



**When Life Beats You Up – Part 3**  
**The Practical Requirements of Comfort**  
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Well, it's great to be in church and to sing songs and fellowship but the world, of course, as Jesus promised would be filled with a lot of trouble for us as Christians. For us as Christians in particular it would be hard. "In this world, you'll have tribulation," Jesus said. And that is a reality. And of course, what God would like to grant his children is comfort in the midst of that. We've been studying that topic for the last two weeks. This is our third installment of a very short series in the first eleven verses of Second Corinthians. And I want you to get as much out of this as you possibly can as we dealt with all the things in the last two messages that are going to necessarily be a part of what it means to be comforted by God. It doesn't mean he's going to remove all of your troubles, but he'll be able to take you through those with strength and resilience and courage and patience. And sometimes he will dismiss the trouble altogether, the temporal trouble we have. But oftentimes it's about getting us to stand up straight. We've been studying the word that's used repeatedly in this passage. "Paraklēsis, which is a compound word "para" is "next to," and "klēsis" from the verb "kaléo," which means "to call," to be called in next to. And it's much like when you're cold and you'll "call in" a blanket to bring you comfort. Or as I often illustrated, if your knee is weak and you need a knee brace, it's called in alongside. That is what we need. The interior soul that you have in the midst of the difficulties of this life, you need to be comforted.

In this last section, the last four verses, verses 8 through 11 of our series, Paul then kicks into a lot of first-person plural pronouns. He uses this section as an autobiographical discussion about his own pain. Now, I've jumped ahead to this each time just to let you know that the Apostle Paul has struggles as well. And he's going to share those struggles and talk about the way God comforted him through all of this. And currently he's still going through this, but he even talks about it in a perfect tense in the sense that it's already accomplished in one sense, because he knows he has a confidence and a hope that God will continue to bring him along and have him bear up through all the trials. There are five things in these last four verses of our series that I want you to make sure you catch. The fundamental ingredients, it's much like cooking a meal. I mean, you might be able to imagine cooking your favorite comfort food, your lasagna or whatever it might be, some casserole. And if you leave out an ingredient or two it can ruin the whole thing. So we need to make sure all five of these ingredients that we see in these four verses are going to be a part of what you do when you are in the midst of a trial and you need God's comfort.

And I'll also say if you're not in the midst of a difficult time right now, it's OK because this sermon in part is directed to you as a source of comfort for other Christians. We live communally here in a sense that we live together in the Christian life and our lives need to be the source of comfort. At least I should say the agency of God's comfort in people's lives. And I want to make sure you're studying this not only for your own comfort but for the comfort you're going to provide to others. So let's dive into these last four verses of our series on comfort. I want to make sure if life's beating you up that you get what you need and what God promises his comfort by doing exactly what Paul does here. Paul tells us, by the way, to follow his example. And he says that repeatedly, we should look to him and others like him to



follow his example. And he lays down a great example for us in acquiring God's comfort. Follow along as I read these four verses from Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verses 8 through 11. I'll read it from the English Standard Version. And it reads like this, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia." Two words there you got to understand, affliction, "Thlipsis," not that we need to say it, but the thlipsis is a word that means "pressure." I mean, that's the kind of visual picture of pressing down. And here he is afflicted. He has this pressure in his life from the sufferings and the struggles that he's having. And Asia is the other word to make sure this isn't China. We're not talking about the Far East. We're talking about the Middle East or in particular what they call, scholars will call in biblical geography, Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. At least most of it we're dealing with there.

And we've read about Paul's travels through ancient Asia Minor and a lot of the struggles he had there. Now, I'm not sure that's what he has in mind here. There may be more local knowledge that the Corinthians have about some other struggle, but he doesn't go to great lengths to even identify it. So I don't think that's a concern of ours, even though commentators may debate it. What matters is the feelings that he's having. And that's where he goes in the second half of verse 8, "For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself." Now, I couldn't help but quote this line in every message so far as we've been dealing with this topic because Paul knows what it's like to be completely beyond what he thinks he can handle. And if you're feeling that way this morning or this week or you're in the middle of something, you feel like I just can't do it, this is Paul admitting this feeling so much so that he says, "we despaired of life itself." We were done. We didn't want to keep going. And we've seen many godly people in the Bible. We've scanned through those at least by way of reference in past weeks of Christians or at least godly people through the Old and New Testament who were done. They felt done. And yet, God, in most cases, all the godly examples that we have in Scripture has gotten them through their time of great despair.

"He was despairing of life," indeed, verse 9 says because, "He felt like he'd received the sentence of death," which is not some formal decree from some bema seat or some bench in the Roman municipalities. Not that he hadn't been accused of crimes. Of course, all of those were crimes for the sake of Christ. But it doesn't mean that it means that he thought this was it. That God's sentence upon them was death. "But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." That's a great argument from greater to lesser. If I'm struggling, I don't think I can go on here. And I have so much pressure on me that this trial is making me feel like I'm going to give up. If the God who can raise Christ from the dead can do that, well, certainly he can revive my spirit and he can bring me what I need to get through. And he says, "He's delivered us from such a deadly peril," speaking of whatever he talked about there in verse 8, "and he will deliver us," because his trials continue. "On him we've set our hope that he will deliver us again." We're confident in that. "You also," verse 11 says, "must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."

