

The God of All Comfort (Part 1)

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Date: 06 October 2024

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[0 : 0 0] All right.

This is not so you all can hear me, right? It's so the recording. That's why Jeff and I do the recording. So if you don't have a copy of God's Word, either digital or analog, we've got a whole stack of Bibles in the back table.

All right. So you're going to need your Scripture this morning because we're going to embark on a new journey this morning, at least for this week and next week, while I have the privilege of bringing you the message from the Word.

So if you have your Bibles, hopefully you do, turn to 2 Corinthians 1. 2 Corinthians 1. Now, as you're turning there, I would like to take a few minutes to sort of set the stage, so to speak, for what I will be sharing with you this morning and next Sunday.

Now, I don't know what your initial reaction was just then when I referred to 2 Corinthians. You know, in comparison to all of the Apostle Paul's writings, his epistles in the New Testament, I'm going to venture a guess that 2 Corinthians is perhaps one of the least familiar of his writings to you.

[1 : 3 0] And not just to you, but even in a couple of commentaries that I was consulting as I was preparing for this week, even they said that perhaps many believers and maybe even pastors and preachers in general have sort of overlooked 2 Corinthians.

And if you sort of think about it, you know, that may be true. If you're going to embark on studying one of Paul's epistles, right? So where would the first place you'd go, right?

You probably want to go to Romans, right? Like on my bucket list, there are certain Pauline epistles that I want to study and go verse by verse, right? So Romans would probably be at the start, right?

Romans is all about righteousness, Christ's righteousness, right? Or maybe Colossians, right? So when our church first called Jeff to be our pastor here, he preached verse by verse through the book of Colossians.

And this is why you see him on occasion sort of going back and reviewing some of the scripture from Colossians because it's so good. Colossians, Paul focuses in on the preeminence of Christ.

[2 : 3 2] Well, of course, you know, in your limited time and as you're in your busyness and your responsibilities of life, you know, if I'm going to pick some Pauline epistles to study, I'm going to go with Romans or Colossians.

Or what's another one that we refer to here often? Yeah, Tara, I saw you word it. Ephesians, right? Grace, right? Paul focuses in on the grace of God in his epistle to the church in Ephesus, right?

So Ephesians, Romans, maybe even 1 Corinthians, right? 1 Corinthians, I believe, is like the third longest of Paul's epistles. And in 1 Corinthians, we see a lot about polity in the church and how the church should act and behave and the whole process of that church going through sanctification.

But we've talked about progressive sanctification in some of our recent times together on Wednesday nights and on Sunday, right? So I want to do a little bit of an impromptu survey this morning since I get to stand up here.

And so I want you to either confirm or maybe not confirm this sort of thought that maybe 2 Corinthians is probably not the most focused on book. So here's my question to you.

[3 : 47] While you may have read 2 Corinthians as part of a Bible reading plan this year or sometime in the past, and by the way, if you are going through our Bible reading plan, right, that we started out, our church has started out in January, last month, you just read through 2 Corinthians.

I think it was about 14 days long, right in the middle of September is when in that Bible reading plan, you probably read probably half a chapter a day for two weeks going through, or one chapter a day for two weeks going through 2 Corinthians.

But aside from that, aside from devotional reading or maybe reading Bible reading plan, I'm just curious, has anyone led or participated in a formal, structured, verse-by-verse study of 2 Corinthians?

Now there's no right answer here, but I'm just curious. I want to validate if that's true or not. So has anybody had the opportunity in their spiritual life? And by the way, my wife, I told her she cannot vote because she did lead a study about 10 years ago on 2 Corinthians.

So aside from my wife, has anybody had the opportunity or taken the opportunity, made the effort? So yes, yes, all right, we have one person, one, maybe two.

[4 : 57] So that maybe validates sort of what folks are thinking. I don't know why, you know, looking back at books of the Bible that I've studied, I don't know that I've spent a whole lot of time in 2 Corinthians either.

I don't know if it's like a hidden jewel in the New Testament or what, but we're going to spend today and next Sunday. So listen, we're not going to go through all 13 chapters today and next Sunday. Don't have the time, right? But I want us to get kicked off looking at 2 Corinthians.

So it's my intention, right, to start. So here's what Jeff and I have been talking about. So it's hard to come up, whether I come up and preach or whether we invite some of the men, the students from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary, when we invite folks to come in and speak and do a one and done sort of sermon, it's hard.

It's hard to do that because it takes so much time to do introduction, right, to set context and background, which is proper and necessary, right, when we open up God's Word. We don't want to take something out of context, right?

You take something out of context, that's pretext. And we don't want to do that. As a faithful studier and preacher of God's Word, we really want to avoid doing that. And so I'm sort of intending that this, when I have the opportunity to preach, when Jeff is out or when he just has a heavy counseling load, at least today, my thought is that I'm going to bring us back and just walk through 2 Corinthians.

