

“The Why of Your Pain” // 2 Corinthians 1:1–11 // *God’s Power in Broken Vessels #1*¹ (Th 8)

Introduction

If you have your Bibles, and I hope you do, open them with me to 4th Corinthians. It’s actually called “2 Corinthians” in your Bibles, but I call it “4th Corinthians” because Paul actually wrote 4 total letters to the Corinthian church--and only 2 of them made it into our Bibles.

The **FIRST letter** was lost. We know about it because in what we call 1 Corinthians, Paul refers to a previous letter he had written to them (in 1 Corinthians 5:9 he references a letter in which he’d given them some general instructions about life and ministry; that lost letter is *technically* FIRST Corinthians.²

Paul then FOLLOWED up that first, lost letter with what we now call 1 Corinthians, so 1st Corinthians in your Bibles is technically second Corinthians. We studied that letter a couple of years ago--it was rather spicy, if you recall, and it forever disabused us of the assumption that life in the early church was perfect--nothing but prayer and revival and Bible studies and touchy-feely kum-ba-yah moments. No, from what we call 1 Corinthians we learn that the Corinthian church was a hot mess: doctrinal problems; massive ego problems among leadership; bigotry and snobbery in the membership; charismatic chaos; some dude in the church was sleeping with his mom--scholars tell us that it was mostly likely his stepmom, but either way, when you ask a girl to the prom that at one point you called “mom,” that’s jacked up, right? But despite those things, God’s grace was genuinely at work in them, and Paul knew that, so he wrote what we call 1st Corinthians to confront those problems--which, again, is technically 2nd Corinthians.

Well, the church at Corinth didn’t really heed the message of 1 Corinthians, so apparently **Paul followed up that letter with “a painful visit”** which he refers to in 2 Cor 2:1; and, after that **Paul wrote the Corinthians a 3rd letter**, a letter he describes in 2 Cor 2:4 as a letter filled “with anguish and tears.”³ This **3rd letter** also was lost, but sometime after Paul wrote it, the Corinthian church came to their senses, repented and sought to reconcile with Paul. **So Paul wrote them a 4th letter**, which is the one open in your laps, which we call “2nd Corinthians.” This all making sense to you? This 4th letter is the one we’re about to study. Paul wrote it to assure them of his love for them and ongoing commitment to them.

¹ Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2024); Gary Millar, *2 Corinthians for You* (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020); Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (London, UK: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Tim Mackie, “[The Book of 2nd Corinthians Summary: A Complete Animated Overview](#)”, November 3, 2016, The Bible Project; Rich Villodas, “2 Corinthians 1:1 - 2:4”, Session 1 of The Book of 2 Corinthians Bible Study, rightnow Media, 2024; Skip Heitzig, “[Expound: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11](#)”, January 4, 2023, Calvary Church; Mark Dever, “The Message of 2 Corinthians: Weakness.”. And others as noted throughout.

² 1 Cor 5:9

³ See also 7:8–9.

Throughout this series I'll refer to this letter as 2 Corinthians, of course, even though it's technically 4th Corinthians--and I wanted you to know about the other two letters, because that will help you better understand what's going on in 2 Corinthians.

(BTW, if I could quickly point out something about biblical authority--not everything Paul said and did was regarded as holy Scripture. Sometimes we assume the Apostles were these perfect, authoritative God-representatives and everything they said and did was right. No, Paul was a sinful, weak man, like the rest of us. And at different points in his life he got things wrong. But there were certain times when he picked up that pen that the Holy Spirit guided his words and sealed them with his own authority. The biblical authority is always located in the writings, never in the men themselves. So, when Paul is talking about biblical authority in 2 Timothy 3:16, he says, "All Scripture" (literally, all "the writings") is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.")

"The writings" are where the authority is. Not in a man--not in the preacher or the pope or even some council--the standard for the church--the only thing with God's absolute authority--is what the Apostles wrote down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The "lost" letters (technically 1st and 3rd Corinthians) apparently weren't written with that authority--I'm sure they had some good stuff in them, but maybe Paul used too many cuss words in them or something because he was so mad--but for whatever reason, God did not put his authority behind them.

This last letter Paul wrote, however, what we call 2 Corinthians, does have that authority. Which is why we're going to study it.)

(Hopefully that wasn't **too much of a nerd moment** to open the message with, but I figured it would help some of you to know all that.)

