

Small Group Materials: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Pray for your time together in God's Word!

Leaders Note: The word for comfort appears ten times in this passage (nine times in English translations¹.) It can be translated as "comfort" or as "strengthen" or "encourage." It is the same word that is used to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14:16 & 26 and John 15:26. The idea expressed by the word we translate "comfort" includes all these nuances.

Ask the Group: In the passage we will read in just a few moments, the word that the NIV translates "comfort" has also been translated "strength" or "encouragement." What comes to mind when you hear the words "strength," "comfort," or "encouragement"?

Leaders' Note: This question is designed to get discussion started; there are no right or wrong answers, but possible answers include: chicken soup, weight lifting, down comforter...

Read passage out loud as a group. Option: Give the group 5 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

This Week's Passage

Scripture Reference

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

New International Version (NIV--2011)

Praise to the God of All Comfort

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

¹ *The implied use of 'comfort' in English is in the end of v.4 (this is just here in case you have an overzealous student who has to know.)*

Discussion

Ask the Group: What about this passage stood out to you?

Leaders' Note: This question gives your group the opportunity to explore their own ideas before leading them to specific discussion. Caution: Do not let this turn into a debate about personal understandings—keep it more on the “observation” level.

Ask the Group: In verse 3 Paul tells us that God is “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.” This tells us that all other sources of strength, encouragement, or comfort are false. What are some of the things that we may be tempted to seek comfort in rather than seeking it in God?

Possible Answers: money, career, relationships, alcohol, drugs, being religious...

- Why do we sometimes seek comfort in these things rather than in God?
Possible Answers: They are tangible; they are familiar; and people around us are seeking strength there.
- Why are other so-called sources of comfort not true comfort?
Possible Answers: They enable us to live apart from God; they mask our need for God; they distract us from God.

Ask the Group: In verse 4 Paul tells us that God comforts (strengthens / encourages) us in trials so that we can comfort others. How does this differ from how our culture views being comforted?

Possible Answer: Comfort is seen primarily for our benefit and rarely as a benefit for others.

- Optional: Verse 4 implies that we have an obligation to comfort others – that we need to be stewards of our sufferings. How does this point of view differ from the normal view of suffering?

Possible Answers: Suffering is something to be avoided at all cost. If I am going to suffer, then I better get something out of it [e.g. athlete.]

Ask the Group: Read vs. 5. What difference does it make knowing, understanding, and believing that in our sufferings we identify with Christ?

Possible Answers: It puts our suffering into context/perspective. It highlights the costliness of what Christ did and forces us to wrestle with the weight of it.

Ask the Group: In verse 6 Paul says that both his distress and comfort are for the Corinthians' comfort (strength / encouragement), and that his suffering will produce in them patient endurance as they suffer. How do you think Paul's distress and comfort would accomplish this?

Possible Answers: He served as an example. His suffering was a part of his labor to bring the gospel to the Corinthians [and others].

- How does Paul's attitude toward suffering show that suffering can be redeemed (turned from something bad into something good)?
Possible Answers: It ties Paul's suffering to the good that comes from God's fulfilled purposes, the deepening of our understanding of God's character and compassion. It reminds us of the necessity of our dependence on God; we are able to participate by God's strength in comforting others in the church and it results in God getting glory vv. 3 & 11.

Ask the Group: In verses 8 and 9 Paul tells us that he suffered extreme hardship so that he would rely on God and not on himself. What are some of the things that God has taken you through that may have been for the same purpose?

Leader's Note: This question is designed to allow group members to connect their experiences with those of Paul and to allow them to verbalize negative experiences in a new light. Note some members of your group may be too free in sharing past experiences. Be careful!

Optional: Ask the Group: In verse 10 Paul emphatically states his confidence in God's deliverance – both in the past and the future. How does that confidence empower him to encourage the Corinthians?

Possible Answers: He could speak from personal experience. He can show them that suffering is not forever.

Optional: Ask the Group: In verses 10 and 11 Paul tells us that God delivered him from a “deadly peril” and that God will deliver him again as the Corinthians help him (Paul) by their prayers. He also says that many will give thanks because of the favor granted by God because of prayer. How does knowing that prayer can be of help encourage us?

Possible Answers: Compels us to pray more; assures us that our prayers are meaningful.

Ask the Group: Paul begins this passage with praise to God in verse 1 and ends with encouragement to pray in verse 11. How does that inform our understanding of Paul's discussion on suffering?

Possible Answers: It emphasizes the importance of God in suffering; it points us towards God; it reminds us of our participation in His purposes; it emphasizes the importance of prayer in times of difficulty.

Application

Ask the Group (small or large): How has this week's study changed the way you view comfort, strength, and encouragement?

- How will you depend on God this week?

Ask the Group (small or large): How has this passage affected your view of prayer?

- How will your prayer life change this week?

Optional: Suggest to the Group: During this week, look for ways to pray for comfort, strengthening, or encouragement for others, and come next week prepared to share what God has done.

Suggestion: Send this application question and challenge out through email or The City during the week to encourage your group.