[6 : 28] So keep 2 Corinthians bookmarked on your Bible. And we may, in the weeks and months to come, we'll come back and look at this. Okay. Well, by way of introduction to 2 Corinthians, I want to take a brief look at 2 Corinthians in the context of Paul's other epistles, right?

I want to set the context for us, all of the other Pauline epistles in the New Testament. So a little Bible drill. So how many books are in the New Testament?

Can you all, anybody know that? Oh, and everyone's eyes diverts from me. 27. Right. So we have 27 books in the New Testament. Now, how many of those 27 are Pauline epistles?

Anybody want to take a stab at that? Anybody? All right. 13. Yeah, 13. So nearly half of the books in the New Testament are Pauline epistles by book count, right?

Clearly, the Gospels and Acts and Revelation, those are much larger books in terms of verses. But when we look at the composition of the New Testament, we see that Paul encompasses almost half of the books in the New Testament.

[7 : 39] So I've created a table for us. This is a quick reference guide to help you and help me understand the context of 2 Corinthians in the New Testament.

So I'll give you a minute just to look at this. These are just the 13 Pauline epistles here on this slide. Now, the far left column, if you were to sort of categorize or summarize all the Pauline epistles, right?

Paul basically wrote to two groups, right? He either wrote to churches or he wrote to individuals, right? So that's maybe one way to categorize, right? Either to churches or to individuals.

Now, of those 13 letters, right, he wrote some of them earlier in his ministry as he was traveling, right? And you're familiar with the Paul, his first missionary journey, second missionary journey, third missionary journey, right?

So as he was journeying, he would be at churches and he would write letters to churches that he had visited, helped found, and just to encourage them or to address issues, as we'll learn a little bit later.

[8 : 43] After his third missionary journey, you know, there is something, you know, if you were to read the book of Acts, right? His fourth missionary journey, if you would, was his trip to Rome, where he was eventually imprisoned.

And so then there are four letters that he wrote while he was imprisoned in Rome, right? Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, and Philipians, okay?

During his first imprisonment. And so we refer to those as the prison epistles. So earlier, the earlier Galatians, and there was some question about when Galatians was written, but for purposes of conversation this morning, we'll put Galatians up near the front, written between some Bible commentators.

Many of them sort of land on, perhaps Galatians was written between his first and second missionary journey. By the way, there is no one church of Galatia, and that's something, Galatia is a region, it's an area.

So when we read the letter to the Galatians, it's to a group of churches, right? So something, put that in your back pocket. But during his second, so this is interesting, during his second missionary journey, look at where he was, the far right column.

[9 : 51] Where was he when he wrote first and second Thessalonians? He was in Corinth, right? So Acts 18, we can read about Paul's visit in Corinth, and that's great context for today as well.

During his third journey, so after his second journey from Corinth, he traveled back to Jerusalem, and then immediately, there's like one verse between his second missionary journey in Acts and when the third one starts.

If you're not reading closely, you'll miss it in the book of Acts. So in the third missionary journey, he travels, he eventually gets to Ephesus, right? So Paul spent roughly three and a half years in Ephesus, and while he was in Ephesus, he wrote 1 Corinthians, and then we'll drill down a little bit more about the context around 2 Corinthians, and he was in Macedonia.

But you see there, so you see that the travel epistles there in the first several years, roughly 10 years of his ministry there, the imprisonment in the later years, in the early 60 A.D.s, and then the beloved pastoral epistles, right?

Where Paul wrote to his young protege Timothy, and also to Titus as well. So we see those late in his ministry, and Jeff, right, we just recently went through 2 Timothy, right?

[11 : 05] Those were, that was a final letter that Paul wrote as he was anticipating his death, and that roughly in 66, 67 A.D. So why is it important that I go over that, right?

So if you study any Pauline epistle, this is a great place to start because this is good context. What's happening in history during this time?

What are the rough time frames? Where is Paul coming from, and where is he going, and what is he dealing with when he writes these epistles? And so this is a very high view picture of where 2 Corinthians fits in to Paul's ministry.

Next week, I'll spend a little bit more time going over some of the introductory material of 2 Corinthians. I could spend the whole time this morning, but I don't want to do that. But hopefully that's sort of helpful to see where that fits in.

By the way, these sermon slides, I think most of you know, right? When Jeff and I finish preaching, the audio is uploaded, and any slides that we present, those are all uploaded to our church website.

[12 : 07] So that's available to you as well. Well, so we've sort of established that 2 Corinthians, probably not the most well-studied epistle, right?

At least in this congregation, and perhaps others. But ironically, 2 Corinthians has many familiar verses to us.

And so I picked up about 10 or 15 verses as I was reading through 2 Corinthians. It's like, you know when you read something, or when you're reading through the Bible, or maybe you haven't been in the book of Genesis.

You know, we're in Genesis now. Jeff's preaching through that. And you come across accounts and references, and it's like, oh yeah, I remember that. Or hey, that's familiar. Or maybe I studied that years ago.

So I'm going to read through several verses from 2 Corinthians. And I think you know 2 Corinthians perhaps more than you believe, okay?