Paul opens 2 Corinthians talking about something that every single one of us has struggled with--and that is understanding the "why" behind some of the painful, unexpected things in your life.

I have a chronic medical condition many of you don't know about--it actually required surgery 23 years ago and now requires me to get regular check-ups to make sure I don't revert back to my original condition. The condition is called "refractive myopic ametropia," otherwise known as "near-sightedness." Back then I had to constantly wear "eye crutches" to correct it--in the form of glasses or contacts. And so, 23 years ago I underwent invasive surgery to try and fix my eyes. Obviously, I'm being ridiculous, but that surgery was a fairly harrowing experience--the year was 2003 and I saw an advertisement for this new surgery called LASIK--a billboard down on Glenwood Ave advertised that if you purchased LASIK for one eye they'd "throw in the other one for free." Veronica and I were newly married at the time and I was always looking for a good deal so I thought, "I mean, how can I afford NOT to do this? Buy one get one free?" And I was feeling pretty good about it until they strapped me down in that chair and it hit me like a ton of bricks that I'd basically auctioned out my vision to the lowest bidder. Veronica was pregnant with our first child, and as the surgery started I thought, "What if something goes wrong here and I never get to see my kid? What if there's an earthquake while I'm in surgery and the laser thingy jiggles around with burned out eyepits?" So. Many. Questions. But thank God everything worked and I was cured of my myopia.

Many Christians suffer from spiritual myopia, spiritual nearsightedness, and Paul wants to correct that. Meaning, they go through life only able to see a few feet in front of them, without ever really understanding the bigger picture of what God is doing in their lives. So, Paul opens 2 Corinthians by saying that he's come to understand at least *part* of the reason for *some* of his suffering--and understanding that is the key to his peace and joy.

You see, understanding the "why" behind your pain gives you the ability to put up with the what. For example, tell any woman in here that over the next few months she'll add 12 inches to her waistline and feel sick almost every day, she'd be pretty depressed. But tell her that it's because she's pregnant, and that turns it into a tolerable, even if not thoroughly enjoyable, kind of suffering. (Assuming she's young and married and wants to be pregnant. Tell my wife right now that she's pregnant again and you'll get less joy and more panic.)

Victor Frankl, the holocaust and concentration camp survivor, famously said, "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."

So keep that in mind as we read this: 2 Corinthians 1:3, Paul says: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, **4** 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. **5** For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. **6** If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort. **7** Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. **9** 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. **10** 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.

[11] 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.

Let's talk for a minute about how Paul had suffered. He refers in vs 8 to a mission trip in Asia where he'd been beaten, tortured, and imprisoned. He'd had his motives questioned and his reputation tarnished by slander. Maybe most painful for him was that some of the churches he'd planted started to doubt him--ironically, they actually turned some of the sacrifices Paul had made on their behalf against him.

You see, throughout his ministry, Paul remained poor.

- He chose not to raise his salary by donations, even though he was entitled to that. Instead, he supported himself by means of a side job of manual labor--tent making. And he did that, he said, because Jesus had made clear to him that he was in such a special position that no one should ever be able to accuse him of trying to profiteer off the church, so instead of raising money by donation, he'd support himself. And thus, Paul remained poor even though he had every right, he said, to take a decent salary from the churches he served.

- Furthermore, Paul was not a particularly impressive speaker--he makes a few references to that in this letter. People were always excited when "the other guy" was preaching on Sunday instead of Paul. Kind of like when y'all show up here and Bryan is preaching and you're like, 'YES!' That's how they were every week when it wasn't Paul.
- Well, after Paul planted this church in Corinth, the Corinthians had been exposed to some of these wealthier, better dressed, more impressive Christian leaders, and the Corinthians started to think of Paul as JV, like he was the kiddie pool, the starter kit of Christianity--and they'd moved on from him to these more sophisticated Christian leaders. So, basically, they disrespected Paul and questioned his competence.
- And then, some people who were jealous of Paul accused him of outright fraud and corruption.

