

**Down but Not Out**  
**2 Corinthians 1:4b-7**  
**Part 4**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of a handful of German Theologians to stand up to the Nazification of the German church. He was prominent in writing the famous Barmen Declaration, which rejected the infamous Aryan clauses imposed by Nazi ideology. Bonhoeffer went so far as to found an underground seminary in Finkenwald, Bavaria, which was closed by Gestapo chief Heinrich Himmler. This led to Bonhoeffer's joining the resistance movement and his being imprisoned by the Gestapo in April 1943.

While he was in prison he wrote numerous letters to his fiancée, Maria Von Wedemeyer, one of which included a poem he had written and entitled "New Year 1945."

Let me now read for you a small part of that poem and this is what it said,

**Should it be ours to drain the cup of grieving**  
**Even to the dregs of pain**  
**At Thy command, we will not falter**  
**Thankfully receiving all that is given**  
**By Thy loving hand**

Now let me ask you a question. Does this sound like a man who, in the midst of his trials, had turned to God for comfort? Absolutely! Dietrich Bonhoeffer certainly could have allowed himself to slip into a state of hopelessness. But he didn't. Why? He did not slip into a state of hopelessness because he had turned to God for His comfort and had received it.

So what happened? Was Dietrich Bonhoeffer delivered from his imprisonment? And what is the answer? The answer is yes. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was delivered from his imprisonment through death.

Just three months after writing the words of the poem that I read you this morning, just as the war was ending, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hung in Flossenburg prison.

But this was not the end of the story. Eighteen years later a woman who had just lost her fiancé in a sledding accident read the poem that Dietrich Bonhoeffer had written to his fiancée and was comforted. She then after being comforted by the poem sent it to the parents of her deceased fiancé who also found comfort in that same poem. This ultimately led the father of her deceased fiancé, Joseph Bayly, to write his own book of poems that he entitled “Heaven.”

Then a most interesting thing happened. Eighteen years after the publication of the book of poems entitled “Heaven,” Joseph Bayly, the author of the book, encountered a pastor friend who related to him that he had visited a terminally ill woman in a Boston hospital for some period of time and had given her his book of poems that was entitled “Heaven” in an attempt to provide her comfort. The pastor said that the dying woman had stayed awake late the previous night to read it and told him of the comfort and help she had received from it. A few hours later she died. The woman’s name was Maria Von Wedemeyer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s fiancée three decades earlier.

God’s comfort is meant to circulate from person to person just as we saw it circulating from person to person in the story I just related to you. God’s comfort is not to be hoarded but shared.

And this thought brings us back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to **2 Corinthians 1:3-11**. In this passage we have been seeking to answer three different questions. Where should we look for comfort? Can we be assured of finding it? If we find it, what are we do with it once we have it? So far we have answered the first and second questions.

So, what was the first question? The first question was where should we look for comfort? And what was the answer to this question? We should look to God for comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3). Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 1:3**. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”** This is where we should look for comfort, not to ourselves, not to others, but to God just as

Dietrich Bonhoeffer looked to God for His comfort during his imprisonment.

And this led us to the second question. Can we, if we go to God for comfort, be assured that we will find it no matter how many or difficult our trials?

And what was the answer? No matter how many or how difficult our trials, if we would look to God for comfort we will always find it (2 Corinthians 1:4a, 8-11). How do we know this? Let me read for you the very first part of **2 Corinthians 1:4. Who comforts us in all our affliction.**” Not in most of our afflictions, but in all of our afflictions no matter how severe those afflictions might be.

And if there was any doubt about this Paul provided an example of how God had comforted he and Timothy while in Asia in **2 Corinthians 1:8-11** when they had been burdened excessively beyond their strength, which was the passage of Scripture that we considered two weeks ago.

So, will God comfort us no matter how many or how severe our trials if we would simply with humility come to Him for help in the time our need? Absolutely! This is what Paul and Timothy discovered. This is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer discovered and this is what we will discover as well if we would do the same thing. But we are not yet done with our study of **2 Corinthians 1:3-11**. There is still a third and final question that needs to be answered.

And what is this third and final question? Once God has provided us with comfort, what are we to do with it?

In order to answer this question let me read for you **2 Corinthians 1:4-7**. **“Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (5) For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. (6) But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; (7) and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.”**

So, what are we to do with the comfort that God provides us when we turn to Him in the time of our need? When God has provided us with His comfort, we have the privilege as well as the responsibility to channel that comfort to others (2 Corinthians 1:4).

And where do we see this in the passage we read? We see it in **verse 4**. Let me read it for you one more time. **“Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”**

So, how did Paul and Timothy view the comfort that God had supplied them? Paul and Timothy viewed the comfort that God had supplied them as a stewardship, or in other words as something that needed to be passed along. And this is how we should view the comfort that God has supplied to us and is continuing to supply to us. It is not to be hoarded but passed along.

Isn't this what Dietrich Bonhoeffer did? He was comforted by God while he was in prison and what did he do with that comfort? He passed it along to his fiancée in the context of a poem that was later published and became a source of comfort for many others.

The comfort that God gives us when we turn to Him in the time of our need has been given to us not only to strengthen us, but also to strengthen others.

So, if God has in fact comforted you, let me ask you this question. Are you, in light of the comfort you have personally received from God, presently aware of anyone, especially any brother or sister in Christ, who is presently going through hard times and is struggling to hang on to his or her capsized boat while the waves of difficult circumstances are pounding them? If we do know of such an individual or individuals then it is not only our privilege but also our responsibility to reach out to them and to try help them, or in other words to pass along to them the comfort that we ourselves have been comforted by God.