Now, there are five things in these four verses we need to take note of, and all of them are key ingredients. You can't do it without all five of these. They're very important. And you



should learn from the Apostle Paul to do precisely what he's doing in this particular passage. And let me start with the first key ingredient, which is probably the hardest for many of you to engage in. But I want to tell you, if it's hard for you, can you imagine how hard it must have been for the Apostle Paul? Who, because of what we read in Second Corinthians is trying to defend his apostleship to a bunch of people here in Corinth who were hearing people disparage the Apostle Paul that he's not all that. And here he's trying to defend himself, almost uncomfortably so in the book of Second Corinthians, when the people who were coming in after him were looking at Paul saying, "You shouldn't listen to that guy. That guy really doesn't know what time it is. He doesn't know what's going on. You shouldn't really give attention to what he is saying." And you would think that of all things, if you're the Apostle Paul, you don't want to appear weak. And yet here in this passage, look at verse 8 again, he says, "I don't want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself." You'd think that's something you'd keep to yourself. You'd like to keep up the appearances of a strong Christian life, wouldn't you, Paul? And you're telling people you're struggling. Well, that seems that seems incommensurate with the Christian life. And yeah, of course, it's not.

If Jesus said "in this world, you'll have tribulation," if you happen to come to your small group this week and say, I'm having tribulation, that should be exactly what people should expect. And we're all going to experience the ebb and flow of difficulties and struggles and hard times. And what's happening here, the Apostle Paul says, I don't want you to be unaware of it. I want you to know, you're my brothers and I want you brothers to be aware of my pain. And that's not how most of us think. And a lot of pride in this room will keep you from making this clear to someone else that you're struggling, that the pressure of whatever you're going through is hard for you. And you may not want to say it. And I would say you take this ingredient out. I mean, if we're going to have the comfort that God provides you better have this ingredient and it's key. You have to, number one, "Be Transparent with Christians." And of course, the context is you need to be transparent with Christians about your struggles, about the difficulties, about the pain. Now, we're hoping you're not in perpetual struggle. Even though your struggles may maintain, there are times when they're crushing down on you so hard that you feel like you can't continue. That's the time you better share it. And you better have the same perspective the Apostle Paul has and that is, I don't want you to be unaware, brothers, that this is happening to me.

Now, here's where it's not going to happen. Probably when the chairs are set up in theater arrangement all facing the front while someone is up here teaching the Bible. That's not when it's going to happen. We'd prefer it not to happen then because I'm talking right now. And it'd be good if you wouldn't be sharing with each other your struggles. It may happen a little bit in the lobby, maybe a little in the parking lot. But the times this is going to happen are when the chairs at church or some church function go face-to-face instead of side-by-side. And I know I talk a lot about this, but you really can't do church on the weekends. That's not how this works. The church is all about us being face-to-face in chairs or sofas or couches or whatever, facing one another and having discussions where people that you know, you repeatedly see every single week, they know you and you know them. You know their struggles and they know yours. And you're transparent enough to share with them what



you're going through. If you don't do that, then when you struggle, God's going to say, why aren't you doing what I told you to do? I gave you the example right here from the Apostle Paul. And ingredient number one was when you're struggling people should know.

Not just any people. Your co-workers shouldn't know more about your struggles than your fellow brothers and sisters at church. You need to share these. You need to be open to these. Why? Well, I told God. Because God says the agency we learn this week, number one in the first three verses is people. Right? Second Corinthians Chapter 7, I quoted it in each sermon so far. Paul says, "God, who comforts the downcast," the word depressed, those who are down, "comforted us with the coming of Titus." That's one good example of the Apostle Paul saying, you know, I talked about all this comfort. He comforted us by the instrumentality of people. People are the agency of God brokering his encouragement into your life. This paraklēsis coming in and holding you up, strengthening you so you can stand. That is what God does through people. And here's the thing about people, they're not mind readers. They need to know what's going on in your life. So you need to share with them when there is a struggle. Now, by the way, for those of you always seeking attention from everyone else, this is not your license to say, great, I'll have this in my back pocket. Every small group I go to, I'll always say, I just need your attention. So do not use this as some kind of chip, because like the boy crying wolf, if you want to talk fables for a minute, no one is going to believe you when you really are hurting. We don't want you to be Eeyor coming to your small group every single week saying how terrible it is and everyone needs to pray for you. Right? This is not something that should be continual. If it is, I'm thinking you've got a spiritual problem.

