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January 2, 2022

The God of All Comfort  
2 Corinthians 1:1-11

### Introduction

Happy New Year! Some of you are optimistic about the prospects of what the new year might bring. You already have exciting things on your calendar about what you are hoping the Lord will do in 2022. So for you, Happy New Year! is anticipatory optimism for the future.

Others of you are more cynical with a view that 2022 has to be better because it is hard to imagine it could be worse than 2021 - but then the pessimist would say that is what we thought a year ago. For you, Happy New Year is simply a nice way of saying, I am glad the old year is gone.

There are a few that already know that 2022 will be difficult due to a change of circumstances that has already happened or is known will happen in the near future. These would include death of a loved one, a forced change of job, having to make an undesired change of location, or being diagnosed with a debilitating disease. The wish of a Happy New Year seems like an unrealistic sentiment that would be better left unstated.

The reality for every one of us is that all three of these elements are normal parts of life and therefore would be included in any anticipation of the future. As an example, I will use my own family. We are excited for this new year and the expected arrival of our first grandchild and all that we know that will surround that. I also have two wedding ceremonies already on my schedule, and I love seeing a man and woman joined together to become husband and wife and follow God's design for the family. Such events mean that there will be elements in the new year that will indeed be happy. At the same time, being more optimistic than pessimistic, I am glad 2021 is gone and hope for a better 2022, though a streak of cynicism keeps me stoic about such prospects. A line from an old Boy Scout song rings in my ears - *"Next verse, same as the first, a little bit louder, a little bit worse."*

Then there is the reality that we are already facing some very tough things in this new year. At just shy of 90 years old, we were not surprised that Diane's father died this past Tuesday. We were not even surprised it would be related to neglect in a nursing facility since we knew from past experience that they can be very bad there. We did not expect it would only take three days to go from being stabilized from a broken ankle and knee to sepsis and internal bleeding from too much medication and dying alone due to restrictions that kept Diane's sister from being able to be with him. The memorial service for him and figuring out the estate will be pushed back to at least March since Diane's brother is having extensive shoulder surgery this week and we are still waiting for an appointment for Diane to see a specialist in *Stiff Person Syndrome (SPS)*. What we already know about SPS is that it is a degenerative debilitating disease and it is already changing our lives, but we do not know the extent and speed this will happen or what can be done to slow it down and remain functioning for as long as possible. We can't really even plan for much of anything until we are able to get a consultation with the specialist. We are fully aware that 2022 will be difficult and may be devastating.

How do you respond to such things? Paul states in Romans 12:15, *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."* For those of you with wonderful plans for 2022, we desire for you to rejoice, and we desire to rejoice with you. For those facing difficult times ahead, we desire to weep with you even as you should weep with us. This is part of body life within Christ's church for it is part of fulfilling the commands to love one another and to comfort one another.

But how do you do these things? The world copes with the trials of life very differently than the way believers should deal with their tribulations. The world generally seeks a way to either escape or ignore the problem, hence the driving forces behind most addictions to drugs and alcohol, but that can also

manifest itself in hedonism, materialism, or irresponsibility all of which can give a brief reprieve from reality. God's word reveals a better way by finding our comfort and hope in the truth of God with His people often being the means by which He extends both reminders of truth and practical help. That is the subject of this sermon this morning. Our God is the God of all comfort. We begin with the Apostle Paul's explanation and example of this in 2 Corinthians 1:1-11 and will conclude with some practical ways that God can use you to comfort one another with suggestions for actions in specific situations.

2 Corinthians 1:1-11, <sup>1</sup> "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. <sup>6</sup> 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; <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; <sup>9</sup> indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; <sup>10</sup> who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, <sup>11</sup> you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many."

### **Salutation - 1:1-2**

Paul, along with his co-laborer in ministry, Timothy, writes this letter to the Corinthian church while on his third missionary journey many months or perhaps up to a year after his first letter. Paul had spent a year and a half teaching there on his second missionary journey, but after his departure, the church demonstrated its immaturity with factions developing quickly and aberrant and heretical doctrine being taught which prompted Paul's first letter. Corinth was an utterly wicked city located on the isthmus connecting northern Greece with Southern Greece, so it took more work to get them to understand holiness and walk in it since godly morality was so foreign to their culture. This second letter is a mixture of both encouragement regarding what was going well and admonishment due to problems that still existed or had developed.