And what might this look like? It will have a thousand different faces. It might be a kind word, a gentle touch, a listening ear, or willingness to give ourselves up in an attempt to lessen the load that is pressing down upon them. The comfort that we have received from God might come to us in one way and go out from us in a different way. But that is okay!

But can the comfort that God has provided us actually be passed to someone who may be going through an entirely different trial? Absolutely! Let us once again go back to the verse. **“Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in [What?] any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”** In other words, if God has comforted you in one set of circumstances, do not be afraid to reach out to someone else who may be in an entirely different set of circumstances.

Whether our circumstances line up with their circumstances is not what is most important. What is most important is that we, in having received God’s comfort, purpose ourselves to pass along that comfort as best as we can to the person whom, we believe, is in need of it.

But even though this is true, that every person that has been comforted by God can and should pass that comfort along to those who are in any affliction, this does not mean that everyone is as equally well-equipped to pass along God’s comfort. What do I mean by this? Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 1:5. “For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”** So, what is this verse telling us?

No matter how great the sufferings a Christian is called upon to endure, they are matched, and more than matched, by the comfort which God bestows (2 Corinthians 1:5).

And because of this, some Christians will be better equipped to share God’s comfort than other Christians just simply because they have far more of it.

These Christians are a gift to any congregation. Unfortunately, in order for them to have such an abundance of comfort, they also had to have an abundance of suffering. Paul and Timothy were two such people.

And how had they come about to have such an overflowing abundant supply of God’s comfort according to Paul in **verse 5**? Was it because they had looked to God for help in the midst of family problems and received His comfort? No? Was it because they had looked to God for help in the midst of some serious financial setbacks and received His comfort? No! Was it because of health issues? No? Was it because of a death of a loved one? No!

Then what was it? What caused them to have such an overflowing abundant supply of comfort according to Paul in **verse 5**?

We get a clue when we see how Paul described the sufferings that he and Timothy had endured in **2 Corinthians 1:5**. And how did he describe them? He described them as **“the sufferings of Christ.”** So, what exactly did Paul mean when he referred to their sufferings **“as the sufferings of Christ?”**

Paul saw his life as an extension of Christ’s life, therefore all the sufferings he endured as an extension of Christ’s life were seen by him as the sufferings of Christ. This included all the things that he suffered in seeking to bring the gospel of Christ to an unsaved world, and all the things he suffered in seeking to bring care to those who responded to the gospel of Christ.

Had Paul and Timothy been comforted by God in all their afflictions? Yes! Had Paul and Timothy been comforted by God abundantly in the midst of all their sufferings, which they viewed as the sufferings of Christ? Yes, they had been. In fact, they reeked of God’s comfort.

And what is very important for us to see is that they saw all that they had been given, both in terms of the afflictions and the comfort, as a stewardship from God.

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 1:6**. **“But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.”**

Paul and Timothy understood that both their afflictions as well as their comfort was a stewardship that had been given them for the comfort of the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 1:6).

Look at the very first part of the verse. **“But if we are afflicted, it is for your [What?] comfort and salvation.** So, how did Paul see their afflictions to be a source of comfort and salvation for the Corinthians?

Paul saw their afflictions as a source of comfort and salvation because apart from their willingness to suffer those afflictions, in bringing the gospel to the Corinthians, the Corinthians would have experienced neither.

And how did Paul see their comfort as being a source of comfort for the Corinthians? Paul already explained this. He saw whatever comfort he received from God as a stewardship that needed to be passed.

And why was it so important for Paul to pass the comfort he had received along to the Corinthians according to Paul in **verse 6**? **“Or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.”**

So again, let me ask you the same question. Why was it so important to Paul that he, as a good steward, pass along the comfort that he had received from God? It was not just that they might be comforted, but that in being comforted they might be able to patiently endure the same sufferings, or in other words the “sufferings of Christ,” in the same way as Paul and Timothy had. This is why it was so important for Paul to pass on the comfort that he had received from God to the Corinthians based on **verse 6**.

So, now let me ask you a question. Did the Corinthians necessarily see Paul’s afflictions as well as the comfort that God had supplied him in the same way as Paul did, or as the means by which they might be able to endure the same sufferings, or in other words the suffering of Christ as Paul had?

And what is the answer? Not really! The church at Corinth was a mess. It had recently responded in a positive way to a very severe letter that Paul had just recently written to them, but they were still very messed up and most likely not yet able to take in what Paul was saying about how he saw his afflictions, as well as his comfort, as being so important to their endurance.

But in spite of this, Paul viewed the Corinthian church with unshakeable confidence. Let us now read **2 Corinthians 1:7**. **“And our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.”**

On what basis was Paul able to say these things about the Corinthians? Paul could say that the Corinthians were sharers of his sufferings, as well as sharers of his comfort, based on his firmly grounded hope that they were joined to him in Christ.

Not only is the believer bound to Christ, but he is also bound, in Christ, to every other believer. He cannot act as an isolated individualist, for he is an integral member of an organic whole. So whether or not the Corinthians appreciated all the implications of the afflictions of Paul, or the comfort of Paul, they were, in truth, joined to Paul in Christ, and therefore they were sharers of his afflictions as well as his comfort and would hopefully in time enter into the full understanding and benefit of it.

In our fellowship this morning there are, I am sure, people who feel as if they have been thrown into a very cold, dark stormy sea. And what is our privilege and responsibility toward them? Our privilege, as well as our responsibility toward them, is to extend as best as we can the comfort that God had extended to us. And as we do this not only will they be strengthened, but also we will be strengthened. We as individuals and as a church body will be strengthened and most importantly Christ will be glorified.

May God give us the grace to channel the comfort that God has supplied to us so that others might be comforted, that we might be strengthened and that God might be glorified.