

# The God of Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

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In 1952, Timex created an ad campaign that helped them capture 25% of the watch market. Those ads continued through the 1980s and then cycled back in the 90s. In these commercials, a Timex watch was put through a series of “torture tests”. For instance, one early ad taped a Timex to Mickey Mantle’s bat and showed Mickey smashing a baseball on the face of the watch. Other commercials featured a Timex watch taking on paint mixers, jackhammers, washing machines, sumo wrestlers and an 87 foot dive off the cliffs in Acapulco. After the Timex watch wins the torture test, the slogan appears, **“It takes a licking and keeps on ticking.”**

When I think of the apostle Paul, I think of a Timex watch. **Over the course of his life he continually took licking after licking after licking and he just kept on ticking.** He never gave up. He kept moving forward in the work that God gave Him. In 2 Timothy 4 toward the end of Paul’s earthly life, he testifies,

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7–8 [ESV](#))*

As followers of Jesus, when we read these verses, we think, “I want to be like that! I want to live my life so that when it comes time for me to die, I can say with gladness that I did not quit on God . . . I did not give up on His work and His glory. I want to receive the joy and peace that comes from living my life for Him.”

**Main Idea: The comfort of God provides all that we need to keep us from quitting on God.**

**Before we look to the Principles of Christian ministry taught in chapter 1, I need to lay two doctrinal foundation stones that the readers of 2 Corinthians already possessed.**

**Foundation Stone #1: God gives every follower of Jesus spiritual gifts to strengthen the church and her mission.**

*"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7 [ESV](#))*

**Foundation Stone #2: God calls and commissions every follower of Jesus to fulfill a specific work in His church.**

*14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose." (1 Corinthians 12:14–18 [ESV](#))*

*"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10 [ESV](#))*

**No one is saved who is not set apart for some vital work in Jesus' church.**

Why are so many followers of Jesus not engaged in the ministry of His church?

1. The absence of real spiritual life. No passion for God. No vision for the eternal purposes of God.
2. The love of this world. (Too busy. Too distracted by temporal things. Too low a view of Jesus' church. Too low a view of God.)
3. The paralysis of fear. (I do not know where to begin. I do not know if I could contribute anything important. I think I would fail if I tried any ministry.)
4. The lack of knowledge. (I did not know God gave me gifts and a work to accomplish.)
5. **The discouragement in the work. (Not fun. Too draining. Too discouraging. Too many problems. Too much emotional cost. Not going back to that.)**

**This last category is growing. This is the group that I pray will be strengthened by our study this morning. Let's dig in!!!**

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:1–2 [ESV](#))*

In order to understand Paul’s second letter to the Corinthian church, we really need to understand some **background to Paul’s relationship with the church members in this city.**

Paul and his team help establish the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey around 51 AD. He immediately meets Aquila and his wife Priscilla and he ministers with them for 18 months.

After leaving Corinth, Paul hears about immorality in the church and writes a letter to confront sin (cf. 1 Cor 5:9). We do not have that letter.

Then a bit later around 57 AD, Paul hears of divisions and other troubles so he writes a second letter. This letter is what we know as 1 Corinthians. Paul sends Timothy to minister to this church in person (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10-11).

Paul then receives some news of false apostles entering the church (2 Corinthians 11:13-14).

*And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.” (2 Corinthians 11:12–15 [ESV](#))*

**These false teachers slander Paul and are effective in convincing the members of the church in Corinth that Paul is a bad guy.** So Paul immediately leaves Ephesus and travels to Corinth. He calls this a “painful visit” in 2 Cor. 2:1. He returns to Ephesus with a sad heart because the Corinthian church is still believing the false teachers slander about him.

From Ephesus, Paul writes a letter out of his “anguish of heart” (2:4).

Paul is really troubled over the Corinthian believers until he meets up with Titus and Titus reports that the majority of people in the church had repented of their distrust of Paul and now loved him (7:7).

But Paul knows that a fire of distrust recently doused is likely to catch flame again. So he writes this letter in 58 AD, 2 Corinthians to put the fire out completely. In this letter Paul will defend his apostleship because if the believers

turn away from him as an apostle of Jesus they will turn away from the Gospel that he preached to them. And in this letter he confronts the false apostles directly.

