

HIGHLANDS CHURCH

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# God of All Comfort

Full Transcript

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*Duration: 37:56*

## Understanding 2 Corinthians: Context and Purpose

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- 0:31 We just took about nine to ten months studying Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church. This is a church, if you remember, in Acts chapter 18 where he founded. People have come to faith in Christ. He planted a church here. We know that this church, just like every church, just like our church, had all kinds of issues. And so the letter that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians was dealing with some of those issues.
- 1:00 Bible commentators will actually tell you there were probably four letters that Paul wrote, and the Lord has graciously given us two of those. So one of those was 1 Corinthians, and now we have a second letter, 2 Corinthians. From the time he wrote that first book to now, some people have come into the church. They have been maligning the character of Paul, questioning his apostleship, saying some terrible things about him. Word's gotten back to Paul. He's made a visit there. It was a painful visit, he says, and now he is writing them the second letter in response. If you've been around Highlands Church for a long time, you know we go verse by verse through the Bible.
- 1:43 We are not going to take months and months to go through this book, however, because a lot of Paul's writing in this epistle is basically defending his apostleship, and we believe the apostleship. Paul, we know that he is called by God, a servant of God, an apostle of God. We believe his words are true, so we're good, Paul.

## The Main Message: God's Comfort for Our Fears

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- 2:06 Not that those passages are unimportant, they're inspired, true words of God to us, but we're just not going to take the time because we can vouch for Paul's character. But what we will be doing is taking five weeks to look at some of the themes that maybe would relate directly to us here at Highlands, and so today we're going to talk about God's comfort, we'll talk about what it means to be a light in the world for Christ, an ambassador for Jesus, we'll talk about generosity towards kingdom ministry, and then we will end our time in chapter 12 talking about in our human weakness, that's God's opportunity to show his strength of who he is.
- 2:49 So those will be the five weeks that we will be spending in 2 Corinthians. Come back if you're new. Hope you'll join us. And Highlands Church. Family, I'm sure you're excited for what the Lord is going to do. Let's open our time in prayer as we start our letter here this morning.
- 3:06 And Lord, we do give this to you. We give you our time, our thoughts, our hearts, would ask that you would use your word to cut us to the quick, that you would bring conviction, you would bring comfort. Thank you for what we're going to see, not only in the apostle Paul and the affliction of your faith, but also just in the camaraderie that he had with this fellowship and his heart and love that they had for this church and their love for him. Would you just make that true of us, we pray in Christ's name, amen.

## God of All Comfort: The Foundation of Hope

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- 3:47 Does anything scare you? Are you afraid? If you could identify one thing that just stops you in your tracks, just take you to the ground, is there something like that in your life? No. I don't know about you, but I'm one of those guys who just, I love, this is terrible, I love to scare people. I remember when my kids were little, I'd hide, like all parents, right, hide behind the hallway. They come down the hallway, I jump out, they hit the deck, I'm laughing, they're crying. I hate being scared, it's the worst thing ever, but man, I love dishing it out. I love to watch people just get scared to death, you know, I'm one of those YouTube junkies who watches those scare videos, right?
- 4:36 I just think it's so funny. It's kind of sick, huh? Sorry. I'm looking forward to chapter 12 when God takes my weakness and makes it better, so we're all in process. But what frightens you? Now, I know as Christians, we're supposed to say, well, nothing, I just fear the Lord, but we're also human.
- 5:00 Are there things in your life that have just rocked your world? Or have devastated you, or maybe you're afraid of, even at this time?
- 5:11 Have you gone through things that challenged your hope in the Lord? Some of you might be in that moment right now where you might be facing a sentence of death. You are in despair. You're at life's end. You're like, there's nothing left for me to figure this out. I'm out of hope. There's a dead end. There is no way out of myself. I'm out of my circumstances.
- 5:40 Maybe you're there emotionally in a relationship like that. If you've ever despaired life itself, or you just didn't want to go on anymore, you can take some comfort in that because the Apostle Paul actually is going to say near the end of our time today that he was like that.
- 6:00 He despaired of life itself. So there's probably something that each of us could identify. And if you're thinking, well, I'm not sure, let me help you. I made up a list of phobias. I looked up what are the top 100 phobias that people face. Can I give a couple to you? We'll see if these hit home with you. First word, arachnophobia. Know what that is? Fear of spiders. By the way, four times as many women than men are afraid of spiders.
- 6:42 Didn't know that. Okay. So, second phobia, ophidiophobia. Ophidiophobia. Honestly, how many have ever heard of that word in your life? Yeah, I didn't think so. What is it? Fear of snakes. Why did it have to be snakes?
- 7:05 Quoting Indiana. Third, acrophobia. Fear of heights. Five percent of the population has a fear of heights. Did you know that? Next one, agoraphobia.
- 7:26 Know what that is? Fear of open spaces. Yeah, there are some people just do not want to go outside. You don't like being in large crowds. Okay. Here's one for you.
- 7:38 I think I have this. Trypanophobia. Any doctors or nurses in the room? What's this one?