Paul is not always known for this. As a matter of fact, a lot of times he's sharing the joy that he has even in the midst of trial. And he's saying, rejoice in the Lord, rejoice with me. He's saying that kind of thing all the time. But sometimes he's down and he's burdened beyond what he can bear. And he's sharing with people this is my problem. This is the struggle. You need to know how I'm feeling right now. And you need to share that with people because people are the instrument of God's comfort. And until they know that God can't mobilize them, or at least he doesn't seem to mobilize them as we need them mobilized. Philippians 2 verses 1 through 5. Here's a set of words that are very important. It's what we need. And it always happens in the context of a group of people. People whose interests are not focused on the front with someone, you know, preaching the Bible, but people who are face-to-face talking biblical things and helping one another. Verse 1 Philippians 2. "If there's any," and here's our word again, paraklēsis translated here, "encouragement." Same word, encouragement, comfort. Same word. If there's any bolstering and buoying my spirit in the midst of it, "if there's any encouragement in Christ," if there's "any comfort," there's another word, similar word, "from love," If there's any fellowship, koinonia, "participation in the Spirit," any of that fabric of the mending of people's lives together to hold me up, "if there's any affection and sympathy," these are things you hope to get. Where? In the midst of people. He says, hey, all you Philippians, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind," get together and be on the same page, "having the same love, being in full accord with one mind." And when you get together, "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others as more significant than yourselves."



Now here's the key, verse 4, "Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." And then it goes on to this great Christological section about how he left heaven to come and meet the needs of human beings by his life and death on a cross and his resurrection. I just want to remind you, if you think, well, I'm not hurting, so I'm not going to small groups. That's not the point. Matter of fact, if you're feeling really good and you're strong in your Christian life and God has given you smooth sailing this week, fantastic. You need to be there so you can live out verse 4, because your interest needs to be there for someone who may be hurting and all of a sudden now their interests go in the front seat of your mind in your life and all that you're interested in doing, you're there to help. This is so important that you recognize that all these great words: comfort, encouragement, participation, fellowship, affection, sympathy, all of that is done in the context of the body of Christ getting together. And it doesn't happen when there are thousands like there are on the weekend at Compass. It happens when there are a dozen or less in a small group somewhere where people are facing each other and they're having a chance to meet needs as people are honest enough to share how they're doing. And at least in a group of 10 to 12 to 15 people, someone's going to need some extra support this week. And this is where this all takes place. You've got to be transparent to get the consolation, comfort, participation, affection, and sympathy that comes through the body of Christ. It's Christ's encouragement and Christ's love, and it's the participation of the fellowship of the Spirit. All of that is brokered through those meetings together.

Oh, and let me speak to those of you who have given up on it because you've tried that. Been there, done that, Pastor Mike. I know how this works. I was honest. I was transparent. They didn't care. They didn't do right. Matter of fact, I don't know, it was like an interest for a week and then no one ever asked. Listen, have you been burned by people just jot this down. In Second Timothy Chapter 4 verses 9 through 11, and you can go all the way, 12, 13, 14, when he starts to talk about Alexander the coppersmith. Paul had a lot of people who did him wrong. Would you agree with that? Here he is in a Roman prison the second time about to lose his head by the Roman officials and everyone has abandoned him. Demas loved the present world. Others, dispatched because of ministry. But he is now there alone with only one person with him, and here's what he says, hey, Timothy, can you come to me? And can you bring John Mark with you, please? Paul is asking for people even when people he relied on weren't trustworthy, even when they didn't respond well. So some of you are no longer involved in a small group. You used to be a part of a ministry where you were face-to-face with people. But now you just check in on Sunday and you're done with all that because you did it, you tried it and it didn't work. Can you be as godly as the Apostle Paul and at least say, I know some people have let me down, but I'm not giving up on people being the hands and feet and body of Christ because Christ is going to broker his comfort through them. And it may not be that Alexander or Demas are the guys, but there's going to be somebody like Luke or John or Timothy, and they're going to work in your lives the comfort of God when you're struggling. We need the body of Christ. Don't let a bad experience isolate you.

Philemon was a little book we studied between Acts and Second Corinthians, and I love the word here in verse 7. It says, for I've derived much joy and comfort from your love. Paul writing to Philemon. He says, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been





refreshed through you. That happens when people are face-to-face in small groups. It needs to be a part of your priority. If you're too busy to go to a small group at your church, whether you're listening on the radio or whether you're sitting here looking at my face right now, then you're too busy as a Christian. You need to cut back. You just need to. You've got to have time for this. It needs to happen.

Second Corinthians Chapter 1. Let's look at verse 9 now. That's the first ingredient. You've got to be honest. You've got to be transparent about your hurts. Verse 9. Now, look at it carefully. Indeed, "We felt that we had received the sentence of death." Oh, man, we thought we were going to die. "But that was to make us not rely on ourselves," but on our small group that God provided. Write down small group there. Make sure you underline that and highlight that phrase. Do you see that there? Small group? No, I thought this was all about Pastor Mike, it was all about small groups, about other people. Yeah, but Paul knows the difference between the means and the source. And you know who doesn't know the difference between the means and the source? Non-Christians. Don't act like a non-Christian. Don't think like a non-Christian, right? Don't confuse the fact that the non-Christian can go to a support group, a hobby group, a guild, a 12-step program, whatever. They can go to groups and get a lot of God's blessings just through the natural common grace of God. They can experience a lot of good things like they can by hiking through the Sierras or sitting on a cliff looking at the Pacific Ocean and they can be calm. There can be things that happen in their lives brokered from God. Every good gift is from God. And they experience a lot of good gifts. But they start to focus on the means and not the source. And you can too, but you're supposed to be a Christian. And the difference according to Romans 1 between Christians and non-Christians is they don't give thanks, but you give thanks. Not to the means, although you should give thanks to the means, but to the source.

