

Where's God When It Hurts?

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Suffering. Like it or not, suffering happens.

It's part of life, that God sends our way.

So, where's God when it hurts?

Is He there? Does He care?

Elderly woman suffered a stroke & was laid up in the hospital struggling for life. Her husband was going blind. Asked how to pray for her: **"Pray that I will have the wisdom not to waste all of this."**

How do we deal with suffering?

We can get frustrated, depressed, or angry.

That's a natural response to pain. *How do WE respond?*

When Paul wrote Cor... persecution had hit church.

As the Gospel spread,
so did persecution.

Paul introduces letter,
addressing suffering.

He wants us to under-stand that God uses suffering
for our good.

Scripture identifies 5 CAUSES OF SUFFERING:

Our suffering may be result of any combo:

1. Physical Problems.
2. Our Sin
3. Sin of Others
4. God Allows Us to Be Tested E.g., Job
5. Our Identification with Christ

We endure same kind of affliction Jesus did:
rejection/ persecution...

Don't lump *all* suffering under 1 cause. [Earthquake; now?]

Don't join Job's friends in jumping on the afflicted.

God has diverse reasons for allowing suffering!

Whatever the cause, God provides comfort, which is useful in encouraging others.

How God uses suffering in our lives:

1. To discipline His children

"Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines"

2. To test us.

"The trying of your faith produces patience"

3. To glorify his name.

Jn. 9—blind man—suffering not result of parental *nor* personal sin; but means of glorifying God.

4. To equip us for ministry to others

2 Cor. 1:4—*"We comfort others with the comfort with which we ourselves have been comforted."*

5. To prevent worse things from happening

Paul's "thorn in the flesh" protects him from being puffed up & proud.

6. To teach us to depend on Him.

When our back's against the wall, with no where to turn, we trust Him.

That's a *significant* purpose as God allows us to go through hard times, but it's *only one* of His purposes.

C. S. Lewis: ***"Suffering is when God speaks to us through a megaphone."***

Thanksgiving for comfort in suffering 1:3-11

COMFORT FROM GOD 1:3-7

Paul praises God for the *comfort* He sends when we need it. 3-4a

"Praise be to the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion & the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles"

GOD COMFORTS US IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY SO WE CAN LEARN TO COMFORT OTHERS.

God's purpose in His comfort 4b-7

We pass comfort we receive to others

4b God *"comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."*

Someone put up a sign:

"Puppies For Sale." Young boy came: "I'd like to buy one!" "Well, son, they're \$25." He was crushed. "I only have \$2. Could I see them?" "Of course. Maybe we can work something out." Boy's eyes danced at sight of 5 balls of fur. "I heard 1 has a bad leg." "Yes, I'm afraid she's crippled for life." "That's the 1 I want. "She'll always have a limp." Smiling, the boy pulled up a pant leg, revealing a brace. "I don't walk good either." Looking at the puppy sympathetically, "I guess she'll need lots of love & help. I sure did. It's not easy being crippled." "Take her," said the man. "I know you'll give her a good home." Boy's experience gave him feeling for the puppy.

Comfort WE receive enables us to pass it on to others.

Christ's comfort flows over into our lives 5a *"The sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives"*

Our comfort flows over into others' lives

5b *“As the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.”*

Our affliction is the source of other's encouragement, deliverance, & patient endurance, in their suffering 6-7

“If we're distressed, it's for your comfort & salvation; if we're comforted, it's for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷ & our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.”

2 phase process:

1. God can comfort us because HE understands OUR suffering.

Jesus suffered as we do.

2. We can comfort others because WE understand their suffering.

We've suffered also

GOD'S DELIVERANCE 8-10 *“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, & he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.”*

When facing death, God's able to deliver us

When we come to the end of *ourselves* & realize our inability to save ourselves, we learn we can trust God to deliver us.

OUR PARTICIPATION IN PRAYER 10b-11 “On him we’ve set our hopes that he’ll continue to deliver us, ¹¹as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”

God responds to our prayer for each other.

**As we pray for each other in times of adversity,
God responds & many praise Him...**

because of our participation in their affliction.

**Our prayer for 1 another produces a united voice
of praise.**

**GOD'S PURPOSES FOR US ARE GOOD,
EVEN IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING!**

This isn't message we preach to *others* when *they* endure hard times! It's fact for **US** to believe, so when we face affliction, our mind can remind US of the truth.

God isn't a cruel torturer, waiting for a chance to get us!

He loves us. He cares.

He's seeking our ultimate good.

How does this work in our life?

Where's God when we're hurting?

One person shared: "3 mos ago. I found out I have cancer. I went through surgery & follow-up treatment I greatly feared. **The Lord has shown me that *He's sufficient*.**"

Marshall & Susan Shelley recount loss of 2 of their 4 children by illness. During those years of pain, Marshall went to the hospital

chapel to pray & wrote a short prayer in a notebook. Months later, someone gave them a magazine article. A mother wrote of her fear about her child's heart surgery. She mentioned going to the chapel and finding a prayer that spoke to her. It was Marshall's prayer for Mandy. The woman wrote, "I don't know these people—Mandy, Marshall & Susan—but they encouraged me." They were stunned!

"Our struggle, expressed only to God, had given courage to someone else."

Often we look at painful experiences of our past & say, "I realize that were it not for the lessons suffering teaches, I wouldn't be the person I am today.

Yet, if I had known where the path would take me,

I would never have gone!"

God chooses the path to make us the person He wants us to become.

Neil Anderson, after passing through 2 dark periods, concludes:

"Never doubt in the darkness what God has revealed in the light..."

I base my life on the hope that morning comes.

No matter how dark the night, morning comes.

It's always darkest just before the dawn. . . .

But when there was nowhere else to turn, morning came!"

"You may be asking, 'What's the point of the dark times?

In the dark times, we learn to respond to the emotional needs of people who have lost hope.

We weep with those who weep.

“Perhaps God brings us to the end of our resources so we can discover the vastness of His.”

***“The God of all comfort comforts us
So we can comfort others with the comfort we have
received from God.”***