All this was really painful for Paul, but Paul said, "It's OK, because I now understand the reason God let me go through these things." Again, vs 3: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, **4** 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.⁴

- **Paul repeats the word "comfort" 10 x in these verses.** "I suffered," Paul said, "so I can comfort others with the same "comfort" that I myself received in my suffering.
- "**Comfort**" here is an interesting word in Greek. It's "**paraklesis**"--and our English word comfort is not the best translation of this word. The problem is in English we don't have a good one-word translation for it. The word means to encourage, to exhort, to console, to strengthen, or to call someone alongside to your aid.
 - One scholar says, "For us, "comfort" is a warm and fuzzy word (with a kind of 'there, there, dear, it will be ok' kind of feel) **but in the NT it includes everything from an arm round the shoulder to a kick in the pants.**" I show up and kick you in the rear and you're like, "What are you doing?" And I say, "I'm just trying to comfort you."
 - (Now, I will say, technically, our English word "**comfort**" means "with strength," so there are elements of that original meaning there, but in our language "comfort" now has mostly a warm, tender, "*there, there*" connotation.)
- **The most technical translation of "paraklesis" is "to call alongside"--that's literally what the word means "para" (alongside) "klesis" (to call). It's the word used for the Holy Spirit in John 15--the Holy Spirit is the great paraklete, the great Comforter.** For Paul, comfort was not just entering into someone's pain and sympathizing with it; it was also coming alongside someone to help lead them through it.

Paul said my suffering better enables me to do that for you. So, let's talk about:

- 1. What (specifically) God taught Paul through his pain (vs 9);**
- 2. The redemptive purpose God has for you in your pain (vv 3-4);** and then,
- 3. (When you're the friend of the sufferer): What you can do for other people when they are in pain (vs 11).**

1. What (specifically) God taught Paul through his pain (vs. 9)

⁴ Paul, in his letters, almost always opens up with some kind of prayer to God in which he basically tells you what the letter is going to be about, and that's what he does here, and he makes it crystal clear--this letter is about the reason for suffering and what God is doing in it.

Paul tells us succinctly in vs 9: **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.**

Through the suffering Paul went through in Asia, Paul learned more about his own weakness and the reliability of God's strength.

- **Now, one thing about that that was initially a little confusing to me.** I asked, "Was Paul saying that prior to this suffering he mainly depended on himself and not on Jesus?"
- I mean, that would be an odd claim for Paul to make, because in 1 Corinthians, which was written before Paul had gone through all this suffering he refers to in vs 8, Paul had plenty to say about depending on God rather than himself. In fact, in 1 Corinthians, Paul talked about being weak in himself so that everyone could see that the real power was in God. He even said, 1 Corinthians 2, that God "chooses the weak and foolish things and uses them to confound the mighty so that everyone can see that the excellency of the power is not in particular people but in God."
- So, it sounds to me like Paul already understood the importance of depending on Jesus. So, why is he talking here like he just learned it?

Let me tell you a little secret about the Christian life: God spends a lifetime taking the simple things you know here and making them experienced realities here.

- **You see, it's one thing to sing,** "I trust in God, my Savior, the one who will never fail..." It's another thing to be at a point where you have no hope in yourself, to feel like you're under a sentence of death and your only hope is a God who raises the dead and to have no choice but to put your confidence in him.
- **When I look back on my Christian life,** I realize how quickly I assumed I had learned certain lessons--simple lessons like how to trust in God; what faith and confidence in him looked like--and then God had to take me back through those lessons again and again, and then again and again, each time going deeper and deeper, until I really learned them. And I'm not done yet.
 - **It's like I'm a ship** and I look so pretty sitting there in the harbor thinking, "I'm awesome!" and then God takes me through a hurricane and all these leaking holes get revealed and so God works with me to patch them up and then I think, "Now I'm really awesome," and then God takes me through another storm and I realize I didn't fix all the leaks so we do it again and this process goes on and on.
 - God is taking the simple things I know here and making them experienced realities here.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (which is Book 3 in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or Book 5, depending on how you read them), C.S. Lewis tells this story about Eustace, one of the main characters, who is a young boy who develops an **evil heart** and manifests that by **turning into a dragon**. But he hates being a dragon and wants to go back to being a boy, so Aslan, the Lion, of course, who represents Jesus, leads him to a fountain of pure water to bathe in. When he gets there, Eustace says (and, btw everyone agrees that Lewis here is talking about himself):

The water was as clear as anything and I thought if I could get in there and bathe it would ease the pain. But the lion [Aslan] told me I must first undress.

So I started scratching myself and my scales began coming off all over the place. And then I scratched a little deeper and, instead of just scales coming off here and there, my whole skin started peeling off. It was

beautiful. In a minute or two I just stepped out of the dragon skin. I could see it lying there beside me, looking rather nasty. It was a most lovely feeling. So I started to go down into the well for my bath.

