul continues writing in verse 8. For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction that we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. 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. You also, and He's directing this to the Corinthians, 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.

Well, we see the first thing in verse 8, right? For we do not want you to be unaware. Yeah, for we do not want you to be unaware, brothers. So that word for, right, that means I'm continuing that same train of thought from the previous verses, right?

[22 : 21] And so Paul continues on that He does not want them to be unaware of a specific affliction that He faced in Asia. So while verses 3 through 7 were sort of general references to affliction, general references to suffering, and that as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, we will share abundantly in Christ's comfort.

So now He moves to basically, let me give you a testimony of something that happened. So He's being very specific for the Corinthians now. He goes from general to very specific.

Now, if you noticed when I read verses 8 through 11, we don't know what that affliction is, right? Did you catch that when we were reading those verses? He just said, you know, He had an affliction in Asia, and then we see, I'll unpack this in just a little bit, but He said, we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

But He doesn't say, interestingly, He doesn't share the nature of that affliction. Are you curious as to what, like what did Paul go through that commanded such a response to such a severe affliction?

So I opened up every commentary that I could find and looked through Bible notes and studying notes to see, hey, do the experts, right, those who spend their whole life studying Scripture, did they maybe piece things together to understand what happened with Paul?

[23 : 52] And the bottom line is no, right? There were speculations. If you are familiar with Acts 19 when Paul is in Ephesus, and this is right before, he writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia.

Well, Paul traveled from Ephesus, which is the capital of Asia, right? So geographically, we're sort of in the right ballpark. He went from Ephesus to Troas and to Macedonia when he wrote 2 Corinthians.

So it seems perhaps recently in Acts 19, do you remember the riot, the account of the riot in Ephesus? A man named Demetrius, a silversmith, and the silversmith, he was making lots of money, him and his silversmith colleagues making these idols to the goddess Diana, or Artemis, there in Ephesus, right?

There was a big temple to Artemis. And so the silversmith and his colleagues were making all these idols. They would sell for a profit and make lots of money.

Well, Paul comes into Ephesus, right? And so what does Paul tell them? Right? You're worshipping idols. You're not worshipping the true and only God. And so as Paul is preaching, you know, all the time in the synagogues and to the Gentiles there in Ephesus, you know, the Demetrius starts to lose money.

[25 : 17] And so Demetrius spins up a riot and the account is in Acts 19. But some commentators, Bible commentators, speculate that perhaps there was something going on with Paul in those riots that perhaps he faced something severe, some sort of severe affliction.

Some other speculation, there's a reference in 1 Corinthians 15 of Paul fighting hand-to-hand with wild beasts. Now it's unclear whether that was literal or figurative.

You know, perhaps it was a life-threatening illness. Perhaps it was some other tragedy in his life. Well, we just don't know. The point is is that we don't know exactly what the affliction was.

All these speculations, while they're sort of interesting as a sidebar study, the experts in the commentaries say that none of them really seem to fit other evidence that we read in Scripture about what happened.

So we're not going to spend any more time speculating. What do we need to do? Let's focus on what Scripture does tell us, right, in verses 8, 9, 10, and 11. So our focus should be not so much on the affliction itself, but instead what Scripture reveals through Paul's words.

[26 : 32] And we see that we, that Paul shares about the severity of the affliction and then his response to that affliction. All right.

So I put up there verse 8 and notice the bold up top. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despised or we despaired of life itself.

So we do see about the affliction. We don't know what exactly was happening, but we do know the severity of the affliction. Right? Paul says that he was so utterly burdened.

And I put up here on the screen some different translations that you may have so utterly burdened, burdened excessively. The New King James says burdened beyond measure.

The NIV, interesting, says under great pressure. Remember, that's what literally affliction means, under pressure. That's a good translation there. Under great pressure.

[27 : 32] Paul was saying I was so utterly burdened. I was under such great pressure. The Greek word, literally, I was weighed down to an extraordinary degree.

picture, if you would, what that might look like. Think of like a ship, like a cargo ship that's overloaded and it's maybe sitting low in the water and it's just plowed along.