7:49 It is fear of needles. Some of you just got lighted up. up. You're just lightheaded just thinking about that. I can see it in your eyes.

8:00 Okay. Alectrophobia. Fear of chickens. If you have the fear of, got to give a dad joke, right? If you have a fear of chickens, you are chicken. Maybe it's this thing that just freaks you out, right? They're going to peck your shoelaces to death. I don't know.

8:29 Okay. Now, the last one, I got to be honest, I've spent half an hour working on my message in about six hours trying to pronounce this word. So here we go.

8:40 Hippopotomonstrosesquipedaliophobia You can guess it is the fear of long words. There you go. We're all afraid of something sometime, right? But can I give you our message of hope for today? Here's our main idea. Our main idea is this, that God comforts us in our fears so that we can comfort others and have hope no matter the circumstances. So it's one thing to read those words. I'm praying that as you walk out of here, you believe those words.

9:19

**2 Corinthians 1:4**

*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.*

10:01 Getting the idea there? God's comfort is good enough for whatever it is that we're in. in. God's comfort is good enough for what we're going through. I had wished I'd put a verse up on the screen, so I'm going to encourage you to write it down. Let me give you this verse to look up, 2 Thessalonians 2, 16 and 17. Go ahead and write that down. 2 Thessalonians 2, 16 and 17. And in those two verses, the apostle Paul basically says that God gives us eternal comfort through the grace of Christ. And he also is able to comfort our hearts in our present circumstances. So that covers it all.

## Understanding Affliction and Its Weight

10:43 Either in this life or the next, in our present circumstances or in all eternity, God gives us his comfort. Incredible passage of scripture there. So we have a God of all comfort, and he comforts us in our affliction. Says that God comforts us. That word is parable. Paraklesis. And it's more than just we feel better. It's more than God is just soothing us, giving us sympathy. It's the same word, comes from the word in John chapter 14, when Jesus is getting ready to tell his disciples he's going to leave at some point. And when he leaves, he's going to send the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit he calls the comforter, the paraclete. So not only is it an idea of soothing.

11:35 And sympathy. But it's a sense of being with. Walking alongside. Strengthening. So when we're going through those times of affliction and suffering and pain, God not only is with us to soothe us, but he's there to give us his strength and his peace to get to the other side. And that's what Paul is saying there. And he says we have a God who is a Father of all mercies. The word mercy over 260 times in the Bible. Over 260 times. That's who he is. He's a God of mercy. Psalm 103 verse 8, and it's all throughout the Psalms, it says the Lord is merciful and gracious. You can see that phrase repeated throughout the Psalm

book.

<sup>12:23</sup> Ephesians 2 tells us that God is, I love this, rich in mercy. He's rich in what? Mercy. He's never going to run out. Isn't that amazing? And then we get to Lamentations 3, and a lot of us have committed that verse to memory, but it says God's mercies never come to an end. They are new every single morning. So we have a God of mercy. He's the Father of mercies. He's the God of all comfort. He's there to sympathize with us, to strengthen us in our affliction.

<sup>13:02</sup> That's this idea of being pressed. You know, in the middle. Ages, in the medieval times, they had this torture by death. It was called pressing, where they would lie somebody down on the ground. They put a piece of wood on them, and one by one they would start to pile rocks on top of somebody. I used to teach the play *The Crucible*, and there's a gentleman in that story called Giles Corey, and he was executed that way. One by one, they'd pile rocks, and eventually the weight of the rocks would press against you. And it would just, you couldn't breathe anymore. Do you feel that affliction? Have you had that sense in your life where you got this weight on your chest, and you just can't seem to get it off?

