

*Abundant*  
**Grace**

HELP FOR TOUGH TIMES

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## The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

Alex Bauman, editor

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# Preface

God's grace flows to us not in trickles but in torrents. It is free, superabundant, and refreshing. It lifts our spirits when they droop and strengthens our hands when they tire. It keeps our faith firm when doubts assail us and keeps our hope bright when trials afflict us. The same grace that availed to save us from our sins avails to guard our steps and escort us safely to Heaven. No problem can overwhelm us if we rely upon the grace that surrounds us, and no task can exasperate us if God's grace equips us.

Second Corinthians brims with grace. The word *grace* surfaces as early as the second verse of the epistle, stamps its imprint on the last verse of the epistle, and forms a backfrop for everything in between. This should not surprise us. After all, the apostle Paul, the human writer of 2 Corinthians, was personally acquainted with God's grace. He had been Christianity's most dangerous opponent, but grace transformed him into its most dedicated proponent. In 2 Corinthians he defended the gospel of grace against false teachers who preached *another gospel* (11:4), testified that even in the severest circumstances God's grace was sufficient for him (12:9), and assured the Corinthians that God was able to make all grace abound toward them for the performance of every good work (9:8).

As you study this course, realize that God's grace is just as sufficient for you as it was for Paul!



# Comfort in Uncomfortable Trials

## Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 1:1–11

## Theme

God’s gracious comfort makes it possible to respond to trials with peace and confidence.

## Memory Verses

*“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4).*

## GETTING STARTED

Most text messages are practical. We use them to tell our spouse to stop by the store to get bread, to let a friend know we have arrived at a restaurant, or to ask if dinner is ready—even though we are in the same house. But occasionally, we will send or receive a text that communicates or touches our hearts. Sometimes to build us up, and other times to wake us up.

1. When was the last time you sent or received a text message that was personal rather than practical?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Was the text the kind that comforts or confronts?

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians as a personal letter meant both to comfort and confront the church at Corinth. He spoke of God's abundant grace, sharing his testimony of experiencing God's enabling strength in trials.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Corinth was the least Greek of all the Greek cities in Paul's day. Furthermore, the city fell inside the boundaries of the Roman Empire, but it reflected Roman culture far less than other major Roman cities. Italians, Greeks, Jews, and others of the Mediterranean world populated the city. Slaves made up about seventy-five percent of the population. The other twenty-five percent enjoyed so much wealth that they caused the city to be characterized as a wealthy city.

Corinth's location made it an important city. Corinth was located on an isthmus, a narrow piece of land that connected northern and southern Greece and separated the Gulf of Corinth from the Saronic Gulf. In Paul's day, ships were unloaded at one gulf and then wheeled to the other gulf, where they were reloaded. The effort saved sailors from the long, dangerous trip by sea around Achaia (southern Greece). Under Nero (AD 67) workers unsuccessfully attempted to cut a canal through the rock. In 1893 the canal was finally dug.

Corinthians worshipped Aphrodite, the goddess of sensual pleasure and self-indulgence. The religion, with its hundreds of sacred prostitutes, debased the city's residents. The rest of the Roman world readily recognized Corinth for their immorality. When describing a person with loose, immoral conduct, the rest of the Roman world simply said the person lived like a Corinthian.

Paul invaded the debased city of Corinth with the gospel of Christ. His invasion led to a successful church plant. Not surprisingly, the Corinthian church desperately needed Paul's instructions and God's grace.

When Paul wrote letters to the churches he started on his missionary journeys, he opened with a greeting. Second Corinthians is no exception.

### Personal Greetings

Certain members of the Corinthian church opposed Paul, believing he was not truly an apostle. Appropriately, he mentioned his apostolic credentials in the first words of 2 Corinthians.



3. Read 2 Corinthians 1:1. To what did Paul attribute his apostleship?

Paul's election through God's will gave him his authority. No man in his right mind would have chosen the kind of life Paul lived. He was exposed to physical danger, hardship, insult, abuse, persecution, loneliness, anxiety, conflict, and fear. Paul was an apostle because God had willed it. Thus Paul opened 2 Corinthians with a strong affirmation of his apostolic authority.

Paul was writing to *the church of God*. Since God was its ruler, the members of the Corinthian church were not free to make decisions according to their likes and dislikes. They were required to submit their decisions to God's will.

Paul also addressed this letter to *all the saints*. In other words, Paul was writing this letter to believers. A saint is a born-again person who is set apart to the Lord.

Paul wished the Corinthian believers grace and peace. Grace is what God gives, and peace is what we receive. Grace is the divine favor God showers on us; peace is the inner rest that grace makes possible. Both grace and peace come *from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ (1:2)*.

4. Why do you value grace? Peace?

Paul's opening statements painted a brief but grand backdrop of the blessedness of God. Paul did not do so haphazardly. He intentionally emphasized God's blessedness because he was about to launch into a discussion on trials and suffering.

## **The God Who Helps**

Despite all his adversities, including those caused by some Corinthians who refused to accept him as an apostle, Paul offered praise to God. *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, he wrote in verse 3. The word translated *blessed* comes from two Greek words meaning *to speak and well*, thus *to speak well of*. The word is always addressed to God.