It's overloaded, overburdened with its cargo. Or perhaps a pack animal, right? A mule or a donkey that's just overloaded with carrying boxes and supplies and whatnot and just, you know, just can barely move because they're so overloaded.

That's the picture of what Paul is painting here. So utterly burdened. And then Paul continues and he says, beyond our strength.

And so the Revised Standard Version says, utterly, unbearably crushed. So it's even worse. The severity is even worse than it initially appears, right? The NIV, upon our ability, beyond our ability to endure.

[28 : 43] And so picture not the pack animal basically moving slowly or the overloaded cargo ship sitting low in the water. But these words tell us, no, no, that cargo ship has sunk.

It is beyond the strength of the cargo ship. That pack animal has been overcome by that overloaded burden on him or her. And the pack animal has just collapsed.

in weakness. Right? That's what Paul is saying. The affliction that we experience in Asia, for we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

So we see the severity so utterly burdened beyond our strength. And then Paul's reaction to this, we despaired of life itself.

Literally, the Greek says, there's no way out. There's no way, right? Without a way, I think is the literal translation there of despaired of life itself.

[29 : 48] As Paul recounts this affliction, Paul is communicating to the Corinthians and to us that he was so burdened, that he was so crushed, that he despaired of life itself.

No exit. No way out. Game over, we would say. Even at this stage in Paul's ministry, he was no stranger to extreme danger.

What we just read in Acts, right, that certainly after Jesus encountered him and he went to Damascus, what was it? Just a few verses later, the Jews are plotting to kill him. And later on in that same chapter, there are other Jews, the Hellenists, the Greek-speaking Jews, that are plotting to kill him.

Paul was no stranger to extreme danger. But here, he's expressing an exceptionally dire circumstance, even for him.

He stared death in the face and fully expected it to embrace him. He repeats this sentiment in verse 9. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence, the death sentence itself.

[30 : 58] So, this is like super-apostle Paul, right? The one who's traveling across countries, across Asia, across Galatia, into Greece and Macedonia.

Paul, the one who is invulnerable, right? Who's preaching the gospel, that is, is working through affliction, is trusting the Lord, right? But he says, this particular affliction that I experience in Asia, I thought I was done.

I despaired of life itself. And I'm so blessed and so thankful to share with you just personally, I don't think I've ever gotten to that point in my own life with that sort of despair.

But maybe some of you have and you know exactly what Paul is talking about. Right? You've gone through a tragedy, you've gone through a circumstance in your life where you have nowhere to go.

You have no hope. And this is where Paul is in recounting this to us. Verse 9, Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

[32 : 11] That has a sense of finality to it, doesn't it? a sentence of death. Paul conceded that he was done for and it was over.

He was resigned to this affliction. As I've mentioned, he was utterly crushed under the unbearable weight. He just helplessly awaited death.

And I don't think I'm being melodramatic here. Right? I mean, you can study this same scripture and you can look. But yeah, this is Paul. This is why when we were going back in October, sort of overview in the background, the context of 2 Corinthians, that 2 Corinthians is considered one of the most, if they not, most personal insights in the Apostle Paul.

Because you do see raw emotions and raw feelings that you don't necessarily see in his other epistles. Paul had sensed that despite all his remarkable earlier deliverances from his many life-threatening experiences, that his time had come and that this affliction was to be the most damaging and debilitating.

And then what's the second half of verse 9? What's that one word right in the middle that Paul writes? But. Right? We celebrate the word but.

[33 : 31] Right? Ephesians? Right? There's another place. Let's turn to Ephesians. You all know where I'm going, right? Ephesians 4, isn't it?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So let me read starting with Ephesians 3. Among whom is it sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and we're by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

Right? That's it. That's it. He's talking about us. And then Paul writes, but God, right? Being rich in mercy. So anytime you get the opportunity to see that word but, celebrate.

And the good news is coming. Right? So Paul writes, but, but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

Paul explains that there was purpose in this affliction as severe as it was. And this purpose has a very simple explanation.