## Suffering as Ministry: Comforting Others

<sup>13:49</sup> Shortness of breath. You just feel tighter and tighter, and you just feel trapped, and it's almost like you're in a straitjacket. It says God is able to comfort us in that affliction. See, it's not only an external pressure, but it's also the effect. It's this internal pressure that we feel. That's affliction. So, that's our first point. In the middle of all that, we have a God of all comfort. No matter what we're going through, that's the God that we have. Our second reminder is that we have and will face affliction and suffering, but

<sup>14:26</sup> It can become a ministry for us. What we're going through now, at some point, is an opportunity to minister to other people. We get a glimpse of that with the purpose statement in the second half of verse 4, that we have a God who comforts us in our affliction. Here it is, so that, there's that purpose statement.

<sup>14:47</sup> This might be one purpose or one reason why we go through suffering here, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort by which we ourselves are comforted by God. In verse 5, for we share abundantly in Christ's suffering. And also, through Christ's comfort, we share abundantly in his comfort, too. I love that. Paul basically gives you this word that's, it's kind of like a balance sheet. So, it's just like we have all this affliction and suffering over here, an abundance of this, God's got it covered, because on this side of the balance sheet, he's the God of all comfort.

<sup>15:27</sup>

### **2 Corinthians 1:5**

*For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.*

## Job's Steadfastness: An Old Testament Example

16:11

**2 Corinthians 1:6**

*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.*

16:55 So not only did he suffer for Christ, but Christ is with him in his suffering. You know, if you were to think of who in the history of humanity has gone through the greatest amount of suffering, if you know your Bible, you probably would have to say it's the person of Job. Right? Job in the Old Testament lost his home. He lost his riches. He lost his entire family except for his wife, who only added to his problems as she continued to ask him to. To question the God that he chose to praise in the midst of it all. But James says this about Job, and I love it. James chapter 5 verse 11, he says, Behold, we consider those blessed who remain steadfast.

17:50

**James 5:11**

*Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

## Community as Comfort: The Role of God's People

18:15 An amazing character in the Old Testament, and that's what Paul is going to be saying here as well.

18:23 Have you had people come alongside of you? Maybe in your darkest moments? You might have been going through something that people didn't even know about. You chose to keep it close to your vest. Don't want to let people in. It's too personal, too private. But somehow your body language or something, people just got a sense that maybe something's up.

18:46 And so they just are a friend to you. Maybe they didn't say a whole lot. Maybe they just sat with you. And just through their presence, you felt a sense of comfort. And then you come to find out later, they were able to read you. Because they have gone through the same type of thing.

19:08 You see, God doesn't waste our pain. We've said that before. God can use our pain for his glory. You might be going through something right now and you're thinking, I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy. Could be a job situation, could be a family relationship issue. Some of you might actually be facing the sentence of death. Maybe it's a diagnosis.

19:37 You are at a dead end. But God is the Father of mercy. God is the God of all comfort. And not only can he be there with you, but he can sustain you through it. And Paul's going to give an example from his own life.

20:00 And at some point, maybe down the road, right now it's too raw. But there may come an opportunity at some point down the road as you heal. That God may use you in the life of somebody else as a comforter. Because you've been there and you know what that's like.

20:21 That's the kind of God we have. And that's the kind of church that these Corinthians are. I love what it says here. Look at the end of verse 6. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort. And if we are comforted, it is for your comfort. When you patiently endure the same suffering, we suffer.

## Global Persecution and Shared Suffering

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20:43 There's a sharing in suffering here. Do you see that? As Paul suffers, they suffer. As Paul's afflicted, they're experiencing that affliction. As Paul is comforted, they see what God is doing in Paul's life. And that gives them patience to endure. They've got this interconnectedness as a church body with the Apostle Paul that's just beautiful.

21:11 I had an opportunity this last week. I was in Florida at a conference. And I got to see and hear this in action.

21:21 I was at a conference and one day there were these testimonies of people who were going through persecution.

21:31 So you've got the stories of those who are persecuted, experiencing affliction. And yet in the same room, there are people who are their legal advocates walking with them hand in hand, defending them before the courts. So you've got those who are suffering and persecuted and those who are with them in the trenches.

21:53 I mean, there are so many things I could share with you. But I remember just a couple of the instances, you know, whether it's a pastor's door being sealed shut in 2018 and facing a jail sentence if he were to open them up.