Number two, you need to "Trust the Ultimate Source of Comfort." If your last small group was full of jerks and you think this was a bust, man, God has not failed you. People may fail you. Demons may fail you. Alexander the coppersmith might have caused you great harm. But God wants you to continue to trust him to provide what is needed in your life and he'll do that through the means of people. It may be different people than the last group you were part of. But God is going to provide it. And you need to thank him and look to him and focus on him and trust in him. Non-Christians don't get it. They don't. They understand at least the fact that there are plenty of gifts of God that they expect. They don't understand that even in their marriage... Think of a non-Christian in a marriage. There are people on your block in your neighborhood who have marriages. There are two non-Christians and they have a good marriage. And they get the gift of God through that relationship. That's the common grace of God. But they don't understand this, that the animation of the spirit within their spouse that brings them such joy or their children or their grandchildren, it comes from God. "In him we live and move and exist." We "have our being" in God. He holds all things. There's not a human being alive on the planet. Let's just say you were the last person on earth. Every other person is animated by God himself. All I'm saying is that every good thing comes from God. Christians are supposed to look past the means even though we give thanks for the means.



Look at First Corinthians 16 if you want to see how we should praise the means, we should take note of them and you should be thankful for your small group and Christians who have stood by you just as Paul was of the people who God used like Titus in his life to bring comfort. But you ought to know that comfort comes from God. It is God who comforts the downcast. And you need to be focused on that because if you start trusting in the means and not the source, I guarantee you it may not happen early in your Christian life but later in your Christian life you're going to be dinged for that God is not going to put up with it. Thirty-nine years into his reign, I'll make you look at this in Second Chronicles 16 this week if you go to your small group and you're going to read about Asa, one little verse where he gets sick in his feet. Who knows what it was? Gout, diabetes, who knows? Arterial disease. Something affected his feet and it became severe. He had been the king for 39 years. He had been leading Israel, which according to the book of Moses, he was supposed to write himself a copy of the law, carry it around and read it. He had 39 years of knowing God's truth, God's word and trusting in God. Now, at the end of his life he picked up the phone and he called the physicians. He said, I need my doctor right now. Now, is God against doctors? No. But he dies in the next verse because he sought the physicians and he did not seek the Lord. That's the problem.

Paul traveled with his own doctor. If you can travel with your doctor on the mission field, take him along. It's a good thing to have. But you understand you're supposed to trust not in the doctor, not in the chemotherapy, not in your oncologist, not in your financial plan or not in the S&P 500. You're supposed to trust in God. Now, those means may provide what God is giving you but all good things come from him. And if you confuse the source with the means, I guarantee you you're going to get in trouble, just think of David. I quote him often, but out there as a teenager when he tried to put on Saul's armor, he goes this doesn't work, this doesn't fit. God has delivered me from the paw of the lion and the bear. Guess what? I'm going to go after this guy in the name of the Lord. And he runs to the battle whirling a slingshot over his shoulder and lands one right between his eyes and kills the giant, trusting in God. He then writes psalms about it. As the commander in chief of the Israeli army, he says, you know what? We don't trust in chariots and horses. People trust in bows and spears and all kinds of swords, but we trust in God. Well, at the end of his life he's out there. At the end of his ministry, after all these years he's now out there counting his troops, like some guy about to retire, sitting here recounting all of his money. If you're trusting in the means and not the source, particularly if you've been around the block in the Christian life a few times, God is expecting you to trust in him.

Remember the whole point of Jesus telling the apostles, don't take a backpack. Don't take a wallet. Don't take a staff. Don't take anything you need for this trip. They should have raised their hands and said Proverbs says we're supposed to, but here's the Son of God saying don't bring any of that. And at the end of the ministry, he goes, OK, guys, I'm about to go be crucified here. I'm going to leave you at the Ascension. Hey, go get a backpack. Go get a staff. Go get an extra pair of sandals. Go get a cloak. Go get a sword. Matter of fact, if you can't, if you don't have a sword and you got two cloaks, go sell a cloak and get a sword. What are you talking about? Were they supposed to trust in the swords and the cloaks and the wallets and the backpack? No, they were not supposed to trust in those things. They weren't



supposed to. And yet they were supposed to have them because those were the general means of God providing for them. But here's the thing about spiritual maturity. You're supposed to trust in the source, not in the means. I want you to go to your small group. I want you to go to church. I want you to read your Bible. I want you to prepare for all the eventualities of life. I want you to save for retirement. I want you to have health insurance. I want you to do all that. But the minute you trust in that, you've just violated the basic principle of being a Christian. You're supposed to trust in God for all of that.