**In all this Paul takes a licking and he keeps on ticking. He never gave up on Gospel ministry to this beloved church.**

## **Principles of Christian Ministry**

### **1. Ministry places us in the path of harm. 1:1-6; 8-9b.**

*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.” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4 [ESV](#)).*

Paul begins with a doxology . . . a statement of praise to God. God is sufficient! But Paul does not hide the pain he experiences as a minister to this church. Notice the words that he uses to describe his experience in ministry . . . specifically ministry to them!

The term “affliction” refers to crushing pressure. **Have you ever had a kind of headache where it seemed like your skull was going to cave in?** That is how Paul describes his pain. If nurse asked Paul, “Describe your pain level on a scale of 1-10.” Paul says, “11”.

Often, 2 Corinthians 1 is applied to general sufferings and trials that we endure: a battle with cancer, a broken marriage, a wayward son or daughter, a financial crisis. For sure, God IS THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT in these trials too. But Paul is not talking about generic suffering here. **Paul is addressing the kind of affliction that a believer experiences when they serve the LORD Jesus in His ministry.**

*“For as **we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings**, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.” (2 Corinthians 1:5 [ESV](#)).*

Think of the sufferings of Jesus with me for a minute. **Because of who He claimed to be**, He was rejected by His own people. **Because of His proclamation of the Gospel**, He was falsely accused by the religious leaders. He was unjustly arrested, put to trial and convicted. He was beaten, spit upon, crowned with thorns, made

to carry a cross through the street, publicly undressed, nails driven through His hands and feet and then crucified.

Paul says, “We share ABUNDANTLY in Christ’s sufferings.” Paul experiences MANY of the sufferings of Jesus in his ministry. He described some of these sufferings in [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](#):

*stripes... prisons... beatings... stonings... shipwrecked... perils of waters... robbers... in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

I thank God that my suffering for Jesus does not yet match Paul’s. I pray that my level of distress never does. I think I can say “As we share in some of Christ’s sufferings . . . enough to feel weak . . . enough to feel anguish . . . enough to feel overwhelmed” but I do not think I can yet say, “We share ABUNDANTLY in Christ’s sufferings.

**But let us grasp this point:**

**Truth: Ministry to Jesus brings the sufferings of Jesus to our doorstep.**

*For we do not want you to be unaware, 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.**” (2 Corinthians 1:8–9 [ESV](#)).*

Paul is not given to exaggeration. The language he uses here brings the picture of an overloaded ship listing in the ocean. Paul believed that he was going to sink!

Keep in mind that Paul’s sufferings and afflictions were not only from unbelievers . . . the pagans who defended their gods or the Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus as Messiah. But his sufferings came from people who claimed to be Christ-followers. In Corinth, Paul’s most difficult hardships came from INSIDERS to the church.

*“All the instruments employed by God in the promotion of his work, have been greatly tried; their labors have been mingled with their tears; and they have not only suffered from their own personal share of human imperfection, but have found in the ignorance, the perverse*

*dispositions, and the unholy practices of others, their sharpest sorrows. They have been grieved by foes, but more injured and vexed by pretended friends.” Jonathan Edwards*

On the basis of 2 Corinthians 1, I have come up with an idea for how we can recruit more of our members to serve in various ministries: **Serve the LORD at Bethany . . . you will suffer like never before!** Catchy? 😊

Seriously, if ministry opens my life to affliction, “Why would I put myself in harm’s way?” I can live out my life without the hassle, without the pressure, without the disappointments, without the abandonments, without the slander, without the isolation that minister to Jesus brings? Why would I do it?

Two reasons stand out: First Jesus is worth it. Second the mission is worth it.

Reason #1: Jesus is worth it. He is life itself. He died in our place. He loves us with an everlasting love. He is worthy of all honor, glory and praise!

Reason #2: The mission is worth it. Jesus’ work is the only work that lasts for all eternity. Jesus’ mission connects us to life’s purpose like nothing else.