[13 : 02] I'm going to ask you to fill in the blank, all right? So this is participation time. We usually don't do this on Sunday morning, but for this occasion, I think it's very appropriate. So let me read some of these verses.

You tell me if they're familiar and maybe fill in the blank. So 2 Corinthians 4, verse 16, Paul writes, So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

Is that a familiar one? Our outer self is wasting away, but our inner self is being renewed day by day. That's chapter 4, verse 16. Chapter 5, verse 8, Paul writes, Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord, right?

So in chapter 5, the context there is Paul is wrestling through what happens to a believer, right, at the end of his life.

And do we groan? Do we desire to be at home with the Lord? And that would be away from the body. Or the Lord is keeping me in my body here on earth while we desire to be at home with the Lord.

[14 : 16] And so often when we have funeral context, one way that we encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ, the passion of a loved one, we say, right, to be away from the body, to be absent from the body, is to be with the Lord.

That comes from 2 Corinthians chapter 8. I'm sorry, chapter 5, verse 8. Another verse in chapter 5. Tell me if this is familiar. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. Right? Familiar, right? That's chapter 5, verse 17. Remaining in chapter 5.

All right, so this is the last verse in chapter 5. I hope you all have this one memorized. This is one of my all-favorite foundational verses. 2 Corinthians 5, 21.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become what? The righteousness of God.

[15:17] Right, right. That's 2 Corinthians. That comes from 2 Corinthians. Chapter 6. You may hear preachers say, Now is the day of salvation.

Yeah, yeah. Now is the day of salvation. Paul writes that in chapter 6, verse 2. A little bit later on in chapter 6, Paul writes, Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

Right? So, you know, equal and unequally yoked, whether it be in relationship, whether it be personal relationship, or business relationship, is more the immediate context there in chapter 6.

So that was chapter 6, verse 14. Chapter 8. That though he, being Jesus, was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.

Right? Became poor. And that's chapter 8. And then chapter 9, verse 6. Whoever sows sparingly, there's all the S's there. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.

[16:18] And whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Right? That's chapter 9, verse 6. And then I think most of you, if not all of you, will know this.

Because chapters 8 and 9, Paul focuses on the principle of giving, the biblical principle of giving. And so what I just read about sowing sparingly and sowing bountifully, that the context there was giving.

Chapters 9, verse 7. The next verse says, For God loves a cheerful giver. Right. Chapter 7, verse 9.

Chapter 10. Right? This is all from this unfamiliar Pauline epistle, 2 Corinthians. You know a lot more than maybe you realize. Chapter 10, verse 5.

Paul instructs the Corinthians, Take every thought captive to obey Christ. Right? Talks about taking every thought captive. There's probably not a week or two that goes by that we talk about taking all of our thoughts captive.

[17:20] Take every thought captive to obey Christ. A little bit later in chapter 10, Paul writes, Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

Yeah. Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. Paul actually writes that in 2 Corinthians, and he also writes that in 1 Corinthians as well. But that's a quote from Jeremiah 9.

A couple more. Chapter 11, verse 3. Paul writes, But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Is that one familiar now that I said that one? Yeah. Yeah. I think Jeff has actually preached on that and made reference to that in the recent past. Right?

But I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, that your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Chapter 12, verse 9.

[18:25] This is where Paul is recounting the thorn that's given to him in the flesh. Right? And after Paul pleads three times with the Lord to remove it, what's Paul say? He says, But he said to me, this is the Lord responding to Paul after Paul's begging for the Lord to take away that thorn in the flesh.

The Lord says, My grace is sufficient for you. That's right. My grace is sufficient. For my power is made perfect in your weakness.

Yeah. That's 2 Corinthians, chapter 12. The next verse, Paul writes, For when I am weak, then I am strong. Yeah. That's chapter 12, verse 10.

And finally, the last chapter, chapter 13, Paul instructs the Corinthians, Examine yourselves, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

That one familiar? Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Well, maybe that motivates you, maybe that encourages you, maybe inspires you to say, Hey, all right, maybe I haven't formally studied 2 Corinthians, but I know a little bit about it.

[19 : 34] And so we're going to be unpacking those verses in the days, weeks, months, years to come, perhaps. All right. So I want to share with you before we dive into chapter one, if you had to step back and say, Okay, of the 13 chapters in 2 Corinthians, what are the key characteristics?

What are we about to dive into and learn as we read this epistle? And I want to just share with you, maybe propose to you that there's three key characteristics, not themes. We'll go over themes next week.

But for this morning, just some characteristics, right? Just some observations of 2 Corinthians. And I think I have a, yeah, so I have a slide here. Three of what I've sort of gathered as key characteristics in reading 2 Corinthians.

Well, the first one is that 2 Corinthians is personally insightful into Paul. We see Paul's raw emotions and his passion, unlike perhaps we see in any other Pauline epistle.