After Paul gives his customary greeting in expressing his desire that the grace and peace that can only come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to be upon them, he quickly moves to his first subject which is the source and extent of comfort. In doing so, he also describes three attributes of God related to that comfort and the reason that God is blessed. Blessed here, εὐλογητός / eulogātos, pertains to being worthy of praise and commendation, and indeed, God is worthy.

### **Attributes of God - 2 Cor. 1:3**

*The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* is the first attribute. Every blessing we have in Jesus Christ is ultimately related to His relationship with God the Father as the second person of the Triune godhead. Every precious and magnificent promise we have from Jesus is grounded in God the Father for Jesus came to do the Father's will and carry out His plan of redemption of sinful man.

*The Father of Mercies* is the second attribute. Mercy here, οἰκτιρισμός / oiktirmos, refers to emotions of sympathy, pity, compassion. Paul uses this same word in Romans 12:1 to refer back to everything explained in the previous eleven chapters about God's righteous actions in bringing about redemption by

His grace based in justification by faith which is the basis for becoming a living sacrifice as part of the worship of God. It is plural pointing to the multiple and multifaceted compassion of God extended to man ranging from supplying the necessities of daily life to salvation from sin and adoption into His family.

*The God of All Comfort* is the third attribute listed. Comfort here, παράκλησις / paraklāsis, refers to causing someone to be encouraged or consoled by either verbal or non-verbal means. It is to come alongside someone to speak encouragement or consolation. Paul specifically designates God to be *The God of All Comfort* because He is the ultimate source of all such comfort. If there is any true encouragement or consolation that is to be given, it must be rooted in truth which comes from God for only in that can there be hope. It is common within our society for people to tell lies thinking that to be a kindness for the present moment, but it only becomes more cruel when the falsehood is born out. Christians are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Even difficult truths are bearable when love and kindness is also present to point us to God's promises which transcend the tribulations of living in this sin cursed world.

### **God's Purpose - 2 Cor. 1:4**

It is these attributes of God that ensure us of the truth of verse 4 that God comforts us in all of our affliction. Affliction here, θλίψις / thlipsis, is any trouble involving direct suffering. That is wide ranging including everything from direct persecution due to your faith in Christ to the trouble caused by things naturally breaking down (the second law of thermodynamics) because this earth is cursed. I will point out some specifics of how He does this in a few minutes, but notice first that Paul immediately states that the purpose of such comfort is so that we can comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. While God will comfort you, His purpose extends beyond just you to include others who can use the comfort you can then give to them. That matches a basic premise in the Christian life expressed in Philippians 2:3-4 that we are to have humility of mind and regard others as more important than ourselves so that we do not merely look out for our own interests, but also to look out for the interests of others.

This boils down to these essential premises. 1) If I am afflicted, I should be actively looking to see how God is going to comfort me so that I will learn and be able to comfort others by pointing to God's faithfulness in my own experience. 2) The greater you have learned to trust God in the tribulations of life, the greater you will be able to help others who go through the same or similar afflictions. In verses 5-7 Paul demonstrates this with both the example of Christ and his own life.

### **Suffering, Comfort & Endurance - 2 Cor. 1:5-7**

**Suffering** - vs. 5. The pain that Jesus suffered is something we should expect in our own life since He gave so many warnings about it. The focus of these warnings is usually that the world would hate us because it hated Him and therefore we will be persecuted for righteousness and His name's sake (Matthew 5:10-12; 10:22, Luke 6:22; John 15:18-19). However, it should be kept in mind that Jesus would also suffer the more common thing that are part of living as a human in this sin cursed world. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. I think it is also safe to say that He also suffered pain in all points as we do and yet endured and overcame. While there is no record of Him getting sick or even having a cold, so that is a point that currently remains a mystery to us, we do know that He became hungry (Matthew 4:2), thirsty (John 19:28), homeless (Matt. 8:20), weary (John 4:6), exhausted (Matthew 8:23), angry & grieved (Mark 3:5), filled with sorrow and even weeping because of the death of His friend, Lazarus (John 11). And though it is not recorded, He would have also grieved over the death of Joseph, his step-father. As for physical pain, Jesus knew in advance the torture He would have to endure at the hands of His enemies including being beaten, flogged and crucified (Matthew 20:17-19). Jesus would also suffer the emotional anguish of rejection that we cannot really

imagine including not only leaving heaven to become a man to save mankind, yet His own refused to receive Him (John 1:11), but also that moment in time when even His heavenly Father would forsake Him as He bore the sins of the world (Matthew 27:46).