[34 : 37] It doesn't take a seminarian to understand this. Right? It doesn't take a Bible scholar to understand this. Paul explains it. Right? He explains it. It was to make us, or make Paul in this case, rely not on ourselves but on God.

Simple as it gets, huh? It's not complicated at all. In Paul's words, he felt he had received a death sentence. So, it's as if now, as he was delivered out of this affliction, it's as if the power of God's resurrection was brought to bear on Paul's despair.

Right? Isn't that beautiful? We see affliction, which is sort of tantamount to death as we read these verses. Right? We see affliction in Paul facing death, whether it be physical death or perhaps in some of our afflictions, a figurative death.

Right? Just a resignation, a giving up, a no way out sort of feeling. And then we see a wondrous experience of deliverance. Right? Which is tantamount to resurrection. And so that's why Paul says at the end of verse 9, to rely not on ourselves but on God.

But he didn't stop there. God who what? Who raises the dead. So is Paul talking about, wait a minute, did Paul die? And then God raised him from the dead?

[35 : 59] No, no, no. That's not the proper understanding or interpretation of that. It seems a little out of place, but it's really not. Paul uses the present tense.

Not God who raised the dead, maybe referring to Jesus. But Paul says, hey, this person, this God that we are to rely on, it's a God who raises the dead.

This expresses an ongoing, permanent attribute of God. So it's God's nature. Isn't that God's nature to raise the dead? Again, physically or figuratively?

Absolutely. Absolutely. We see accounts in Scripture where Jesus raises individuals from the dead. We see in the Old Testament as well where God raises from the dead.

And so God is a raiser of the dead, so to speak. Here's another quote from a Bible commentator, Philip Hughes. This again sort of explains this concept of God in His nature raising, being a raiser of the dead.

[37 : 05] Philip Hughes comments, notwithstanding that the resurrection is a future event, so He said, notwithstanding the future times when there will be the resurrection when Jesus comes back, notwithstanding that, God shows that it happens every day.

For when God raises up again a man whose life is despaired of and who has been brought to the very gates of hell, He shows nothing other than a resurrection, snatching from the very jaws of death the one who had fallen into them.

Isn't that fantastic? It's almost like there's a cycle of affliction, and we see this in Paul, right, from affliction to death to resurrection, right, affliction, death, to God delivering one out of that state of finality, if you would.

So when you and I find ourselves in impossible circumstances, and as we find ourselves in impossible circumstances as we follow the Lord Jesus and as we live for Him, we are well to remember, do well to remember that God by nature is a raiser of the dead.

He's an encourager, He's a deliverer. Well, in view of all of Paul's epic miseries and afflictions and then deliverances from those that he had experienced up to this moment in his ministry, who would have imagined that Paul had reverted back to depending upon himself?

[38 : 43] So think about that, right? So Paul is, he's probably, he's in his third missionary journey, right? So he's had his first and second missionary journeys. He's, I don't know, probably halfway through his ministry years.

So who would have thought that God would use an affliction to do what? To have him rely not on himself, but on God who raises the dead, right?

You'd think Paul's got it by then, right? I mean, Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus. And Jesus told him through Ananias, that you're going to suffer for my namesake, right?

And through many miseries and through many afflictions, through Paul's life to that point, you'd think, Paul's got this. He can trust in the Lord to deliver him out of the situation that he's in.

But apparently, and we see this in these scriptures, right? Apparently, Paul was still tempted to practice self-reliance. And thus, his experience in Asia helped him, or helped steal him against this self-reliance.

[39 : 54] Anybody have trouble with that in your own life, being a self-reliant person? Come on, everyone's hand. I know you people. Come on, church family. I know you.

I think there's a lesson for Grace Church Williamsburg, at least many of you, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, right? So many of us are independent, right? We're self-reliant.

We know that. Some of us maybe have a little pride in being that way. But if we're not careful, if it happened to the Apostle Paul, if it happened to the Apostle Paul, if God had to bring Paul to the end of himself, to persuade, not persuade, but to basically make Paul realize that he needs to rely on God and not himself.