If you were to, and this is where you sort of pull your Bible out, and I just want to do a brief survey and look at some different verses here as I share with you these key characteristics, these key observations of 2 Corinthians.

[20 : 52] So in chapter 1, Paul writes in verses 8 and 9, and we'll read this here in just a minute as well, but for now, Paul writes, For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia.

Then Paul writes this, For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. That's pretty raw, right?

That's pretty raw writing. But basically, Paul, in this letter, basically says, I'm about to die. And then verse 9, the following verse says, Indeed, we felt that we had received a sentence of death, but that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

So that's one example of we see some insights into Paul and the struggles. Yeah, I mean, Paul struggled, right? When we think of some of these New Testament writers, we think they're supermen, right?

But we see that 2 Corinthians reveals to us anxiety that Paul had, and we'll go over that probably next week. Some of the anxiety, the restlessness that he had.

[22 : 03] Yes, he was trusting the Lord, but he was also a man in flesh, serving his Lord and trusting in him as best he could. But nonetheless, we see in this letter how some insights into Paul that we don't see in other places.

Turn over to chapter 3 just for a moment. In chapter 3, verse 5, we see Paul stressing his human weakness and his inadequacy, his humility, right?

Paul says, Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything that's coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God. Yeah.

Isn't that so true? That's so true of each of us. But Paul in this letter to the Corinthians says, we are insufficient. We are insufficient. There's nothing in ourselves that we can claim sufficiency to.

All our sufficiency is from God. If you turn over to chapter 11, again, as we see some insights into the character of Paul, we see Paul's passion for his flock.

[23 : 19] And his passion for his flock is both for spiritual growth and also for spiritual safety. So in chapter 11, let me read verses 2, 3, and 4, and you follow along. Paul writes, For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

But then chapter, verse 3, I read that just a second ago, right? Verse 3, But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, that your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one that you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one that you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

He loves his flock. He's a little frustrated with his flock because he says, Hey, Corinthians, you put up with some of this false teaching that is permeating into the church now that I'm not there.

And I'm afraid that the enemy is going to deceive you and pull you away from pure and sincere devotion to Christ. And so that's a heart of a shepherd talking, right?

[24 : 39] A shepherd who loves his flock and is concerned about their spiritual growth and their spiritual safety. Turn back to chapter 4. We also see a little bit more of Paul's character and his humility.

So, chapter 4, verse 7, Paul writes, But we have this treasure in jars of clay.

What was this treasure? Jesus, the gospel, right? But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Now, this is chapter 4. We're not there today. But I did do a little bit of research on this jars of clay thing, right? What is this jars of clay? Is this like a ceramic pot?

What's he talking about here? So, when he's saying that we have this treasure in jars of clay, right? He's calling himself a jar of clay, right? In me is this treasure of Christ, Christ in me, right?

[25 : 41] Well, one of the primary uses of clay pots, get this, was to hold garbage and human waste. And that's how Paul saw himself.

Common, expendable, and replaceable. That's pretty humble, huh? He just claims that he's just a clay pot, pot used for trash, human waste.

You know, Paul's basically saying, I am nothing. But yet, in my nothingness, I've got a treasure, which is Jesus Christ. Well, and that's how he saw himself.

And why? Well, if we look at the last half of verse 7, why does he think this? To show the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us, right?

You want to develop a view, a picture of a tremendous separation. This is a great word picture, right? You've got the perfection, the majesty of Christ, but indwelling in a clay pot, in a vessel of no worth, of nothing.

[26 : 52] And that's what Paul is. Paul's not saying he's nothing, right? Because in Christ, right, we're everything. We're God's masterpiece. But Paul does see just as a servant of Christ.

It's all him. All glory, all power, all surpassing power belongs to God, not in us. Well, lastly, as we, again, are looking at some insights into Paul, Paul also models how to handle suffering in the ministry.

Remaining here in chapter 4 and just going down to the next verse, let me read verses 4 through 10, I'm sorry, verses 8 through 10.

And we see how Paul responds to and models how to handle suffering in ministry. Now, you may think, well, Greg, you know, if this is, you know, an example of Paul modeling behavior in ministry, all right, man, that's for you and Jeff.

No, it's for all of us, right? We're all in ministry, right? We're all in ministry. We are always discipling and encouraging and doing the one another's, helping each other to grow, bearing one another's burdens.

[27 : 59] So this is for all of us. So Paul models how to handle suffering in ministry. So he writes in verses 8, 9, and 10, he says, We are afflicted in every way, but we're not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

That's a pretty good picture, right, of how Paul responds to ministry. Ministry's hard. Ministry's hard. And sometimes you're beaten down.

We're going to talk a little bit about affliction and suffering and trials that you all may be going through. We all go through that in some degree. Ministry's hard, but I love this perspective.

Yeah, we're afflicted, but hey, we're not crushed because we have Christ. We're persecuted, but we're not forsaken because we have Christ. Right? We're struck down.

We're not destroyed, right, because we have Christ. And so we see that where Paul just is a great model for us to look at when it comes to suffering in ministry.