22:10 Or somebody on social media getting 20 years to life because he proclaimed Jesus as Lord. What stood out to me the most was the story of one young man for witnessing for Jesus Christ got arrested for blasphemy. Blasphemy! Because he believed that Jesus Christ is God.

22:32 And the charge for blasphemy in this nation is public execution by hanging. And that's coming. So these advocates are stepping into these trenches and they're coming to fight for this guy. They're praying for him. They're trying to work their way through the court system to represent him and overturn these laws. They're so barbaric.

22:56 But he's not alone. There are 500 people in this room who see it as their sole mission to stand up for believers in Christ as brothers and sisters, as legal representatives, and to share in the suffering that these people all around the globe are going through. And not only is that happening overseas, but we're starting to get a taste of that here in the U.S. Now, not to that extreme. Could it come? Maybe. We're blessed in this country. No matter how bad you think it is here, we're blessed.

## Hope Through God's Power: Unshaken Confidence

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23:29 But we're seeing things go to the Supreme Court where Christians are being taken to court just over the right to say something or believe something. We had a couple people share their story. One woman's case has been heard by the Supreme Court. One's case has been heard. has been heard. One's case is being brought after January. And this young girl, probably about 24 years old, said, you know, I don't know if the courts are going to decide in my favor,

23:58 But I know one thing. My faith will not waver. Isn't that good? I have a God of all comfort who's with me in my affliction. And I have brothers and sisters around me who are sharing in this battle with me. What a wonderful story. What a wonderful story.

24:22 We can be that for each other. We can be that for each other. You're not alone, Christian. You don't need to be alone.

## The Power of Prayer in Our Afflictions

24:32

### 2 Corinthians 1:7

*Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.*

25:01 Isn't that a great sentence? It's unshaken. There's nothing that can happen that's going to shake or rattle our faith. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you also share in our comfort. For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia.

25:23

### 2 Corinthians 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. 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.*

25:51 It was rough. Look at verse 8. We experienced this in Asia, which is now what we would call modern - day Turkey. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength. You been there? That we despaired of life itself. The word despair is there's no way out. End of the line. He says we're toast. We're done. We had received the sentence of death. Okay, this is it.

26:28 God's going to end our ministry. I guess this is how we're going out. We're sentenced to death.

26:38 But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. That could be another reason for suffering, by the way, to help us not rely on ourselves, but to rely on God for coming through it. But even if Paul were to face death, he knew that he had a God who conquered death. So that's a beautiful thing here.

- 27:02 He delivered us from such deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set, here it is, our hope that he will deliver us again. That's so good. We have hope. You know, an umbrella doesn't stop the rain. But what does it do? It protects you from getting soaked.
- 27:28 God isn't going to necessarily stop the storms that come into our life, but he is our God. He is our refuge. He is our protection in the middle of those storms. Have you heard the story of a man who's walking by a Little League game? I love Little League games.
- 27:44 There's such a purity of it, such a joy in it, no matter how bad it is, right? You always get a snow cone at the end. That's the best part. But this man's walking by the dugout, and he sees a little boy sitting there all by himself. Everybody else is out in the field, and he says, Hey, what's
- 28:06 The score? It was 18 to nothing. We're losing. Oh, wow. What inning is it? It's the first inning.
- 28:16 And he says, Aren't you discouraged? He goes, Nah, we haven't batted yet. Isn't that great? Isn't that great? I've given up hope. We haven't gotten our turn yet. He says, No matter the circumstances, no matter the deadly peril before us, we have a God who's all powerful. We have a God who's conquered even the grave. We have hope.

## Four Reflective Questions for Personal Application

28:45

### 2 Corinthians 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.*

- 29:11 Yes, we have a God who's with us and can get us through it. But it looks like here, the means by which God is getting us through is by the prayer of his people. The power of prayer to get us through. You know, the song we sang earlier talked about the prison doors being released. That was a reference to Acts chapter 12. Do you know that story where Peter is in prison? And it says at the beginning of Acts chapter 12 that the church is earnestly praying for his release. And sure enough, God sends an angel, doors fly open, Peter gets out of there. Peter's release from prison was through the prayers of the church on his behalf.
- 29:55 So if we are going through suffering and prayer is an incredible opportunity to strengthen people. Boy, there have been times in our family's life where we chose not to share.
- 30:10 Thinking it was too private. Didn't know if we should. We realized on the back end, I wish we had asked people to pray. I wish we had invited people in. Right? The effectual prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much. Well, we don't want to bother. Well, what it was, was really a sense of pride on our behalf, right?
- 30:39 Not only did we rob people of a ministry opportunity, but we didn't see the blessing of God through his people to work through prayer in that situation. Can I encourage you, beloved? Pray for each other. Share your requests with one another. I was up this morning, I'm looking at the app. Did you know on your