But just as I was going to put my feet into the water I looked down and saw that (the skin on my feet was) all hard and rough and wrinkled and scaly, just as it had been before.

[So Eustace repeats the process of scratching off his own skin a second and third time, but each time it grows back. And Eustace starts to despair].

Then the lion said to me, ‘You will have to let me undress you.’ I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I’ve ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off.

Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off – just as I thought I’d done it myself the other three times, only they hadn’t hurt – and there it was lying on the grass: only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly-looking than the others had been. Then he caught hold of me – I didn’t like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I’d no skin on – and he threw me into the water. It smarted like anything, but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone. And then I saw why. I’d turned back into a boy again.”

What is God doing in your pain? There are a dozen things he might be doing, but one thing he is always doing: He’s tearing that unbelieving, self-reliant, proud skin off of you.

- You know how to talk a big game about trusting in God, but it may not go deep enough yet. So, God takes you through that valley of death again and again and it’s **painful**, but listen... through it God is peeling off the skin of the dragon and turning you “into a boy” again.

Can I tell you a few places he's done that with me?

(1) In Unanswered Questions: Things I can't quite understand. I say, "God, why would you do this **that** way?" Sometimes they are theological questions--questions about suffering or hell or why there are so many obstacles in the way of world evangelization or why he often lets bad people succeed unpunished. Or why, if God loves everyone as much he says he does, why he lets certain things play out a certain way. And there are times I've gotten to the end of my understanding and read all that I know to read and I still don't know what to say. And there, in that valley, I've learned the reality of my favorite Psalm, **Psalm 131:** "O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore." (That's it, btw. That's the whole Psalm. It's a great one to memorize.) That Psalm tells me that God wants me in a place of trust, sure of his heart even when I don't understand his thoughts.

- See, I know that when I finally see him face to face, and I look backwards on my life, I'll say with all the saints, **Rev 15:3:** "*Just and true are your ways, O God, o King of the Nations...*" "*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!*" *How unsearchable were your judgments and how inscrutable were your ways*"--but now I see that in your ways you are true and righteous altogether!
- And until then I can just rest like a contented, trusting child in his mother's arms, unsure of how it all works but confident that if I'm with her, it's all going to be ok. The point is, I had to learn that posture of trust through unanswered questions.

Sometimes I've experienced it (2) through Unfair Accusations: Many of you know I'm not without my critics. And sometimes it just feels unfair. Especially when you try to do something sacrificial for the ministry only to have it turned around and used against you. To be clear, I'm not saying I'm like Paul—I'm a few shipwrecks and a couple imprisonments short of that status—but that's what happened to him.

I'll start with the light-hearted. I have a file of screenshots called "Mean Tweets." **(VID)** This is just a sampling of them. I wanted to save them for posterity so I put them all in a file. (I pulled out a few I thought you'd enjoy **(SPECIFIC ONES)** I laugh about it but that's never fun.

More painful have been times when people close to me questioned me. Maybe you've been there. A friend really lets you down, or questions your motives, or lets you down, or betrays or backstabs you. I've had that happen. And in those moments, I have felt like the Lord has said to me a number of things: First of all, there's some things you need to learn from your critics because sometimes they are right--and, you know, maybe I'm doing all of this because your reputation matters too much to you. Second, where it is unfair, now you know a little bit more of what Jesus felt; and finally, now you can better minister to people who've been lied about or maligned." In that weakness, God taught me more to depend on him, and treasure him.

Sometimes I've experienced this feeling of death **(3) through Unanswered Prayer:** I'm like, "God, I feel like what I'm asking you for is reasonable--why won't you give it?" Listen, **every parent I know** deals with this with their kids in some way, especially if you have a prodigal. "God, we did everything like we were supposed to. I know we weren't perfect, God, but we raised them right. And they walked away." And what makes it worse is you see parents who did half the job you did as parents--or some of them were outright terrible or negligent parents--and their kids turn out great, and you say, "Why, Lord? Why my kids?" I don't know all the answers, and I'd encourage you never to give up, but maybe part of God's

purpose was to teach you how little power you had in yourself, and how much you needed God, and never to give up hoping in God's goodness--never, never, never while you have breath in your lungs and faith in your heart. Never give up trusting in God's goodness and hoping in his mercy.