[29 : 23] A major theme, and we'll talk about this next week, a major theme in 2 Corinthians is Paul's defense of his integrity and his apostleship against the attacks from many of the false teachers that had infiltrated the church in Corinth.

Okay, we'll talk about that more next week, but this, in that context, is where Paul is an example to us of humble but trusting in the Lord type of ministry.

All right, so those are just some examples of how we look at Paul. We see a lot of insights into Paul that we may not necessarily see in other of his epistles. Well, in addition to that, a second key characteristic of 2 Corinthians is that, and we've sort of gone over this already in those earlier verses, there is rich theological truth in 2 Corinthians.

Right? In chapter 3, Paul expounds on the new covenant in Christ, right, that we're no longer like Moses in the Old Covenant, in the Old Testament, but now through Christ we have the new covenant, the gospel through Jesus Christ.

And so chapter 3, we read a lot about that. In chapter 5, we read important teaching on what happens when believers die. We talked about that. To be away from the body is to be present with the Lord, as well as on the doctrine of reconciliation.

[30 : 45] And that was my favorite verse, right, is in chapter 5, verse 21. He concludes, Paul concludes chapter 5, as I mentioned earlier, with verse 21.

This is what John MacArthur says about 2 Corinthians 5, 21. Right? For our sake he made him who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

John MacArthur says this. He says this verse, chapter 5, verse 21, he describes it as the 15 Greek words, Mark, 15 Greek words, Greek, because Mark is in a class right now learning Greek.

The 15 Greek words of chapter 5, verse 21, it provides the most concise yet profound summary of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in Scripture.

Ah, that's high praise for a single verse, right? Provides the most concise yet profound summary of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in Scripture.

[31 : 54] Deep, rich theological truth in 2 Corinthians. Alright, so we learn, we see insights into Paul's life. We see rich theological truth as we study 2 Corinthians.

But thirdly, there's also a lot of practical aspects that we also see of living the Christian life in 2 Corinthians as well. And again, just as a brief summary, because I do need to move on, but chapter 6 addresses the principle of separating from unbelievers, like the unequally yoked, right?

So how do you deal, like in a business situation, in a personal relationship situation, what do I do if I, you know, I'm a guy and I'm interested in a girl, but she's a non-believer?

Is there guidance? Is there counsel for that? Yeah, yeah. Chapter 6, 2 Corinthians. In a business relationship, how do you handle business relationships? You know, you want to work with another company, or you want to maybe subcontract some work out to a different company.

How do you handle that when there's an unequally yoked situation there? What do you do? The counsel is provided in chapter 6. I mentioned earlier chapters 8 and 9 gives the most detailed teaching on giving in all the New Testament.

[33 : 11] Whenever I'm asked, hey, Greg, so what's the Bible teach about giving? Are we still under the tide? Are we in our New Testament giving, grace giving? What do we do now versus maybe what we read in the Old Testament?

Go to chapters 8 and 9 in 2 Corinthians, and Paul gives great illustrations, great counsel, great instruction, principles around grace giving.

Chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 11 gives instruction on how to distinguish true servants of God from false teachers. Again, the context is false teachers have infiltrated the church at Corinth when Paul left, and so now he's instructing the church how to distinguish between true believers and false teachers.

You see that. We see that in chapter 11. Chapter 12, Paul reveals how God uses suffering in the lives of his children. And in chapters 12 and 13, we see several important elements of the sanctification process.

Right? Progressive sanctification. Lots of references, lots of teaching there in chapters 12 and 13. All right? So that's a little bit of a 50,000 foot overview.

[34 : 28] If you were to embark on a formal study of 2 Corinthians, hopefully you're a little bit more equipped, right, in knowing some of the key characteristics of 2 Corinthians. And it's important to us to understand this, again, as we dive into some of the verse-by-verse teaching that we will do.

All right. Have I given you enough time to get to 2 Corinthians now? Right? Are you there in chapter 1? All right. So I'm going to read 2 Corinthians 1. Actually, I'll get some water. All right.

By the way, this is not a... I'm not doing a gotcha. Jeff and I have no plans to start a study on 2 Corinthians. You know, a Bible study. We may.

I don't know. But there's no intentionality here. This is just something that the Lord has put on my mind for months now to study and preach. 2 Corinthians. So read along with me.

I'm going to read the first 11 verses in chapter 1 of 2 Corinthians. We're going to spend only time in verses 3, 4, and 5 this morning. All right. So you're sitting there thinking, uh-oh, that was a long introduction, Greg.

[35 : 38] Are you almost done? Well, that was all, again, that was all introductory material. So we're... Hey, I'm here next week. Right? So I have the... You have the relief that there's an opportunity for part two.

Right? So... And I knew that. And so we'll dig into verses just 3, 4, and 5 this morning. But I do want to read, again, to give us context, verses 1 through 11 of 2 Corinthians.

So follow along with me. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the church of God that is at Corinth, and with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia, 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 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.

