# 2 Corinthians 1 (Part 2): 8-11 - The Apostle Paul and Suffering

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2 Corinthians, we're in chapter 1. This is the second part of chapter 1. We started it last week and excited to be in a new book study. And we're going to take about 4 whole verses today. I'm back into slow mode. Just wanted you to know.

2 Corinthians, chapter 1, beginning at verse 8 goes like this, *"For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. 11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many." (ESV)*

Let's stop there and let's pray.

Thank you, Father, for this time in Your Word. May it be fruitful and along those lines, Father, we pray that You would open our hearts to hear Your voice, to respond appropriately, and then Lord, to put this into practice in our lives.

Use this Lord to bring great instruction and insight. We ask it in Jesus name, amen.

Last week when we started our study of 2 Corinthians, we focused on the first 7 verses of what I shared with you is a very personal letter by the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church. And we saw how Paul spoke in those first verses about comfort. He talked about God is the God of all comfort and he talked about just that whole topic.

And we noted as we looked at it, that Paul looked at trials differently than you and I look at trials. I brought out last week how, when I'm going through a hard time, I see it as something that's just making me miserable. But Paul saw trials in his life as something that would help equip him when he received the comfort

of the Lord, to then turn around and give that comfort to other people. He literally looked at difficulties that way. How is this going to help me bless other people? And so forth.

And now the apostle begins to open up to these folks in Corinth about just how bad things were in Asia, and when he talks about Asia, he's talking about Asia minor. And he's telling them how awful their suffering was in Asia minor. And you'll notice here in verse 8, he begins again by saying, *"...we do not want you to be unaware,"* your Bible may say, *"ignorant"* of the afflictions or the suffering that we experienced there in Asia minor.

And look what it goes on to say. He says, *"For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself."* And then he, just as if that isn't dramatic enough, he says, *"... we felt ... the sentence of death."* And that's a very, very strong statement by the apostle, but he's being uncharacteristically transparent with these people. And we're going to see that purpose unfold as we go through 2 Corinthians.

Paul often would talk in his letters about his suffering, but he never talked like this. This is new, and he's telling them just, that, this is the worst thing that's ever happened. He says, guys, I just want you to know that when we were in Asia Minor, this was the worst thing that ever happened to us.

There's this wonderful rendition of the Bible that's been around for, since the 40s called the Phillips Translation, some of you might have heard of it. It's a little bit weird to read because there's no verse numbers in it, but the Phillips Translation has a really interesting take on this verse. Let me show you this on the screen. It goes like this.

**2 Corinthians 1: 8-9**

*"At that time we were completely overwhelmed; the burden was more than we could bear; in fact we told ourselves that this was the end."*

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Just lays it out in very clear terms, doesn't it? How Paul felt about the way they'd been suffering. And in the whole Greek language, there are basically 10 words, basic words, general words, that are translated or used to describe suffering. Paul uses 5 of them in this letter alone; 5 of the 10 that cover the whole Greek language. And the one that he uses most frequently in this book is a Greek word that that speaks of suffering as being confined and under pressure.

I don't know if you can relate to that. To feeling like you're confined and under pressure. Pushed down, pressed down, and stuffed in, no air to breathe, nowhere to move, and you just feel trapped.

Have you ever been in that sort of a place? That's the essence of what just one of the words that he uses means. And it's clear that the apostle Paul's life was a life of pain. It was a hard, difficult life, and he's going to focus in this letter on his pain. We're going to talk a lot about pain in our study of 2 Corinthians.

But what makes this letter so wonderful is that the apostle Paul is going to teach us how to see our pain and our suffering through God's perspective, because you see, that's something we don't usually do.

And frankly, I believe it's the secret to dealing with pain and difficulty. The way you and I see our pain is we see it through our own eyes, and that's all we see, and that's the way we relate it to others. It's the way we view it in our own hearts. And when we try to view the difficulty of our lives, the painful situations of our lives through our own vision, through our own ability to see it, it becomes incredibly oppressive and burdensome, and you talk about being depressed. I mean, you got good reason to be depressed. If you're looking at the painful situations of your life through your eyes, it will always be oppressive.

And Paul is going to show us in this letter how to lift up our eyes and to see our pain, and our challenges, and our difficulties, and our trials, through the lens of God's perspective.

Some of you been around here long enough, you know that one of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 73. Don't turn there. The reason I like it so much is because it's so real. And the writer of that Psalm, as you read through it, he admits that he got his eyes off the Lord, and he was processing life through his own eyes.

And what he was doing was he was looking around him, and he was noticing all the people who were godless. And what that basically means is, people that don't give a rip about God. They just don't care. And he was looking at all of his neighbors and so forth that, never thought twice about God. And he was taking note of the fact their lives are good. It's like they never suffer.

And then he would look at his own life and the suffering that he was going through. And the lives of other believers and the suffering that they were going through, and he was going, wait a minute, we got to disconnect here. Something is wrong here. And it talks about how he pondered this idea to the point that it really began to mess with his mind. And he admits something about pondering

it in his own ability. Let me put this part of it up on the screen from Psalm 73. He says,

**Psalm 73:16 (NIV)**

*When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me*

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Notice what he's saying there. *"When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive"* from my perspective. In other words, when I tried to make sense of it through the lens of my ability to comprehend all that's happening in my life, I was, instead of being relieved, I was oppressed. So confusing, so oppressive.