**Comfort** - vs. 5. Paul not only states in verse 5 *the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance*, he also adds, *so also our comfort is abundant through Christ*. How can He say that? Because all that Jesus went through as a man makes Him the perfect high priest for us because He sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). That is why we can draw near to the throne of grace and know that from Him we will receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). Our comfort, the encouragement and consolation we will need during life, will come through our High Priest who knows and understands us.

**Endurance** - vs. 6-7. Paul makes all of this personal in verses 6-7 because the afflictions that he and his missionary team had gone through was to bring them the gospel and strengthen them in the faith - comfort and salvation. At the same time, the encouragement Paul and his companions received from seeing them come to Christ and grow enabled them to endure the afflictions they suffered. It would then become mutual because those disciples would become like their teachers and suffer as they furthered the cause of Christ. Much like the disciples in Acts 5:40-41, after they had been flogged by the Sanhedrin, they left *rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for [Jesus'] name.*" When we suffer because of the sake of righteousness and Jesus' name, then we know we have entered into the fellowship of our Lord's suffering (Phil. 3:10).

### **Paul's Suffering & Hope** - 2 Cor. 1:8-10

Paul makes this even more personal in verses 8-10 reminding them of what he and the other missionaries had gone through in bringing them the gospel and teaching them about God and His ways. What Paul lists briefly in verses 8-10 he gives more detail about in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 as he contrasts himself with the false teachers that were leading them astray. <sup>23</sup> *Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.* <sup>24</sup> *Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.* <sup>25</sup> *Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.* <sup>26</sup> *I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;* <sup>27</sup> *I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."*

Though Paul had suffered so much, yet his confidence was stronger than ever because he had experienced the Lord's deliverance so many times. That is why his hope was so firmly fixed and he could encourage them in the same. That takes us back to Paul's opening statement that the comfort he had received from God, the Father of Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, Paul could extend to them because of his own experiences. His great trust in God in the midst of tribulation could encourage and console them in the midst of whatever affliction they were experiencing.

### **The Importance of Prayer** - 2 Cor. 1:11

Paul ends this section with an emphasis on the importance of prayer in verse 11. He clearly recognized that they were helped by the prayers of the Corinthians on their behalf, and that such prayer increased the thanksgiving to God as they would learn how God answered those prayers. Keep that in mind as you pray for others. You become part of what God is doing in their lives and so are able to personally rejoice in what the Lord does in response.

### **Practical Comfort**

The premise of this passage is simple enough. As we experience and recognize the comfort - the

encouragement and consolation - that God brings to us when we are afflicted and going through tribulations, we are able to help others who may be going through something similar. Our own confidence in God born out of those experiences become an encouragement to them to endure in the midst of their own testing of faith as described in James 1:2-4. In the same manner, the consolation we have received we extend to them becoming the arms and hands of the Lord in giving practical emotional and physical support.

For the rest of this sermon I want to give practical application of these truths in how we are to comfort one another as Paul describes in this passage. That must begin with the fundamental truth that God's love has been demonstrated for all time and eternity in such a way that it cannot be questioned even when we are confused or feel God is far away and that we are abandoned. How we feel is brought back to reality by this truth.

Paul declares in Romans 5:1-11, <sup>1</sup> *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,* <sup>2</sup> *through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.* <sup>3</sup> *And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;* <sup>4</sup> *and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;* <sup>5</sup> *and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.* <sup>6</sup> *For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.* <sup>7</sup> *For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.* <sup>8</sup> *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* <sup>9</sup> *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.* <sup>10</sup> *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.* <sup>11</sup> *And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

The key truth here is verse 8 that God demonstrated His love for us when Jesus Christ died as the redemption price on our behalf while we were still sinners. He did not do this because there was anything good or worthy in you, because there was not - you were ungodly, an enemy of God and dead in your trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1). Jesus did this because of His own great love exhibiting His mercy and grace. Because of this rock hard fact, no matter how you may feel or where your emotions are wandering, you can come back to this anchor and work your way backward through the text. God's proven love at the cross gives confident assurance of the future which is the definition of hope. Where there is hope to hold onto, your character can be proven as one who trusts God. Where there is trust in God, you can persevere in the midst of tribulation. When you can persevere in tribulation, you can exult even in those trials knowing that the end is already determined. You are saved by Jesus' life, reconciled with God and destined for heaven. (See Romans 8:31-39 for additional promises that you cannot be separated from the love of God demonstrated in Christ Jesus).