If you need comfort, I want you to go and pull up to your small group, wherever that small group is meeting, whether it's a sub-congregation and you break into small groups for the second half, or whether it's a home somewhere in a home fellowship group. I want you to pray, God, I'm hurting. I want you to bring me comfort, YOU to bring me comfort through the body of Christ that I'm about to meet with. There are means and there's source. Please don't get those confused. God who raises the dead can raise your spirit, can get you through your trial. Verse 10. Are you still with me on this passage? Verse 10, "He delivered us from such a deadly peril." Whatever it was in Asia, he got through that. And he will deliver us. He's still struggling. He's about to say in verse 11, I need help. He will deliver. And "on him we've set our hope that he will deliver us again." Now, what kind of deliverance do you have in mind? Is he going to live forever because he's going to keep praying this all the way through the second Roman imprisonment and he's not going to get his head chopped off? No. We've learned that throughout the whole book of Acts. I mean, think about what was going on in the book of Acts. Acts Chapter 12, you get one apostle imprisoned and the other one gets his head chopped off. James is dead. Or how about John the Baptist? John the Baptist in Matthew 12 gets killed. Did God not deliver them?

When Paul does go to get his head chopped off in Second Timothy 4, he says, "God will bring me safely into his kingdom." He knows being brought safely into his kingdom is a kind of deliverance. Look up again at verse 7. He said, "Our hope for you," this is the end of last week's lesson, "our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort." You will have comfort. There's the deliverance from despair, from thinking you can't handle it, from thinking you just can't make it. You're going to die. You can't do it anymore. God will deliver you from that. He will. That's what the Bible promises. Paul ends up getting a no from God three times in Second Corinthians 12. Do you remember that? I prayed that this thorn of the flesh would go away. And God says, no, no, no. You're going to live with a chronic illness. And he lives with that as far as we know from all of his writings to the end of his life. So the chronic illness didn't go away, but you know what went away is all the despair about his chronic illness. He was okay. Because he said, God said "his grace is sufficient for me." He could stand up straight, though the outer man is decaying and certainly in his mind must have been his chronic disease. The inner man is being renewed day by day. Here's the deal. You need to have the deliverance in your mind. Not the kind that the prosperity gospel preachers will tell you about in their arenas. But the kind that God really promises. That whatever comes your way, no matter what difficulty you have, God will allow you to stand up straight and stand up strong with courageous perseverance so that you are not defeated. One day you're going to die. One day you're





going to be physically defeated, but you're never going to be someone who's lacking the deliverance of God if you're a child of God and you ought to live like that.

Turn to one passage with me really real quick on this. Romans Chapter 8. In Romans Chapter 8, if I said to you, pick a chapter of Romans that is going to encourage you, you'd think of Romans 8, but you may forget the context. The Christians in Rome were being persecuted. They were suffering. If you have any doubt about that look near the end of this chapter when it says in verse 36, "As it's written, 'For your sake we're being killed all the day long; we're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'" That's the mindset, at least circumstantially, among the Roman Christians. This was hard and it was going to get really hard. Nero, Diocletian, I mean the Roman emperors who wanted to eliminate and extract the Christians from Rome. I mean, this was a bad time. They were living in the catacombs at one point under persecution running from the officials of Rome. It's going to be hard. But my favorite verse starting this whole thing, at least this part of the discussion in verse 18, Romans 8:18, he says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." You do understand we're going to get delivered ultimately at the end of this road. And whether your heads get chopped off or you get killed or whatever happens, talk about deliverance. "The glory that's going to be revealed to you," I mean, we're not even going to be able to compare how bad the bad was on earth to how good the good is there. That's the picture. And he says it's going to be so good. Now, I know, verse 19, he says creation, it just can't wait to be done and to get to the place where the sons of God are revealed in all their glory. That'll be good. "Creation was subjected to futility." We've read this twice talking about the need for comfort. We know it's because the world has been cursed in Genesis 3. And it's all about futility at this point.

But in verse 21, creation knows if we personify creation as knowing anything. Of course, God knows that "creation is going to be set free from its bondage to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." It's going to be so good for the children of God. "For we know the whole creation," verse 22, "has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth," and that's not a fun afternoon, that's hard, "until now," until the present day. And that's the first century, two thousand years ago. For "not only creation, but we ourselves," we know what it's like to suffer. That's how this all started in verse 18. We're groaning inwardly. We can't wait for our adoption. That's the ultimate deliverance, the redemption of the body. You may have a redeemed spirit right now. God may have purchased your spirit out of the slave-holding of sin, and you may now be forgiven. But here's one thing, your body is still laden with sin and corruption and it's dying. And there are all kinds of persecution that's going to hurt your body. But one day, the redemption of your body is going to solve all that.

Now, that is the hope of the Christian life. In this hope, we were saved. Hope, if you had it, well, it wouldn't be hope. You can't talk about hope in a prosperity gospel church, because it's all about the "here and now." But I've told you multiple times, it's not about the "here and now," it's about the "then and there," and here he says it. For hope, man, we wouldn't be hoping for what we see. "But if we hope," verse 25, "for what we don't see," here's our word, "Hypomonē," we'll wait for it with hypomonē. "Thlipsis" and hypomonē. Those are two great words. The pressure, the downward pressure of I can't take it anymore, and hypomonē,



"Hupo" is "under" and "Monē" is "to remain," to stand up, to be there, to not give up, to hold up under the pressure of suffering. And, of course, the agency of that is the people of God. The source of that is God himself. God has a good plan. He wants to keep you strong, waiting patiently, enduring courageously. Number three, you need to "Affirm God's Good Plans." You need to say God does have a good plan, and the plan is to get me through all the sufferings of the present time, and they're going to be so small compared to how great the glory of the next life is going to be.