5. What two reasons did Paul give in verse 3 for speaking a good word for God?

Paul referred to God as the *Father of mercies*. This expression reflects the theology of Psalm 103:13: *As a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him*. He is the fountainhead from which all mercies flow. A Jewish prayer pleads, *O Father, merciful Father, ever compassionate, have mercy upon us*. Paul's hymn of praise views God in a similar manner. On the other hand, God is the *God of all comfort*.

6. What is significant about God's being the God of all comfort?

God is the source and the author of encouragement. We are accustomed to think of the Holy Spirit as the comforter, but the Father also performs this ministry. *All* emphasizes the completeness and adequacy of God's comfort for any need that arises.

7. How has a trial given you a deeper appreciation of God's comfort?

## **Reason for Suffering: Opportunity to Help Others**

We live in a fallen world with sin-cursed bodies. Suffering is unavoidable. Yet suffering is not without purpose. God allows us to suffer for several reasons. How we respond to suffering is of utmost importance.

8. Read 1 Corinthians 1:4. Why does God allow believers to suffer?

We should seek to encourage others who are going through any trials, but those who have gone through trials similar to ours are often the ones

to whom we can offer the greatest encouragement and blessing.

9. What sufferings have you experienced that now provide an opportunity for you to minister to others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Describe a time when someone helped you through a trial by sharing how God helped him or her through a similar trial.

### **Reason for Suffering: Comfort from Christ**

Verse 5 is a somewhat difficult verse to interpret. What did Paul mean by *the sufferings of Christ [which] abound in us*? It is likely he was referring to sufferings that Christians endure because they identify with Christ. Christians in Paul's day, and many since, suffered because of persecution. Paul, in the context of this chapter, went on to speak of the persecution he suffered for the cause of Christ.

11. Read 2 Corinthians 1:5. What is the correlation between suffering and Christ's comfort?

Suffering for Christ results in an overflowing of consolation from Christ. Apart from Christ, suffering leads to despair. With Christ at our side, suffering leads to encouragement.

### **Reason for Suffering: Example for Others**

12. Read 2 Corinthians 1:6, 7. Who did Paul say would benefit from his suffering?

In verses 6 and 7 Paul related his afflictions and encouragement to the Corinthians' spiritual welfare. *Whether we be afflicted* could mean *when we are afflicted*. It was not a matter of probability but of actuality. Paul was continually afflicted. Second Corinthians 6:4 and 5 make this clear, and 11:23–28 expands the matter even further. Paul suffered his afflictions while taking the gospel to the Corinthians.

God encouraged Paul in his trials so the Corinthians would have an example of God's gracious comfort. The Corinthians could look at Paul's life and know that God's grace is sufficient to meet their needs as they suffered for Him. Thus Paul regarded his experiences as beneficial to the Corinthians. He was confident that they would partake of both his sufferings and his encouragement and would, therefore, endure.

### **Reason for Suffering: Reliance on God**

In verses 8–10 Paul related to the Corinthians a severe trial he had recently endured. It seems the full details of this incident had not yet reached Corinth. He informed them of what had happened to him.

13. Read 2 Corinthians 1:8. How did Paul describe the degree to which he suffered?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
14. Describe the role Paul's own strength played in helping him get through this trouble.

Apparently the trial had occurred in Asia. Some commentators suggest that it was the riot of Demetrius (Acts 19:23ff.). Some commentators believe a nearly fatal illness beset Paul in Asia. Still others think it was a period of persecution not mentioned in Acts. Whatever it was, Paul was *pressed out of measure, above strength*. Sometimes we feel like this too. Our trials seem more than we can bear. It is at times like this when we need to draw closer to the God of all comfort.

In Paul's case the trial was a major crisis. He *despaired even of life*. He

bore *the sentence of death*. Humanly speaking, his situation was utterly hopeless.

15. Read 2 Corinthians 1:9. Why might Paul have been tempted to trust in self to get him through his trouble?

16. What does society say a person should do when facing trouble?

Back in Asia Paul had learned that he could not trust in himself *but in God which raiseth the dead* (1:9). God had allowed Paul to experience trouble and trials that far exceeded what Paul could handle on his own so Paul would rely completely on God.

17. What situation has taught you to rely completely on God?

### **Reason for Suffering: Prayer and Thanksgiving**

The final reason God allows trials to come our way is seen in verse 11. Trials cause prayer, which results in thanksgiving. When Paul was going through this time of danger and suffering, the Corinthians were praying for him. Prayer does make a difference.

The last part of verse 11 seems more complicated than it really is. The idea is that many people in Corinth had prayed for Paul. Those praying people were God's gift to him. Because their prayers had been answered, many would give thanks to God.

18. Describe a time in your life when you prayed especially fervently.

God answered the Corinthians' prayers on Paul's behalf and delivered him from a potentially devastating crisis.

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

19. Select one person who is undergoing a difficult trial. What actions will you take in the coming week to comfort that person?

20. As you consider a trial you are facing, meditate on the following Scripture passages and ask God to supply you with His abounding grace so you might face your trials with peace and confidence.

Psalm 23:4

Psalm 71:19–21

Psalm 119:49–52, 76

John 14:27

Philippians 4:6, 7

1 Peter 5:7