For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation, and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

[37 : 13] Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. 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 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, as we look at this section of Scripture, we see the main topic here is affliction and suffering and God's comfort, right?

[38 : 24] So, if you look at verses 3 through 7, real quick, just, and this is why you need your Bible, right? How many times does Paul use the term comfort? Just in those, what, those five verses, verses 3 through 7 that I just read.

It felt like every other word was the word comfort. Right? I counted, at least in the ESV, I counted 10 times in those five verses that Paul uses the word comfort.

Right? If Paul, who is inspired by God to write this and the word comfort is repeated 10 times, we should take note, right?

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. You know, it's a reality, I think it's a reality that we all suffer and that we are all afflicted at least to one degree or another in the various stages of our lives, whether it be failing health, whether it be catastrophes or strategy, I mean, catastrophes or tragedies, you know, what's fresh on our mind, you know, the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, right?

And what's happening in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. But those aren't the only places that are seeing devastation, but certainly those are the ones that are geographically close to us.

[39 : 40] There are folks who are suffering lives that were lost, earthly possessions that were lost. We also may struggle with marriage struggles and issues and challenges, family struggles, issues at work, issues with our neighbors.

Maybe we're being falsely accused, whether it be at home or at work or at school. Perhaps we're being mocked or insulted or perhaps we're just being dismissed by family or friends or colleagues by your living for Jesus.

Right? The holidays are coming up. Right? So we have Thanksgiving and Christmas coming up. And I know, just having a relationship with many of you, that sometimes holidays aren't the most encouraging times because you have family members who don't know the Lord and you don't know whether to say something or not or perhaps religion and politics is just off the table.

Right? So do you live for Christ boldly, openly? Do you be sensitive concerning the context? I say all that just to mention that we all suffer, we're all afflicted in one degree or another.

But as believers, don't we groan for the day when it'll all be made right? Right? In Romans 8, Paul writes in verse 23, in that section, Romans 8, 23, he writes, and not only the creation, in verse 22, Paul writes about how creation groans, right, for the coming of the Lord.

[41 : 21] And in verse 23, Paul writes, and not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we, that means we're the believers, we groan inwardly as we eagerly await for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

And when Paul writes about the bodies, he's not just thinking about the glorification of our physical bodies, but also when all of man's remaining sinfulness and fallenness will be swept away.

Right? We groan for when all things will be made right. But until that day, we suffer. And we are afflicted. And it does seem that affliction, suffering, that try and trials, that those are instruments that God uses in His hands to continually reveal in us our ultimate dependence on Him and our ultimate hope in Him despite our circumstances.

Isn't that right? When you're going through a trial, an affliction, either you're reminded or I hope that you have a brother and sister in Christ that's reminded that our hope is in Christ, that our dependence is on the Lord.

Right? Those seem to be just instruments that God uses. Right? To bring us into remembrance. And isn't it true that often, sometimes in our lives in these situations that we find that God will take something away, an idol, some crutch or other dependency, something earthly, something temporary, that God will take something away in order to help us trust in Him and Him alone?

[43 : 13] and sometimes it may feel just like we've received just in Paul's words that he writes in verse 9, it feels like in some of those trials and afflictions that we've received a death sentence.

And it's hard. It's hard. It's hard. Afflictions and sufferings and trials. Well, what do we do or what should we do as believers in those times?

Especially when we have afflictions or trials that are tough, that we're in a season where it's a fight. What should we do? Well, we depend on God and we rely on and we trust on and we cling to what we know about Him through His all-sufficient Word.

Right? When we're under affliction, where do we go to? What do we, what can we look at that's true and sure? God's Word.

We go to what we know, right? Not what we think, not what we feel, not what we're experiencing. We have to put our anchor in God's Word and we do that during these trials and afflictions.

[44 : 31] And so, let's dig in verses 3, 4, and 5 because we see comfort so many times. Let's see a little bit more what Paul says about this comfort that we are provided in the midst of those trials and those afflictions.

Alright? So, verse 3. Verse 3 says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What do you read in verse 3? That He is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

Right? He's the source. This is not, you don't need a theological degree here, a seminary degree for you to understand this. Right? This is a pretty straightforward teaching of Paul. Right? He, God, is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

He is the source of mercy and comfort. There's nothing else outside of Him that can provide the comfort that you need in your time of affliction. Well, we see Paul's own heartfelt celebration of God's mercy and God's comfort right here at the outset.

[45 : 45] We've read verses 8 through 10 a couple of times now. We see where Paul shares of the affliction that he had. Right? Verse 9, the affliction that we experienced. You were unaware, brothers.

Right? But they were so utterly burdened to the point of death. Right? But wait a minute. But Paul's writing up in verse 3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But God of mercy is the Father of all comfort.

So we see that Paul is reflecting his celebration. Thank you, Lord, for being a provider and a protector and a comforter. But turn over to chapter 7 real quick for me.