The Spirit's going to help us, verse 26, if you're still in Romans 8. Verse 27, he's always praying for the right things when I'm praying for the wrong things. Verse 28, "We know that those who love God all things work together for good." We're going to get there. We're going to be ultimately delivered. He's going to deliver us with hope and courage and strength throughout all of the patient enduring we have to go through, because "we're called according to his purpose." What's his purpose? Well, he laid his love on us. He "foreknew" us. Then he "predestined" us. He planned and architected our salvation. He "conforms us now to the image of his Son," but he'll ultimately conform us to the image of his Son when our bodies are redeemed "in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." If he's predestined you, he's called you, if he's called you, he's justified you, if he's justified you, he's glorified you. Well, we haven't gotten there yet but it's as good as done in this chain of the things that God says he's going to do for every Christian, and the reality is that if you're on the justification module, the link in this chain, what's next is absolutely indomitable. It's going to happen. You're going to be glorified, and that's the great thing. Even if you are like sheep that are led to the slaughter, verse 36, there's nothing that is going to separate you from this plan and the love that God has endowed. God's got a good plan. It may be that you end up like John the Baptist or James the Apostle, but just know where it's all headed, and know that all of this is to help you to stand up under whatever struggle God throws in your path.

Back to our text, Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 11, Paul's still going through it, and he says this in the present tense, "you also must help us by prayer." Let's just stop right there. It's as simple as that. Number four, "Request Prayer Support." If the Apostle Paul incessantly requests prayer support, and of course he does, then I think you should not think you're above that. When was the last time you asked for prayer? You need to ask for prayer. Well, some of you don't even have the context to ask for prayer. You need to be in a group where your chairs are face-to-face. People who know you and care about you and learn about who you are, they know you, you know them, and you can share what it is that you need help with in your prayer life. God, please make this church obedient to this very simple command that you do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, not just in theater seating, but in round circles in people's living rooms or in all the hundred thousand square feet of facility we have here because it happens all week long, every night, people are meeting in small groups around this campus because that's where the heavy lifting of being able to say pray for me, help me through this, takes place.

If you're strong, that's fantastic. No trials right now. Great. Go and put their needs before your own. But if you're hurting and you're struggling that's when you ask for prayer. And it's really hard when I sit there on the patio and I talk to someone in the lobby and they say, oh, I'm



going through a terrible time, and I ask have you asked people to pray for you? I mean, don't say no to that. Well, don't lie to me either but you need to ask for prayer. If I ask you things like have you told your small group? The wrong answer is I don't have a small group. That's the wrong answer. You need to find a small group, be a part of that small group, and make sure you ask for prayer. And a lot of things come to our prayer ministry. We've got a prayer ministry here. It's even linked on our website. If there's something that we need to pray for as a church at large, we've got a whole army of people who take that list every single week and we pray through it. We pray for all those needs. We have a long-term list. We've got the immediate list. Then we've got the crisis list that comes through on any day of the week, any hour of the day. We've got people manning this ministry to have people come together when you have to raise your hands and say, I need prayer. You need to request prayer.

Look at this prayer in Romans 15. This is amazing. One example, I thought of all the examples of the Apostle Paul and I wasn't exhaustive, so I won't give you a number because I didn't do the count. I mean, I can think of First Thessalonians, I can think of Philippians, Colossians. Paul is asking here in Romans 15 again for prayer, but just look at the way he saddles them with the burden of praying, which again should be a privilege for us, but he says it this way, verse 30, Romans 15:30, "I appeal to you, brothers," well, that's even a strong start, but it gets worse, "by the Lord Jesus Christ," by the King, the Deliverer, the Christos, the Christ, the Messiah, "and by the love of the Spirit," by the third person of the Godhead because he's the Spirit who loves, think about this, that you, this is good, "Soon agonizomai," that "to strive together," that you struggle together, "with me in your prayers to God on my behalf." Now, you don't need that big preamble to ask for prayer in your small group. But you ought to know that this is the kind of prayer request that Paul's saying, I just appeal to you by the authority of Christ, by the authority of God's Spirit, because the God's Spirit is love. Man, would you just do more than just throw up a simple prayer? Could you struggle with me in prayer for this thing that I'm facing? There's nothing unbiblical or selfish about that because he's not asking I just need a boat in the harbor off the Mediterranean. I hope in Caesarea I can get, you know, I don't know, a stand-up paddleboard. Can you pray for that?