If it happened to Paul, do you think it can happen to you and to me? Absolutely. I don't want to play the comparison game here, but I have to believe that there's a lesson right here for us.

And our self-reliance, our fierce independence, it can easily and quickly slide into pride, right? It can easily slide into pride because we can become self-reliant, independent, and under God's grace, His common grace, that can happen, right?

[41 : 15] And then we get a little puffed up, right? It's not just knowledge that puffs us up, but it's success that puffs us up. And so we have to be really careful. This is a great lesson, I think, for me and for so many of us, that we have to be careful in our self-reliance, but instead to rely on God.

That's the title of my sermon, right? We rely not on ourselves, but on God, and that's why. Well, so, hopefully you agree with me that, yeah, yeah, I need to become less dependent.

I need to be more reliant on God. But where does the power come from to withstand afflictions and suffering when we're living for Christ, if not from within?

Right? That's a puffball question, right? Where does it come from? It comes from God, right? Paul writes, if you're in 2 Corinthians 1, if you turn over to chapter 4, Paul writes in chapter 4, verse 7, but we have this treasure in jars of clay, this treasure being the gospel, Jesus, right?

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to who? To God, to the contents of that jar, and not to us, not to us, the vessel, the jar of clay.

[42 : 38] And so Paul exhorts the Corinthians, and therefore he exhorts us that the power belongs to God to help us through, to come alongside, to comfort us in afflictions and sufferings.

So bottom line, right, the purpose of Paul's deathly affliction was to make Paul rely not on himself, but on God who raises the dead. Alright, verse 10.

Verse 10, Paul writes, He delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us and on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. So we see three actions, right, in those words, right?

Let me slow down a little bit and let me read these again, right? So verse 10, He delivered us from such a deadly peril, he delivered us, right? So the first action is a past action, right? Paul tells us he delivered us, right?

He's now, he's now, this affliction that he experienced in Asia, right? So he's past that now, right? He's moved on and so he's giving testimony that, hey, God delivered us from such a deadly peril and then he says, and he will deliver us.

[43 : 50] So in the immediate future, now God, Paul expresses his confidence in the Lord that the Lord is truly a deliverer. And then he says, on him, we have set our hope that he will deliver us again, the ultimate future, right?

The ultimate future when we as followers and believers of Jesus Christ who are generally saved will be resurrected to our new body, right? So past, immediate future and ultimate future.

So do you hear the repetition? What word is repeated over and over in those three statements? Deliverer, right, he delivers. He delivered us, he will deliver us, he will deliver us again.

He delivers us, he will deliver us, he will deliver us again. Holy, holy, holy. He delivered us, he will deliver us, he will deliver us again.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. Right? He delivers us, he will deliver us, he will deliver us again.

[45 : 02] Holy, holy, holy. He was, he is, he is to come. See, isn't that beautiful? As Paul writes and we look at Revelation, that was from Revelation 4, 8, John's vision, and we see this beautiful, stylistic, just repetition that should fill our hearts and our minds with worship.

Right? The readers of this letter in Corinth and also to all the saints who were in the hole of the Kaya, according to verse 1, right, they would have caught on to that repetition in this verse 10.

It's beautiful. God is a deliverer, a redeemer, and a savior who raises the dead. So, if you're a Bible underliner, perhaps you want to underline that as in your own worship, in your own time of just personal reflection with the Lord, right, who delivers us, who will deliver us, and who will deliver us again.

Holy, holy, holy. In our last verse this morning, Paul writes, you must also, or 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.

So, verse 11, right, Paul sort of pivots a little bit. Instead of giving testimony to what he has been through, this affliction in Asia, he now sort of directs it back to the readers, right, to the Corinthians.

[46 : 32] He says, you, 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.

So, he's asking for prayers, but what's the purpose? There's a purposefulness, a purpose, purpose, yeah, a purpose for that prayer, right?

It's so that many will give thanks on behalf of the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. All right, let me throw this up here. So, the phrase, you also must help us.