Turn over just a couple of pages to the right. I want to see another place where Paul is celebrating God being his comforter. in chapter 7 verses 5-7.

Let me read that and I'll give you a little bit of an explanation as to what is happening in this particular account. So Paul writes again, chapter 7 verse 5-7.

[46 : 53] Verses 5-7. Verse 6-7.

So Paul is recounting, hey, God was a comfort to me and he used Titus, one of his colleagues, to do that.

So over the next couple of weeks, I mean, over the next week, Lord willing, next week, I'm going to plan to take a little bit more time, again, fleshing out the context of the comings and goings of Paul and of Titus.

But to understand these three verses, 5, 6, and 7, I do need to give you a little bit more insight into what's happening here so that you understand how was it that Titus was such a comfort to Paul, God using Titus to comfort Paul.

Alright, so during his third missionary journey, and I've got a map here, so I'm going to show you, I'm going to blow up the part that's in the rectangle.

[48 : 19] This is a map of Asia Minor and Macedonia and over on the right is Palestine, but I'm going to blow up the part that's in the rectangle so you can see a little bit better for what's going on in this context of chapter 5.

Okay? And so I circle some of the key cities, right? We have Ephesus over there in Asia Minor, and we have Troas just up north of that, still in Asia Minor, and then we have Macedonia and Corinth over here on the west.

Alright, so during Paul's third missionary journey, during his third missionary journey, Paul had ministered in Ephesus for three and a half years. That was sort of his mainstay in the third missionary journey.

Paul had departed Ephesus for Troas where he had hoped to meet up with Titus. And why did he do that? That's because Paul had earlier written a strongly worded letter.

It's referred to as the severe letter. And it's non-canonical. It's not, we don't record, that's not recorded in Scripture, but it's referenced in a few different places in 2 Corinthians.

[49 : 29] So Paul writes this severe, strong-worded letter and he sent it to Corinth with Titus. So Paul and Titus are in Ephesus. He writes this very strong-worded letter and he sends Titus to Corinth with that letter.

This letter, we believe it's written between when he wrote 1 Corinthians and definitely before he wrote 2 Corinthians. Okay? Again, Scripture doesn't record this letter, but in Scripture Paul refers to this letter that he wrote.

So Titus now goes west of Corinth to deliver this letter to the church. And it's strongly worded. Right? What's Paul? What did we learn about Paul earlier?

He's a shepherd. He loves his flock, but he wants to protect his flock. Right? And so, put yourself in Paul's shoes for just a moment. Right? You write a blistering letter to the church because the church is getting into nonsense.

Right? They're allowing these false teachers in. We'll even learn next week or in the weeks or months to come. Right? That there are people who were in that church that became under the influence of these false teachers and they were insulting Paul.

[50 : 42] Right? So Paul is working with all these different feelings and emotions. This beloved church that he loves that he's founded and then these wolves have come in and turning the church against him.

Right? And so he writes a strongly worded letter to the church in Corinth and he sends Titus out there. So, in chapter 2, in 2 Corinthians, in chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, Paul writes, so this is how we know sort of what's going on.

Paul writes that although there was not, oh, so let me back up. So, Titus goes to Corinth, so Paul finishes up in Ephesus and so he travels to Troas hoping that Titus will deliver the letter, will see how the church responds, and then he's going to meet up with Titus in Troas.

Right? There's no email, there's no texting, there's no phone calls, right? Right? It takes months and the scale here of this map, you know, these are long distances of traveling.

And so, Paul is up in Troas and this is what he writes in chapter 2 of 2 Corinthians. He writes, although there was a door opened for me in the Lord for ministry in Troas, he writes that his spirit was not at rest due to his concern and anxiety in waiting for Titus.

[52 : 09] Again, that gives us some insight into Paul. You think Paul is strong, steady, trusting, a bulwark. God has been faithful to Paul at every turn.

But we're right. We don't have to guess to make this. He says that right there in Scripture in chapter 2 that a door was opened for me in the Lord but my spirit was not at rest due to the concern that he had in waiting for Titus.

So, he was eager to hear back from Titus. So, he's at Troas. How many of you are easily distracted or when life's pressures get on you, right? You can't focus, you can't think straight.

Well, this is, I think, we see a little bit of insight into Paul, maybe doesn't, I don't want to talk bad about Paul, right? But it could be that because of his love and his passion and his concern for his church that he really wants to know if the church received the letter and the instruction or if they rejected the letter.

And so, he's waiting, he's eagerly waiting for Titus to return to Troas. Well, Scripture tells us that being restless, Paul departed Troas and he went up to Macedonia, probably up there to Philippi.

[53 : 21] See Philippi up there in the north? So, this Macedonia, Greece area. So, he travels and that's the solid red line on this map. So, he got tired of waiting for Titus to Troas and so, I guess they had, this is speculation, but how did Titus know to go through Macedonia?

Maybe he and Paul sort of worked that out that that route, they didn't go across the water but they took this route that you see on the map. So, Paul, eager, went to Macedonia and now he's waiting for Titus.