Paul knows that we all will be tempted to quit on the work that God has designed for us to accomplish in our lives:

*“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58 [ESV](#))*

*“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9 [ESV](#))*

## **2. Ministry places us in the path of God’s comfort. 1:1-5**

*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.” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4 [ESV](#)).*

**When we face discouragement, we are right to remember who God is and what God does.**

God is the Father of mercies: every mercy we experience finds its origin in Him. There is no mercy apart from Him. Our God is the origin of all forgiveness. Our God is the origin of all power for living. Our God is the origin of all lovingkindness. Our God is the origin of all grace and goodness. He is the FATHER of ALL mercies.

All Christian ministry begins with a reception of God's mercy. We cannot minister for Jesus without first having received FROM Jesus.

**Truth: Our suffering for Christ presents a deeper opportunity to experience His mercies!**

Self-pity is a dark sin. Self-pity isolates us and then devours us. Self-pity justifies any path that we believe will relieve us of our pain. When we experience affliction for doing what is right, we will be tempted to feel sorry for ourselves. And then we will be tempted to walk away from the LORD.

What keeps us from thinking, "Poor me. I do not deserve to be treated this way."

Answer: God's mercies. No matter how much pain and difficulty we may endure, the truth is that our sins deserve much worse! God has already relieved us of the worst kinds of affliction by sending His Son to die for us so that we can receive His mercies! Because of His mercies, we will never experience the painful punishment that our sins merit. As Christ followers, we are always way ahead in the blessing to difficulty ratio!!

To quit ministry to Jesus is to leave the path where mercy is found day by day.

**BUT MORE . . . He is the God of all comfort.**

Paul encourages us to endure hardship in our service to Jesus because God's comfort will always

The word "comfort" clearly is a major subject in these opening verses. Used 10X in vv. 3-7. "Comfort" often connotes a warm hug or a soothing pat on the shoulder. But here comfort means that God provides strength and faith to hope in Him through our hardships. His comfort keeps us from despair. His comfort

keeps us from exhaustion. His comfort provides the rest our souls need to be replenished.

Have you ever run out of gas in your car? It has been a long time, but I have had it happen two times. You feel very foolish. Both times I thought, “Why didn’t I stop at a gas station before this happened?”

Paul is saying, “When we trust in the LORD we will never run out of fuel to live for Him. The road may be bumpy, long and uphill. But God will not abandon you. He will be with you each mile and will supply everything you need to keep moving forward. So when you feel yourself running low, go to HIM! He will fill you with His strength, His encouragement, His help, His hope!!”

**Principle: The LORD’s supply always abounds over our need. As our needs grow, His supply will match it and more.**

*“For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.” (2 Corinthians 1:5 [ESV](#)).*

Paul brings everything back to Jesus. Jesus must be the center if we are to understand our problems!!

**The word abundantly suggests the picture of waves upon the ocean that roll one on top of the other without end. Yes, in this life we can expect the experience of abundant sufferings for Jesus. But through Jesus, we also share ABUNDANTLY in comfort too!**

Timex commercials caused us to ask, “How much can a Timex watch take before it breaks?” The answer from the commercials is, “More than we would expect!” But Paul’s experiences as a minister of Jesus’ church causes us to ask a much more relevant question, *“How much can a servant of Jesus take before he/she breaks?”*

**Answer: God supplies abundantly for what we need so that our pains never outstrip the comfort that keeps us going. God’s comfort always outpaces our afflictions.**



**Application: When you think you are at the end of your endurance, wait upon the LORD. He WILL comfort you. He WILL renew your strength.**

### Principles of Christian Ministry

1. Ministry places us in the path of harm. 1:1-6; 8-9b.
2. Ministry places us in the path of God's comfort. 1:1-5
3. Ministry places us in the path of eternal impact. 1:3-4, 6-7.

*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.” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4 [ESV](#)).*

**God's comfort TO US must never stop WITH US.** God supplies our needs for the purpose of resourcing us **so that we can be His instrument to supply other believers needs.**

In short, instead of affliction being a cause to quit ministry, affliction can be an impetus for ministry. Our afflictions open doors for deeper fruit in others' lives because our afflictions equip us to give others the same comfort that we received from God.

**In this way, our weaknesses become our most significant credentials.** Our weaknesses, not our strengths, build bridges to eternal impact in others' lives.