So, NASB is the concept of join in helping us, right? Paul is, after sharing this very raw sort of testimony about this affliction in Asia, he sort of concludes this section by saying, join us.

I invite you to join us in praying for us. Greek, you know, literally, that phrase is join and serving. Cooperate. I invite you to come in cooperation, in collaboration, if you would, and pray for us and pray with us.

[47 : 44] And why? Why do that? Because I want you to be able to give thanks on behalf of the blessing that will result from that prayer.

So, when you ask someone to pray for you, like if there's a decision that you need to make, there's a circumstance in your family, in your job, in your marriage, or whatever, and you go to a brother and sister in Christ, and you say, pray for me.

I need your prayer support. I need wisdom in how to handle a situation. Well, Paul is modeling here that when you ask someone to pray for you, why don't you remind them, hey, listen, when you pray for me, I am so confident that God is going to answer.

He may answer yes, may answer no. God's going to answer. And so, would you also, as you pray for me, would you also go ahead and give thanks for the blessing that I'm going to receive for that prayer that you prayed for me?

Right? Isn't that pretty cool? I've never seen that before in this verse, right? So, I'm not making this up, right? Paul says, you also must help us by prayer. Why?

[48 : 50] So that, all right, there's your purpose clause, right? So that, he's giving the Corinthians a reason why he's asking for their prayer. so that many will give thanks on behalf, on our behalf, right?

So that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many, the prayers that you're going to make. And I think that's just a great, that's a great, probably of all these verses, this is the one that I probably took the most away from.

It's like, it's beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. We see that intercessory, intercessory prayer, right? prayers where we're going before the Lord, beseeching and requesting and asking, right?

That that flows, should flow, right into thanksgiving and gratefulness in your prayer life. Well, why, why did Paul say this? Why, why, why he mentioned this?

Well, we've just learned because God continually raises from the dead, right? He ongoingly delivers His people from their afflictions as we share in the, the sufferings of Christ, as we live for Christ, we also share abundantly, right?

[50 : 02] In the comfort that's found through Christ and through others. He comforts us and therefore, in our prayers, we can pray in confidence that He will deliver. And so, let's give Him thanks.

Then there, don't wait. Go ahead and thank Him as you're praying for others or praying for yourself. That's what Paul, that's what Paul is instructing, is asking and inviting the Corinthians to do.

Well, Paul's account of his affliction and the deliverance from that affliction in Asia, it thematically flows on and completes the first verses 3 through 7 that we read at the beginning, right?

3 through 7 really shouldn't be disconnected from verses 8 to 11, right? And that's why I wanted to spend some time going through 3 through 7. It thematically flows from 3 through 7 all the way through to verse 11.

And it's now ended appropriately by Paul focusing on intercessory prayer and thanksgiving for all that God does.

[51 : 05] Such intercession has the declared intention further to bless God for His deliverance of Paul. All right.

So, as I was studying these verses this week, I just thought these verses and just reading more in depth and studying more in depth about this affliction that super apostle Paul that he lived through and he gave testimony through, it was beautiful, it was raw, right?

It was emotional, insightful, and encouraging. You know, while Scripture does not reveal the exact nature of Paul's affliction in Asia, it does reveal the severity of the affliction.

We went over that and Paul's reaction to it. Just as a reminder, right, he was so utterly burned beyond his strength, he was crushed. He despaired of life itself.

He saw no exit, no way out of that circumstance. Indeed, he felt that he had received the sentence of death. Game over. And by the testimony of Paul in this epistle, Paul tells us that God delivered him from that affliction.

[52 : 30] And what was the purpose of this experience, of this affliction? Well, Paul tells us, and it's simple, right, to make him rely not on himself, but on God who raises the dead.

On a God who's a deliverer and a redeemer and a savior and a comforter. These are all words and themes that we've seen this morning. So I'm guessing, you know, as I, just in conclusion, I'm guessing that some of you here this morning could give testimony of God's comfort and deliverance as you perhaps have faced some dire affliction.

I know many of you, but there's many of you who I don't know or just have recently met. But I'm just guessing, it's a guess that some of you could give a testimony similar to what we read this morning from Paul.