He wants to get to Titus as quickly as he can. And this is the context, right? So, in verse 5 that I just read, right, in chapter 7, for when we came into Macedonia, alright, so this is where we are now in the narrative of this.

Paul writes, even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest but we were afflicted at every turn, fighting without, alright, so fighting outside of us, right, false teachers, Jews, you know, on Paul's heels, being rejected, being afflicted, but he also says and fear within.

You know what that fear within very likely is? The fear that this church has rejected Paul's letter, his instruction, and his counsel. Verse 6, But Paul, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.

[54 : 52] So we read that, yes, they did finally connect somewhere in Macedonia, Titus and Paul. And he writes, not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you.

So the church of Corinth comforted Titus. Yes, the church was receptive to the letter that Paul wrote. As he told us, of your longing, even your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoice still more.

And then, let me continue reading just a couple of verses just to fill out this context. In verse 8, Paul writes, For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it.

Though I did regret it, for I see that the letter grieved you, though only for a little while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting.

For you felt a godly grief so that you suffered no loss through us. You see, isn't that wonderful that in God's sovereign plan and sovereign will that he inspired Paul to write this and we get to witness and experience this interaction.

[56 : 09] Paul, again, going back to chapter 1, Paul sees God as the God of all comfort, the Father of all mercies. And even here in chapter 7, he's saying, God comforted me.

What's it say? But God who comforts the downcast, he comforted us but by the coming of Titus. So that was God's doing. But he used Titus.

Now why do I accentuate that? Hold on, because you know maybe where I'm going with that, right? Alright, so out of the gate, back to chapter 1.

Back to chapter 1, verse 3. We see that God is the source of comfort and of mercy. When we're afflicted and stressed and anxious, what do we need to know?

We need to know what Paul proclaims, that God is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. When we're afflicted, stressed, and anxious, where do we run?

[57 : 11] We need to run where Paul runs, to the Father of mercies and to the God of all comfort. That's verse 3. Alright.

I'm eager to move on to verses 4 and 5, but my time is up. Alright. This is exciting, y'all. I hope in some, I've got so much more to say, but I ran out of time.

But we'll pick it up there next week. If there's one or two things you can take away from this morning, right, just know. We'll talk more about afflictions, and we'll talk more about suffering and trials, but just camp out on verse 3.

Camp out that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, right, He is the God of mercy, and He is the Father of all comfort. Is that right?

The Father of mercies. I got that backward. Same thing, same thing though, right? That He's the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. words. Next week, I'm going to share with you, I looked up the word all, hey Mark, I looked up the word all in Greek, and guess what all means in English?

[58 : 19] All. Everything. It means everything. Let me share this with you. I'm going to, I got to, let me share this with you, right? I got to find it in my notes. Get this, here are all the different synonyms for all.

Ah, where is it? I can't find it. You'll have to wait until next week. But yeah, all. Where is it? There it is. There it is. No, I found it.

So get this. So the Greek root word for all, get this, here's the different ways in which our Bible translations may use this. All, any, every, the whole, W-H-O-L-E, always, anyone, everyone, every way, whatsoever, whosoever, right?

All the different ways in which that Greek root word is used throughout Scripture. All means all. So if you haven't already, underline your Bible, right? God is the God of all comfort, no matter our circumstance.

Let me pray. So Father, we thank you. Lord, we thank you for your truth. Father, I thank you for this church, Lord. I thank you for my brothers and sisters who have prayed for me these past few weeks as I prepare for this morning.

[59 : 29] Father, I pray that I have just gotten myself out of the way, Lord, that I have proclaimed your word. Lord, your word is so majestic. It's so wonderful.

Father, we thank you that you have revealed your word to us. And it's a word that we can know. It's a word that we can trust. It's a word that we can get to know you through. Now, Father, this morning, I know we have some families and some individuals here.

I've got dear brothers and sisters in Christ who are going through various trials and afflictions of various things, Lord. And I pray this morning for them that, Lord, they would just trust knowing that you are the source of all comfort and that you are the source of mercy and love and grace, Father.

So thank you for our time together. Thank you for your word. Thank you how your word changes our lives. Father, may we exercise the spiritual discipline of spending time in your word.

Lord, I pray that for our church family here this morning, Lord, that you would convict, that you would exhort, Father, that you would even rebuke maybe where we've been lazy, maybe where we've been distracted with idols in our lives, and that we have not given you due a priority in our life, Father.

[60 : 56] So would today perhaps be the day, Father, where we take a sober look at that, Lord, and that you would help us, that you would exhort us, that you would lead us to treat you as our King, and as our Lord, and as our Father.

Lord, we love you. We thank you, Father. Thank you for this time together. Thank you for this sweet assembly of brothers and sisters in Christ who have submitted themselves, Lord, to your word, Lord.

I pray that your word has not returned void, but Father, that it works in the hearts of the saints that are here today. Thank you, Father, in Christ's name, amen.