With this as an anchor, we can both comfort those in need and help them overcome to face whatever fear of the future they may have. Here are some practical examples of our hope in Christ and how to bring practical comfort.

**Death** - there are two areas in which comfort is needed when death calls. In general, the closer the relationship that the person has to the deceased, the more they will need comfort.

First is the grief over the loss of being able to experience life with the deceased. That grief is real even for believers for we miss the one that has departed from this life. The difference for believers are the promises of God in relationship to death. First, a true Christian that dies is now absent from the body but at home with the Lord which is to be preferred (2 Cor. 5:8). Second, when Jesus returns for His church, the bodies of the deceased will be resurrected while those still alive will be transformed, and all believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and thus ever be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). We are told specifically to comfort one another with this truth (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

If the deceased is not a Christian or if that is questionable, we are comforted in the very character of God who is not only holy and just, but is also loving and will do what is right. We are consoled knowing that God Himself will wipe away our tears (Revelation 21:4).

Second is the fear of death that comes upon people when they have to face their own mortality. For Christians, comfort comes from simple reminders of God's promises of eternal life and what heaven will be like. For non-Christians, hope can be given in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Those are all encouragements, but what about consolation?

We console one another by entering into the grief and helping to bear it up. In practical terms, depending on the closeness of the relationship, it is simply going and being with the one grieving. You don't have to even say anything. Your presence, a hug, holding their hand, and perhaps even weeping with them is the expression that you care and are there for them. Even Job's friends started off well by simply sitting with him for seven days. Their problem was that they became afraid that what happened to Job could happen to them, so they became desperate to find some flaw in Job and began attacking him instead of admitting their own confusion and lamenting with him as Job cried out to God.

If you are not as close or not sure of what to do, a simple phone call, message or note of some kind that you would like to come and be there with them if they are up to it. At minimum you express your own sorrow and you are praying for them by some means of communication. Sending flowers in our culture is an act of kindness, as is bringing over food to help feed the mourners that may be gathering and making sure those grieving will eat since they will not feel like it and may easily neglect to take care of themselves. Other acts of practical service can also be meaningful, but that will vary according to your own spiritual gifts and how close you are or would like to be with those grieving.

**Physical Affliction** - this would include being sick and injuries and can range from simply being hindered from functioning normally such as happens with a bad cold, the flu, a broken arm or leg, to catastrophic diagnosis or injuries such as cancer and its downward spiral or an accident resulting in becoming a paraplegic.

The degree of response will normally vary with the debilitation level from the sickness or injury, but expressions of sorrow and practical help are always good. That may range from simply a phone call or sending a get well card, to visitation at the hospital, to practical measures such as meals and cleaning the house for them, to walking alongside them as they go through the valley of the shadow of death.

The two key elements needed are pointing them to the fact that Jesus has promised to never desert or forsake them (Hebrews 13:5), and that you care and will do whatever you are able to help them get through it. As the degree of sickness or injury goes up, it becomes more common for the one suffering to feel abandoned by God or even punished by Him for some unknown reason. Job is an example of that. Elihu is the best example of pointing out to Job that while none of them had any understanding of why Job was suffering, God remained the same and could be trusted so hope must be ultimately found in Him. Elihu was proving by his presence that he would be there with Job as he went through it. Ultimately our hope will be bound in a departure from the frailties and ills of this world to be given immortal and incorruptible bodies in which we will dwell with God forever.

**Persecution** - can be difficult because it takes courage to join with or identify with someone being persecuted because it might easily spill over to you, yet that is the first response that will encourage. Stand with the persecuted. Certainly that is easier if those persecuted are a long way away in another land, yet even then messages of standing with them and praying for them are great encouragements. Paul mentions that in regards to himself in 2 Corinthians.