Some of you may be right now in a dire sort of affliction or a trial or going through some sort of suffering.

And so you're living this. And maybe in God's sovereignty, these scripture verses is exactly what you need to hear to encourage you as you go through this time of suffering and trial.

[53 : 45] Well, earlier this week as I was studying and preparing for the sermon this morning, the Lord connected two things in my mind about this scripture.

the first being these verses in chapter one. And the second being earlier this month, the remembrance of something that happened seven years ago that resulted in much affliction in the life of a dear brother and sister in Christ.

An affliction perhaps to the degree that we've read this morning in the Apostle Paul's testimony. And so I wondered and I prayed about this and about asking my brother, my brother in Christ to perhaps give a brief testimony about this and how his experience might relate to what we've learned this morning from scripture about God using afflictions in our lives and as we live for Jesus Christ, right, to remind us to rely on him and on ourselves.

And so I asked my brother and my brother Clyde graciously accepted my request and my invitation to share a little bit of his testimony of going through a deep affliction.

So, brother, as we close out our sermon time today, I'd like to invite you up to share a little bit about what's on your heart and working with that affliction. and we will put, because the sermon is being recorded, we'll pull the mic up for the recording.

[55 : 21] Thank you. Thank you.

I've got to have glasses. My wife's wisdom also said that nobody gets in this pulpit here without writing something down so we don't go on rabbit trails. So, this morning I put it on paper and Greg and I spoke earlier this week and I thought I had it all together and we had like four days so the Lord changed my heart in a lot of ways to be down to them.

So, I will just share with you, trials come in many different ways. We talk about the things with Paul, we don't know what his were. I don't know what your reflection is here as well.

There are many, there are many different trials that come along but I'd like to start with just the first question.

How do we, how will we, how should we respond in the midst of a trial? The Bible says as Christians we will encounter trials, tribulations, adversities, not if, but when we will face these trials.

[57 : 21] What is a trial? A trial is an examination by testing. Biblically, it is a testing of one's faith. I may end up like Jeff and cry a lot so I'm sorry.

Trials come in many forms. Loss of a job, sudden loss of your home through disasters and catastrophe of weather and fire and hurricane, maybe a flood, a sudden illness, short term of a flu or an allergy, long term of cancer or diabetes or heart condition that came up.

These are extreme things but they could be as simple as trying to get here this morning without running over the person in front of you in a Christian manner or even getting your kids ready to get here this morning.

But this morning, Pastor Greg, my brother in Christ, asked me to share with you the testimony of grief. Specifically, the loss of my son, our son, the loss of a loved one.

March 17, 2018 would become the greatest trial that we had ever faced as a family.

[58 : 50] For me personally, it would become the greatest testing of my own personal faith. On that day, we lost one of our five boys in a four-wheeler accident in the mountains of West Virginia.

CJ was a father of two at that time, four and six. He was a companion and a soul provider for their father. He was a co-worker, a friend, a cousin, a nephew, a grandson, a brother, and a son.

He was loved and liked by many. People handle loss in many different ways of a loved one. There's no preparing yourself for grief until that time comes.

The severity of grief comes in different levels. That is determined by the depth of the relationship in which you had with a loved one who's passed. We all go through grief.

Even a child can understand these things in the depth of grief if they've ever lost a family pet. The question still remains, how will we respond?

[60 : 09] Will we believe and live as Psalms 119.68 says? God is good and he is doing good. Let's take a moment to pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, as I give this testimony, will it not be of mine but of yours. May this time be used to glorify you in your goodness and your graciousness and in your love.

May it be a testimony in the power and the control and sovereign will which you hold over your children and your creation. Hide me behind the cross of Christ.

Use my words to exalt his thing and his glory. It is in Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Oh, me.

It's hard to live those words. It's hard to walk that walk when you lose something. To believe that it's designed by him for his purpose and for his glory.

[61 : 12] It's interesting that this morning we heard seven times that the word suffering and affliction were in the scriptures but ten times the word comfort was used. God's comfort is always greater than the affliction in which we will go through.