No, he says, you know what? I have something that I need you to pray for, and that is "that I can be delivered from the unbelievers," who want to kill me, "the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company." I need to get to you guys, and I need to be delivered from the people who are threatening my life, and I need to make sure that the ministry that I'm bringing to Jerusalem in the midst of their famine, that would be well accepted and that it would get there safely. I just think we need to be more forward about asking for prayer. Jot it down, we don't have time to look at it, but James 5 verses 13 through 18, it starts with a very simple statement. If you're suffering, you better be praying. Whenever you suffer you need to pray. And then it immediately talks about expanding the prayer circle all the way to a discussion about, do you know how effectual a prayer is from a righteous person? Which is great. One of the reasons I want to expand the prayer circle is I'd like to get a few of those people to pray for me. I want to expand the prayer circle to have the effectual prayers of a righteous man accomplish a lot. I mean, that's just an interesting statement.



And then he talks about Elijah. And that's why, by the way, the next line that comes in that passage in James Chapter 5 should remind you, you don't have to find the five most godly people in the church to pray for you. It says Elijah, who had a "nature like ours." I mean, I know he did a lot. And he talks about how he prayed and changed the weather. Everyone in your small group has a nature like Elijah, a human being. I can show you passages. I've even shown you one in this series about Elijah wanting to die. He had a death wish. He was suicidal. And yet he was someone who prayed and God changed things. You know, the people in your small group are as good as Elijah when it comes to their prayers if they are willing to righteously come and wrestle in prayer for whatever it is you're struggling with. God may not change your circumstance like he didn't with Paul in Second Corinthians 12, but he can change your heart. He can let you stand up with joy to sing in the dungeons of Philippi in stocks, hymns before God at midnight. That can happen. God can lift you up. That's the *paraklēsis* that we've been trying to talk about for the last three weeks. Request the prayer support.

Middle of verse 11, back to our passage, Second Corinthians 1, "So that," I want everyone praying for me here, Paul says, "So that many give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many." Here's the problem with you going through your struggles alone. Number one, you're leaving on the table the number one way God wants to give you comfort, strength, courageous boldness in the midst of your struggle. You're leaving that all on the table. You need the body of Christ. You should have utilized them. But here's one of the collateral damages that come from that. When God does take you through that, if indeed he does, and he lets you stand up strong through the midst of that struggle, who's going to be thanking God for that? You. I mean, I hope you. But what if you had six people who wrestled in prayer through the struggle that you're facing? And you get to share with them the blessing of deliverance and you now stand strong and you say I have incurred the comfort of God. Man, I'm not crying myself to sleep every night this week. God has changed the circumstances, or he's changed my heart, or he's changed both. Then everybody gets to participate.

All this thing we do before we get up to the preaching, all the worship that we sing, all the thanksgiving, all the things we do to praise God, if it's not fueled by specific things then it's pretty hollow. Real worship takes place when people are being thankful to God for specific things. We're praising him, not only for who he is but for what he does because of who he is. And you know, if you come into this thinking about the five, six, seven things that God has done for the people you've been praying for, then your praise is filled with fuel. And we need more of that. Sometimes our worship is pretty flat in our own hearts because we don't have much to praise God for because we're not involved in the sufferings of other people. He says I want the prayer circle expanded. "You must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many." And what is that? The kind of deliverance he talked about in verse 7. The kind of deliverance he talked about in verse 10.

One passage on this and I think I take you to Psalm 116, at least one of the verses in the small group discussions this week. I hope you do get to your small group and get to these



questions. But let me read a little bit of the context that I don't point you to in Psalm 116. Look at this with me. What a great psalm. Unattributed psalm but here it is in verse 1. The psalmist says, "I love the Lord, because he's heard my voice and my pleas for mercy." I love the word "mercy" because even the struggles and sufferings as we talked about in week one of this series, sometimes you feel like I got myself into this jam. Well, even so, we're calling on God to get us through the struggle, the mercy. I know I don't deserve this, but God, I prayed that you would help me. And you did. "Because you inclined your ear," verse 2, "to me, therefore I'll call on him as long as I live." This is good. "The snares of death encompass me," verse 3, "the pangs of Sheol," of the grave, "laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish." Man, I was down. I mean, maybe like Paul despairing even of life. "Then I called on the name of the Lord: 'Oh Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!' Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. He preserves the simple." I'm no one great, but here I am. God is answering my prayer. "When I was brought low, he saved me. Return, O my soul to your rest."

By the way, there's a "hapax legomenon" a one-time Greek New Testament word that's used in Colossians as Paul talked about the comfort he got in Colossians 4 from his friends. And the word "Agora," do you know the word agora? Like the "marketplace," the buzz of the marketplace. It's a compound word and it talks about the buzz of the marketplace, so to speak. That's the image in the word. It's all calmed. It's like going to a busy like the Spectrum mall or something in the midst of the height of all the people shopping at Christmas and then going there at three in the morning when somebody's just barely sweeping up. And the calm and the quiet. It's like that's the picture it's translated "comfort" in Colossians 4. The comfort that comes, the calm that comes.