Highlands app, we have a prayer tab where you can go into that app and see the prayer requests of the people in our church family? And you can pray for people all the time. It's right there at your fingertips. Just the power of prayer. And there are a lot of people going through it, man. I got to tell you, just like all of you,

31:20 There's an opportunity to pray for each other. Well, let's reflect a little bit on

31:28 Just our time together. I'm going to ask you four questions. Number one, what are you facing? What are you facing?

## Call to Faith and Community Invitation

31:45 No suffering, no affliction is too small or too great. We have a God of all comfort.

31:57 Doesn't matter what we're going through. Yeah, but my diagnosis... We have a God of all comfort. We have a Father of mercies. What are you facing? Do you know him? That's our second question. Who is your God? Who is your God? Do you have a relationship with the God of the Bible through the person of his Son, Jesus Christ? We would never admit it, but is your God you?

32:28 Are you trying to do it on your own? Your own strength? Your own emotional stamina? Your own physical ability?

32:40 We are limited, but our God is unlimited. Our God is all -knowing. Our God is all -powerful. Do you know that God?

32:53 Have you given your heart to Jesus Christ and become a child of that God? Who is your God? Number three, who's your community? Do you have one? Do you have that little small circle? You got that close - knit group of people that you just share life with? I hope you do.

33:15 But I encourage you, look around. We got a big family. This is your community too.

33:25 So as you look around and you see faces, we are for you. We are with you. We want to pray with you. We want to encourage you. We can minister to one another. I also see a lot of empty chairs down here. We may have some people who used to be here, but now they're not.

33:44 When people drop out of community, that's generally a sign that things are not going well. Get plugged in. We would love to connect you into community. We were made for relationship. You don't need to go through it alone, whatever it is. And then finally, how's your hope? Is your hope steadfast?

34:11 Is it strong? Is it anchored in the person of Jesus Christ? How is your hope? And is he your hope? Let me pray. We love you, Lord. Thanks again for your word. Thank you for the encouragement of the Apostle Paul.

34:32 Lord, he was a man called to suffer for the sake of the gospel. And while we have brothers and sisters all around the world

- 34:41 Paying with their lives for their faith, Lord, we know in Nigeria alone, 35 Christians a day are killed just for believing in Jesus.
- 34:56 Lord, thank you that in the midst of the pain, the affliction, the suffering, the persecution,
- 35:06 That you are not only coming alongside and providing comfort and sympathy, but you're also strengthening and encouraging. And thank you, Father, that you do that, not only through the presence of your Spirit, but through the community that we see around us even now.
- 35:25 Lord, would you be a special source of comfort even in this moment for those who need to hear a special word from you, and that's still a small voice, that you've got them.

## Understanding 2 Corinthians: Context and Purpose

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- 35:38 That you've got them. You are worthy of our praise. You are worthy of our trust. And as Paul began this, blessed be God, we want to end our time as well. We praise you for who you are, for what you allow to come into our lives, because those are just opportunities to realize how good you are. So thank you for that. In Christ's name, amen. Amen. I love the line in that song near the end. We have a God who freed hearts.
- 36:15 It's a beautiful line. We have a God who sent his only son to live a perfect life, to die on a cross and to suffer in our place, but then come back to life, so we would not need to fear the consequences of sin or anything in this life.
- 36:41 Do you need God to free you of that, to free you from your sin, to free your heart of fear? We encourage you to put your faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world who is alive today and is wanting a relationship with you. If you've done that and you're a believer in Christ and you're just going through it, Paul told us at the end of that passage, we need to pray for each other. We have a care team down here. That's their ministry.
- 37:17 We want to be a family to you. We want to pray with you and for you. So we would invite you to come as well. Just let their ministry be a blessing to you. So make your way down after service as well.
- 37:32 Service isn't over until you love somebody. So on the way out, shake a hand, give a hug, and have a great week. Thanks for coming.