So I want to take just a few minutes just to set the context of where I was in my life from seven years ago. I wasn't new to the Christian walk at all. At that time I'd been walking with the Lord for 16 years.

I was a current deacon in the church. I'd been leading men's Bible study. I had the t-shirts, the bumper stickers sold out for Jesus.

Then upon that day the greatest test would begin. Not on the outside but the inside. I'd still go on to do the things that I knew I had to do.

There were those who were watching and counting on me. They were looking to see how I would be tested with my faith and how I would react when I walk away from God. It wasn't those times on the outside that was hard.

[62 : 25] It was on the inside that the war had begun. There was the times alone with God that became the battlegrounds. those riding down the road sitting in an empty room laying in the bed at night in the darkness but with your own thoughts emptiness in your heart and brokenness.

Sadness, despair, fear, disappointment, anger, heartbroken, emotions driven by the question of why.

See, all trials touch different things but grief touches them all. If I'm honest with myself then and now the war and sad continues to battle is a daily constant attack on your faith the enemy has never addressed.

The number one target wasn't my anger towards CJ or the decisions he made that caused his death but it was towards God. I began to hold God accountable for CJ's actions.

I justify my anger with statements in my head like if you're so loving and kind then why didn't you use your power to save him?

[64 : 03] Why did you allow this to happen? How is it at one time you allow people in the same accident to walk away without a scratch? And this one you willfully let it happen.

I question if this God was even real. Was he even who the Bible says he is? Was he not worthy to be praised?

Depression had begun to set in as I heard of others dying behind me I can relate to Paul I would selfless think of the great feeling of relief it would be the God I knew I was in a bad place on the outside things looked good on the inside things were completely a mess ironically the world had boxes that I had to check I worked with DuPont at the time and to get FMLA coverage they forced me to go see a shrink with worldly wisdom and in 15 minutes I was diagnosed as bipolar manic depression and suicidal me and the young lady had a quick discussion that she was completely right on all three accounts but the greatest one that I was a sinner and there was no medicine she could give to take that away so I paid her 450 bucks and she signed the paperwork and I got my FMLA coverage but I was still left with that hole and dealing with things so I went to a biblical counselor recommended all things that are called biblical aren't biblical spent more time correcting his theology rather than working on the problem at hand my brother

Greg had encouraged me to meet with Pastor Jeff so I accepted he opened up the Bible first thing he went straight to Psalms 119 68 shared how God was good and he was doing something good that he was sovereign and that he was doing all good things for his purpose for those who love him like most or many I heard the words but didn't believe it even when we don't want to hear it or believe it we need believers to speak into our lives to open the scriptures to remind us of God's truths to point us to him and to that he is who he says he is that he is never going to leave us never going to forsake us he's always there while we pull away and run he is steadfast he is faithful

God began to speak truths into my heart to remind me of who he is who I am not to remind me that he is God and I am not to remind me that he is in control and I am not that he is perfect in his plan and in his will and I am not he began to reveal the truth which I knew in my head but did not believe it in my heart till then I began to seek him in his word and pray began to seek his face to get me through the trial and not his hand to remove me from it this is a constant and daily activity the struggles of life are real in many different trials no matter the age no matter the time in the midst of a trial

[68 : 47] I've realized that there's two things that will happen that will either push you closer to God or further from him but God still remains steadfast it's us that moves he does not he is patient he is forgiving he is loving he is kind five years had passed on in the midst of those things and some brothers in Christ invited me to a G3 conference and wouldn't you know the topic would be the sovereignty of God I knew this would be the greatest challenge to me to accept the truth that God is sovereign his ways are perfect even when we don't understand it after the conference I realized that there would be a peace inside my soul to come to realize that God is sovereign that he has a purpose in things during that trip there was many discussions in late nights and early mornings car rides lunch dinners breakfast conferences sermons that express