For some of the young adults in the room, you may have felt this pain in **(4) Unmet Expectations**. You've got good things you've been hoping for, and praying for, and yet you feel like you're further away today than you were years ago. Worse than that, it seems like people who are doing all the wrong things keep getting what you want. And you're sitting there confused, hurt, bitter and maybe even questioning why, if it's the wicked around you who are prospering, why should you keep pursuing what's right?

I could go on and on. **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. (1:9)**

- **Where is it happening to you right now? Where do you feel overwhelmed?** Where do you feel you're under a death sentence?
- Maybe God is at last teaching you to depend on him.
- I've told you, the three most deadly words in the English language: "I got this" and now God's got you at a place where you don't "got this," and he's teaching you to depend on him.

Our friend **Eric Mason** said this recently: **"We often say that God won't give us more than we can handle. (Ever heard that?) That's wrong...** (Mason said). **God DOES give us more than we can handle, precisely so we come to the end of ourselves and cast ourselves on God's mercy.**

So thank God for your problems. Nobody like pain, of course, and you don't have to enjoy it. But God is teaching you something good through it. And when you look backwards over your life, you'll likely see that the most valuable things in life that you learned; the things you want to pass on to your kids or the next generation one day, are the things you learned in unanswered questions, unfair accusations, unanswered prayer and unmet expectations.

- I've always loved the words of **British journalist** Malcolm Muggeridge (and some of you are like, 'Wasn't he a professor at Hogwarts? No, that's a different guy. Malcolm Muggeridge is a British journalist): **"Contrary to what I would have expected, I look back now on experiences that at the time seemed especially devastating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything of value that I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence has been through affliction, not through comfort and ease."**

And that brings me to #2...

2. The redemptive purpose God has for you in your pain (vv 3–4)

Paul said that through his pain God gave him the ability to comfort others in similar pain. Again, look at **vs 3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, **4** 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.

You see, suffering and affliction shows you certain things about God that you can't learn any other way.

None of us experiences all the dimensions of Jesus's faithfulness. The church is supposed to be like a diamond **(PIC)**, and Jesus is like the ray of light, and each person in the church reflects his faithfulness in their own unique way, so that the whole thing, shining together, is an object of dazzling beauty.

Or the church is supposed to be like a symphony where no one instrument conveys the fullness of the sound--it only happens when all the instruments blend together. And maybe you're the cowbell of the church, and you sound weird and one-sided out there clanking on your own, but man when you come together with all the other saints in God's church, it sounds so good. *I got a fever, and the only prescription is more cowbell.*

You see, there are things about Jesus you have learned and experienced in your journey that you will teach to the rest of us.

Some place where you're able to say, "Oh, I know you can trust God there! I've been through that valley and I know God is faithful there. *"I sought the Lord THERE, and he heard and he answered... that's why I trust him, and you can, too! ... Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine. He's been my fourth man in the fire, time after time... This is what the story of my fire is like, and that's why I trust him, that's why I trust in God, MY savior, the one who will never fail..." I know that because he didn't fail me there.*

So, here's my question: **Where have you experienced Jesus' faithfulness in a way that you have a story to tell?**

In fact, look down a couple of verses to **vs 6**. **Paul says,** *"If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort."*

For whom has God written your story, and are you in a place to share it?

- **I love our G4 ministries here at Summit**, which are literally built around these verses. G4 is where people who've walked through some fire—*anxiety, depression, infertility, betrayal, bereavement*—and found that Jesus really meets you in that spot. Then they "come alongside" others in similar situations, offering the comfort as they have been comforted.
- One G4 leader told me just this week--listen to this: *"I went through 4 excruciating years of what I like to call the "furnace of infertility." And I confess: I did not "suffer well." I isolated myself, became bitter, and constantly screamed, "Why me, God!?" I idolized having a baby, and my entire world revolved around it. Four years later, the Holy Spirit kept*

tugging at my heart to use my story to help other women. Through G4, I'm now able to use my experience to love, support, and comfort the women in my group in a personal, first-hand way. Most importantly, I've been able to help point the way through this furnace of suffering. You see, if we know that Jesus threw himself into the ultimate furnace of God's wrath for us, we know he's with us in the smaller, much cooler furnace of infertility, and he's using it to refine us like gold! Praise God that my misery has become my ministry. And I couldn't be more thankful for it."

You see, that's the kind of story you can have from the fiery furnaces you walk through. That's a part of Jesus you will put on display.