Paul is giving us a vision to see how our sufferings actually place us in the path of eternal comfort to others.

*6 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. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.” (2 Corinthians 1:6–7 [ESV](#))*

Paul rejoiced that his suffering was not a dead end. His suffering did not just produce difficulty for him and then stop there. No.

First, his suffering caused him to experience more of God's love and power. Second, his suffering caused him to be able to help others to stay on the path of

eternal reward. **His suffering placed him in position to strengthen others who were feeling like quitting on God.**

**Paul is not taking credit for any good impact.** He KNOWS that he is simply passing on the comfort that God gave to him. But Paul is taking joy in being God's instrument to bring this spiritual nourishment to others.

**Question: What suffering would you endure if you KNEW for certain that it would bring eternal blessing to your children?** Most would say, "Almost any measure of suffering. I would die to secure that." God promises here that our suffering WILL have that kind of IMPACT UPON OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST.

**TRUTH: Our patient endurance through afflictions brings God's strength to others whom we love.**

**Application: Begin serving Jesus if you have not. Persevere in serving Jesus if you have.**

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3. Ministry places us in the path of eternal impact. 1:3-4, 6-7.

### **4. Ministry places us in the path of joyful deliverance. 1:8-10**

*For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction 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. **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.**" (2 Corinthians 1:8–10 [ESV](#))*

Affliction brings fear to our hearts. Affliction whispers, "You are lost. You are broken. You will not survive me." Paul says, "Christian, fix your eyes upon Jesus' death and resurrection. When you think of the empty tomb, know that you will be delivered too! God will not let evil have the last word upon your life. He will rescue you!!!"

**Throughout my life, my greatest joys flow from the deliverances of God in the midst of my troubles.**

I think of physical deliverances from cancers or from anaphalactic shock when I was 20.

I think of emotional deliverances from the despair of a break-up with a girlfriend.

I think of violence deliverances from a man in the Chicago subway who threatened to stab me or from a huge bully at school who promised to beat me to a pulp.

I think of ministry deliverances from two families who wanted me to be dismissed from youth ministry in the church in Texas.

I think of deliverances from fears that pushed me from wanting to teach God's Word.

I think of church family deliverances from the apostacy and sins of some friends.

Here is what I know: God has delivered me so many times from so many troubles!! My life would be boring without His deliverances.

I thank God for every deliverance of God. This is not to say that I would want to go through the sufferings again, but it is encouraging as we go through afflictions to remember that **ministry places us in the path of joyful deliverance.**

Ministry provides us a front row seat to the power of God in delivering His people from harm!!

**Application: Set your hope that Jesus WILL deliver you. Verse 10**

### **Principles of Christian Ministry**

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**5. Ministry places us in the path of divine intervention. 1:11**

*"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."(2 Corinthians 1:11 [ESV](#))*

I love this verse on so many levels!

I love Paul's vulnerability. "You must help us by prayer!" We need you to pray for us or we will perish!

I love Paul's worship. "So that many will give thanks" for the answers to your prayers for us! Pray for us so that God will receive the glory!

I love Paul's faith. "For the blessing granted us through the prayers of many." Your prayers for us are not words spoken in the wind. Your prayers are heard by the Creator of the worlds. He will answer with blessing to us! Your prayers bring God's mercies upon us!! Your prayers make a difference in our every day life." This is not the only time that Paul urges for ministry to be bathed in prayer:

*"[Pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel" (Ephesians 6:19).*

*"For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance" (Philippians 1:19).*

*"Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ" (Colossians 4:3).*

*"Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored" (2 Thessalonians 3:1).*

**Application: Let us pray for those engaged in Jesus' ministry.** Make a list of five people who are serving Jesus in ministry. Church staff, elders, Bible teachers, greeters, women's ministry, deacons/deaconesses, evangelists, prayer team members, counselors, missionaries, etc . . . five people and pray for them each day this week. Would you do that?

Ministry is never a one-way street. Christian ministry is community. We cannot fulfill the work that God has given us without others in the church. We need each other!

Conclusion: Gospel. Father of mercies.

**Main Idea: The comfort of God provides all that we need to keep us from quitting on God.**