God is loving God is all knowing and he is doing something well even when we don't understand it during that weekend I repented of my sin of bitterness towards God blame shifting to God forgiveness and restoration of our relationship have been restored a peace have been given that comfort have been given God's love had shown through the trial when we returned that weekend we knew that there would be more trials and adversities to come however we accept that trials are part of life as believers we have to be we have to be reminded that why the trials exist to start with they remind us that

God is in control of the trial he either has brought it to you or he's bringing you through one either way he's still in control of it he's ordained it it is for our good when we don't see the trials to be as good but ultimately it's for his glory it's for his purpose even though it doesn't seem like it at the time especially in the beginning that God is anywhere around we don't see God in these things but he is he is the closest to us in our trials he reminds us that we cannot do it without him as our world is crumbling around us he is still good and he is still doing good the Bible begins to come alive there is many ways that people deal with comfort trials and they are comforted by loved ones and a hug and sitting and talking and doing those things but there is no greater comfort than found in God's word now we got a slew of verses 1 Corinthians 16 14 says let all bad thing about writing things down you can't read your own handwriting it's so terrible let all that you do be done in life

Ecclesiastes 4 12 says and if one can't overthrow him who is alone two can resist him a quarter three strands is not quickly torn apart Joshua 1 9 be strong and courageous do not tremble or be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go Jeremiah 29 11 we hung this on Mason's wall for I know the plans that I have for you declare the Lord Jeremiah 29 12 13 then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart

John 3 30 he must increase but I must decrease Psalm 61 3 says for you have been a refuge for me a tower of strength against the enemy it is a battle when you're in the trial the enemy is at work he wants to lie to you and he wants to tell you things but God's word is true Ephesians 4 2 says with all humility and gentleness with patience showing tolerance for one another and love thank you Ephesians 6 13 therefore take up the full armor of God so that you will be able to resist in the end day Psalm 61 2 from the end of the earth

[74 : 52] I call to you when my heart is faint lead me to the rock that is higher than I in Psalm 16 3 commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established 1 Thessalonians 16 through 18 rejoice always pray without ceasing and everlasting give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus Romans 12 12 says rejoicing in hope preserving in tribulation devoted to prayer I read all these scriptures to you and you say well man you just got a pile of them these scriptures are immersed in every room in our house thank goodness for Hobby Lobby I guess you have to cling to God's word even when you don't believe it you have to be surrounded by it you have to be in it in conclusion while it's difficult to see and understand or even believe that trials are good it is even harder to realize that it isn't about us it's about him while we grow through the trials they are to point us to him they are designed in a purpose to remind us that we cannot do it alone that we cannot survive it on our own strength and on our own flesh it is only through

God's grace and his mercy and his strength and his love of Christ shown on us through the cross that can sustain us the trials are a reminder of us of hope found in Christ when we can find no hope in anything the hope in Christ is the only given by the power of a loving God drink out of a coffee cup now that says faith doesn't make it easy but it makes it possible faith in God's sovereignty faith in his goodness only comes through the faith in the good news of Jesus Christ and the gospel of Christ my wife before I came up pointed out a scripture and you'll probably get there in like 20 years while you're going on this Corinthians walk 2 Corinthians 4 16 therefore we do not lose heart but through our other outer man is decaying yet our inner man is being renewed day by day for momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen for the things which we are which are seen are temporal for the things which are not seen are eternal let's pray dear my father lord we thank you so much for this time lord i thank you for the opportunity to give a testimony to brag on you to brag on a god that's worthy to be praised a god who is faithful when we are faithless a god who we can have hope in when we see no hope a god whom gives great comfort through many different devices and all things which he controls a god who loves us so much that has given us his word a god who speaks truth to us through his word a god who loves us so much that he gives everything to us through his son jesus christ a god who raised him from the dead which we will be celebrating soon a god who we have hope to see those things come to be when we don't have the answers we know that you do so lord as we leave here today lord may you continue to bless us with your mighty hand may you continue to draw us nearer to you in the midst of trials and tribulations may you continue to comfort those when we can find no other comfort but in you so lord we thank you again for this day we thank you for this time as we give all these things in jesus glory in his name amen amen thank you brother