- There are parents with prodigals who can minister to other parents in the same situation. When you're broken, you don't want to hear from someone distant from your pain. Faithful parent, God wrote that into your story, in part, so you could testify to others.
- Those who are suffering under despairing health diagnoses need the testimony of those who have walked through similar ones, too--from those who can testify that God is able and willing to heal and others who can testify that his presence and plan is better than healing. Friend, listen: You've got a story to tell.
- Maybe you've been through a divorce; or abandoned by a spouse; you've struggled with an eating disorder; or maybe you lost a child to suicide or drugs. Or maybe you made the tragic mistake of abortion and now you have a message for those who are walking that same bitter path--and you can show them where they can find mercy and healing. You can say, "I've been down that road! I sought the Lord, and heard, and he answered... that's why I trust him, and you can, too!"

6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort.

- Is there someone you feel this way about? My suffering is **for these people**. Paul felt that way about the Corinthians. Who is it for you? Who is the Holy Spirit putting on YOUR heart right now?

Finally...

3. (For the friend of the sufferer) What you can do for other people when they are in pain (vs 11)

[11] 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.

Paul says, "I need you to pray for me." And pray what, exactly? Well, I can tell you when I'm suffering what I usually ask people to pray for: Ask God to make it **STOP!!! Ask him to take the pain away.**"

But that's not the first thing Paul asks for. He does ask God to take away his pain--you'll see that in chapter 12. But the **FIRST** thing he asks the Corinthians to pray for is **that he will persevere in faith**, to learn the lesson, and trust God for his faithfulness.

- You see, pain can serve as a force that pushes you away from God or one that pushes you toward God. Let this table represent God and here I am... Now, imagine a wind--a gale force wind blowing against you. You ever been in gale force wind? **Illus.** (Tornado that touched down near our home...)

- So, imagine pain like a strong wind... (FAN) Is that pain pushing me away from God or toward his arms?
- Listen: Prayer turns the angle of the wind in someone's life so that pain drives them toward Jesus; so that pain moves them to be more trusting and humble and dependent on Jesus rather than more bitter and resentful and independent from him.

So, yes, pray that the suffering will stop, that's fine; but more importantly, pray for the sufferer to have the humility and faith to learn the lesson--to despair of their own weakness and trust in a God who injects resurrection life into dying things in the world. To have the confidence that that's the kind of God he is. **BTW, could we just stop there for a quick second?** Look again at **vs 9**: Paul did not see resurrection power as a one-time thing. Like, that was God's one, big miracle and now he's just sitting back to see how things play out. Paul said, "God took that resurrection power and injected it into MY situation."

The church should be a house of miracles. Miracles in our parenting and our finances and our relationships and in our sicknesses and in our patience and generosity and perseverance. Hope in a God who still raises from the dead. You don't need relief from your problems; you need resurrection in your problems, and that's what God wants to give to you. That's why he brought you to this valley of the shadow of death, so you could know he's the God of new life.

So pray for that sufferer that they'll know, deep in their hearts, and utterly trust in, the goodness of God. I often pray that that friend in pain will know **the truth that David concluded the book of Psalms with** "The Lord is righteous in everything he does; he is filled with kindness. The LORD is close to all who call on him, yes, to all who call on him in truth. He grants the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cries for help and rescues them."⁵

Or the promise God gave to Jacob at his lowest point, Genesis 28:15: 'I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go ... I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

Or the promise I wear around my wrist: **Jeremiah 32:40**, I have made an everlasting covenant with you, and I will never stop doing good to you.

Or the promise Jesus clung to when he was on the cross, Psalm 22:30: "Our children will also serve him. Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord." And I say, "God, may this be true of my kids and the next generation of this church and one day grandkids, too."

Or 100 others...

So, let's end today doing what Paul encourages them to do--to pray. Some of you have problems you need to bring to God; some of you have friends or kids with problems you need to bring to God.

⁵ Psalm 145:17-19

Today as our worship teams come, you are welcome to respond in a number of ways, as they lead, you can remain seated and reflect as our worship team sings over you; or, you could come and kneel at the altar to receive comfort in your time of need; there will be prayer counselors and team members off to the side if you want someone to pray over you; or you can stand and sing and place your trust and hope in God.

The point: As our worship team comes, Let this be a time for ministry from the Holy Spirit. If you feel like you need strength to endure suffering, or you know someone else who does, I'd encourage you to come forward. Let's stand, and come find the help of the Holy Spirit! It's available!