The theological foundation for comfort are Jesus' promises given to those persecuted for the sake of righteousness and His name's sake that they will be blessed for they demonstrate themselves to be like the prophets of old, the disciples, and Jesus Himself. The hope of both an eternal reward and God using it in the present are also consolations and encouragements that comfort.

Practical measures may include sending them messages, visiting them in jail, providing for their needs or even taking care of their families. That may be done personally if they are close or through an agency in a foreign land that can do it on your behalf.

**Disappointment & Rejection** are normal parts of life, but Christians comfort one another by pointing out Jesus' promises of remaining faithful Himself even to the extreme of doing so when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13). Jesus remains the same yesterday, today and forever even though the world and we ourselves change constantly (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus also understands because no one who has walked on this earth has experience as much disappointment and rejection as He has, yet He remains focused on others.

In practical terms, you help others in this by personal involvement. If they are disappointed or feel rejected by you, then that begins with asking for forgiveness as appropriate for any wrongs you have done. It also means helping them move away from any self-centeredness that could be making the problem worse to see that God wants them to move forward including overcoming evil with good. Helping them to maintain a godly perspective on life goes a long way in overcoming the debilitating effects of disappointment and rejection so that they are only bumps in the road instead of washed out bridges. Jesus' disappointment in His disciples only led to a new lesson to teach them. Paul overcame his circumstances of being in jail and having other purposely seeking to add to his distress by keeping his eyes firmly fixed on his purpose of proclaiming Christ so that he even rejoiced (Phil. 1). His goal was to present every man complete in Christ (Col. 1:28) and so he continued to teach, preach, encourage, rebuke, exhort and instruct with great patience.

I am past time, but I want to also mention two more examples even if briefly.

**Loneliness** - Jesus promised that He would be with His disciples always even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20), and after that, He will be with us in heaven for eternity. So regardless of how lonely we may feel, we are never alone if we have Christ. In practical matters, communicate with the person. Go be with them if possible. Drag them out of their place of solitude to involve them in other people - especially if you can get them to help you serve others. That goes a long way in getting someone out of the depression of loneliness.

**Fear** is debilitating on many levels. The key theological solution is 1 John 4:18, *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."* Whatever the fear may be, it is solved by God's perfect love which takes us back to Romans 5:8. God proved His love in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and Jesus proved all of His claims about Himself and that He will carry out everyone of His promises by rising from the dead. In practical terms, you help others overcome their fears by pointing them to Christ and helping them to learn to trust His promises.

Our God is the God of all comfort, and the comfort we receive from Him we can then pass on to others so that they too are comforted - encouraged and consoled - by His precious and magnificent promises. The greater your own knowledge of God and trust in Him, the greater you will be able to comfort others, so continue to grow in knowledge and trust of Christ. In practical terms - comfort comes from putting into practice all the one another commands: love, build up, encourage, accept, give preference to, be of the same mind toward, confess, pray for, be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving, serve.

## **Introduction**

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God the Father

The Father of Mercies

God of All Comfort

**God's Purpose** - 2 Cor. 1:4

**Suffering, Comfort & Endurance** - 2 Cor. 1:5-7

Suffering

Comfort

Endurance

**Paul's Suffering & Hope** - 2 Cor. 1:8-10

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**Practical Comfort**

## **Romans 5:1-11**

**Death**

**Physical Affliction**

**Persecution**

**Disappointment & Rejection**

**Loneliness**

**Fear**

**KIDS KORNER** - Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - 1) Count how many times comfort is mentioned. 2) Discuss with your parents the meaning of comfort and how God comforts people.

**THINK ABOUT IT!** What joys are you anticipating for 2022? What fears do you have about 2022? What do you know will change in your life in 2022? What is the importance of each of the attributes of God listed in 2 Cor. 1:3? What is comfort? What is God's purpose in it? What did Jesus suffer? Does that make any difference in your prayers to Him? What is the relationship between suffering, comfort and endurance? What was Paul's own example in this? What is the importance of prayer for those suffering? How does Romans 5:1-11 anchor you to an unshakable hope? Explain. What theological truths bring encouragement / consolation in the situations listed below? How can you practically be used of God to encourage / console in these situations: Death, Physical Affliction, Persecution, Disappointment and Rejection, Loneliness, Fear