And I love that phrase right there and basically it paints that picture. "Return, O my soul to rest," calm now, be calm, "for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you." Verse 8, "You've delivered my soul from death, and my eyes from tears, and my feet from stumbling." Man, I was crying myself to sleep but you fixed it. You fixed me. "I'll walk before the Lord in the land of the living." I'm going to stand up straight. I'm going to get up and go to work. I'm going to do this stuff that you've called me to do. You got me through this. "I believed, even when I spoke; 'I'm greatly afflicted'; I said in my alarm, 'All mankind are liars.'" Now I know Paul quotes this as the truth because certainly it is objectively true, technically, right? People grow up. They all lie. And that's stated in the New Testament as a universal thing. But here's a statement of despair. You know he's saying I was calling out. I was just so greatly afflicted and I was alarmed. This is kind of like Psalm 73 when Asaph said, "I was like a brute. I was like a beast toward you." Everybody's a liar. I can't trust in anybody. And this is a statement of the despair of someone being really down. And then he says in verse 12, you got me through it. "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I'll lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord, I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people." I can't wait to get to my small group to tell people this. I can't wait to rejoice and praise God in the multitude, in the throng, as Psalm 35 says. I'm going to go and pay my praises. I'm going to sign up for the next ministry. I'm going to go serve. I'm going to go give. I'm going to do... I can't wait. I mean, here's a supercharged Christian life because God got that person through the difficulty. And the Bible says to get people involved in this. Not only will they be the source of it but you'll fuel their lives in worship like the person who goes through this deliverance.





They are fixing the road by my house, thankfully, because it's been a mess. But one thing I've learned about them trying to smooth out the roads is it gets worse before it gets better. They tear it up, man. And it is torn up in a horrible way. I mean, the pavement's uneven and they do something just to grind it out to where your tires scream at you when you drive by it. There are bumps. There are holes. There are potholes. There are plates. There are all kinds of things. And it's just like riding on Ghost Rider at Knotts. Have you ever ridden that ride? I don't believe how any of us believed it was good when we were kids because it rattles your teeth out of your head. And that's kind of what it's like driving through some of this construction zone. And one thing I noticed, no matter what your car is, and there are some cars that look pretty beefy out there, the big Ford Broncos and the four-wheel drives and the Cybertrucks or whatever, but everybody struggles through this. Not only is it dusty and dirty and bumpy, but it just, I mean, there are sections of this that just flip your car around. Now, it's kind of like people. There are some people that are like the Mini Coopers of your small group. They're low to the ground and they feel every bump I'm assuming. I've never driven one, but whatever. The genteel kind of car. And every little bump, every speed bump, you know, just messes with their lives. But even the big trucks sometimes hit some rough road that even messes them up. I mean, you watch the, whatever, maybe you don't watch, but like the Baja 500 or whatever, where these big, gigantic trucks with these giant wheels and huge suspension and still, they hit the right rock or they hit the right obstacle and they break an axle or their wheel flies off or whatever.

Even big trucks and small cars, all alike, when they run into something that messes up the exterior of their life everyone's going to notice that. And there are people who come to your small group and they got a flat tire, so to speak, and you know, they lost a loved one. Oh, man, we need to care for them. They've gone through a divorce, they're out of work, whatever, and you know they're struggling. But just know there's a lot that goes on in the inside. Like I was heading home and I have everything nicely balanced on my dashboard and all the pockets and everything and you hit certain parts of the road and it throws everything on the floorboard. And so the interior of our lives can be messed up. The exterior maybe just a little dusty. No one knows how bad it is on the inside. But we can feel totally disheveled in our own hearts. Maybe we even feel with a place that our interior life is so messed up we can't even keep going. But the reality is that we've got to open the door, let people know what's going on, because we need each other's help to clean up, to help out, to support us, to be able to stand up in the midst of whatever struggle God has purposed and decreed for our lives. Don't be afraid to ask for help. And if you're strong and everything's good right now, it's smooth sailing for you, great. Get to your small groups this week and say I'm here to put your interests before my own. We need to hold each other up. We need to help each other through this life. In this world, we're going to have tribulation. But we need help to hold on tightly to Jesus' word that we're supposed to take heart, that he's "overcome the world." The best is yet to come. And the good that he has planned for us he's going to work all things together for his ultimate good and the conformity of our lives to Christ. So let's lean into this this week. Would you stand with me as we close in a word of prayer? Several hymns were written in the wake of people's pain, this old Swedish hymn. This gal had lost her family. Her father had died in a boating accident. She wrote these words, "Day by day, with each passing moment, strength I



find to meet my trials here, trusting in my Father's wise bestowment, I have no cause for worry and no cause for fear."

Let's pray. God, give us that kind of perspective. We know what's right. We know what's true. It's hard for our hearts sometimes that are so hurt, so frustrated, so pained by so many circumstances. God, I just pray that we'd be much more invested in each other, much more honest about our struggles, that you provide for us the comfort that only comes from you through the people who you have appointed to be around us in this season of our lives. Thanks for this congregation, for every part in it, every person in it. I mean that God, every person, every regenerate Christian in this church has such an important role to play in each other's lives. So help us God to be involved, even now even starting now, in the lobby, in the parking lot, through text this afternoon, through phone calls this week, through meetings throughout the week. Let us encourage each other and all the more as we see the Day drawing near.

In Jesus' name, Amen.