And I think a lot of people, a lot of believers even, tend to walk around trying to make sense of suffering with their own understanding, with their own mind, with their own perspective. And it's not working, in case you were wondering. It's not working. We're not getting anywhere. We're spinning our wheels, and we're just getting discouraged and depressed.

The other thing about this passage, that we're looking at here this morning, and what we're going to be seeing, extending into this book, is that what Paul is saying here, is a wonderful reminder to you and I, that the level of difficulty that God might allow in our lives, can easily surpass our ability to endure it.

Notice what Paul says again, if you look with me in your Bible, in the middle of verse 8. He says, *"we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength,"* or as the NIV says, *"we were under great pressure far beyond our ability to endure."* And you guys, I hope you are able to deduce what that means.

It means God will give you more than you can bear. I know what you've heard. And Sue and I have really enjoyed watching that Hallmark series, When Calls the Heart, some of you guys might have seen it too. But I got to tell you something, their frequent quotes from the Bible leave something to be desired.

They are constantly saying to one another just remember, God will never give you more than you can bear, and I want to scream at the TV, and I think I've even done it a few times. That's not in the Bible! I want to say, and Sue and I always look at each other and roll our eyes whenever they say that, because, it's a common belief. But Paul says right here in 2 Corinthians, God gave us more than we could bear. It was far beyond our ability to bear. It was far beyond our ability to endure. Plus, when it comes to, When Calls The Heart, I don't like the

fact that the pastor occasionally pops into the saloon for a drink, but that's another message all together. We'll just deal with that at a different time

Anyway, the apostle Paul makes it clear in this passage, and this is the point that he and his team were allowed to experience a level of suffering that easily extended beyond their ability to endure. And I know that's probably not the good news you were hoping that I would bring, but I want you to see here that in the second half of verse 9, Paul explains why.

Look with me there, the second half of the verse. Verse 9, he says, *"But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God…"* Or as the New King James Version (NKJV) says*, "that we should not trust in ourselves but in God."*

And the idea here people, this is important, the idea here is that suffering, really of any kind, is a constant reminder to you and I, that we need God to carry such things, because we can't carry them ourselves. Oh, I don't know what kind of arrogance or dopey headedness, I'm not sure that's a word, it takes for us to think that we can handle all of these things in our own strength and power, but we can't. We can't handle them.

Have you ever noticed you guys that when life is going well and things are on cruise, it's just so easy to depend on yourself and we get into that routine of just, an issue comes up, but it's not a big issue because life's going pretty well. And so what do I do? I basically just figure things out on my own. I do it my own way.

I'm Lord of my own life in a very real sense of the word. Oh yeah, sure. I'm still coming to church and saying Jesus, You are Lord. I might even be singing it in the songs, but when it comes to my day to day life, I'm in charge. But see, I'm not really thinking much about it because life's not that bad and I can deal with this stuff, right? And so I basically step into the driver's seat. And if we're going to be brutally honest with ourselves, we're going to admit that the majority of us really only turn to God to help fix things when we run out of ideas of our own.

But that's the point of trials and difficulties. They are a reminder to you and I that we're not just powerless when we've run out of ideas, we're always powerless, fundamentally. At the baseline of life, you and I, it's a fantasy, it's a figment of our imagination that we're really able to work things out in our life.

We only come to realize it when we come to the end of ourselves. When I come to the end of my own solutions. I've tried everything I can do, nothing works. I guess it's time to turn to God. He's my ace up my sleeve sort of a thing.

But I want to remind you here in this passage that we're looking at who Paul trusted in the face of his own trials and suffering. You might say, that's easy pastor Paul, it's God. Yeah, but look what he says.

Look at the end of verse 9. He says, who did he trust? *"...God who raises the dead."* Did you catch that? It wasn't just, and so we're trusting in God. He says, we're trusting in, so that we might trust in God who raises the dead.

Doesn't that change sort of your understanding or your view of Him? When you call Him that you can say to people, I'm just trusting in God. Or you can say to people, I'm trusting in God who raises the dead. Do you understand how that just brings the intensity up of who you're trusting in?

Cause we say trust in God all the time and it almost becomes this meaningless cliché phrase. Well, just trust in God. Are you trusting God? Yeah, let's all trust in God. Hey, got a bumper sticker, trust in God. Or my money says, in God we trust. It just becomes this meaningless noise.

But try saying this next time. You know what? I choose to trust in the God who raises the dead. Why is that significant? Because Paul is making a point here. He's saying He's powerful and He's able. Right? God who raises the dead. It's just that reminder that He can do something that you can't.

You know what? I'm going to trust in the God who raises the dead. Because there's a lot of things in life that are dead, and we need God to raise them up. And we can't do it ourselves.

Oh, and check out this declaration of faith that Paul gives here in verse 10. This is a great statement. He says, *"He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. "*

And this is what you have to love about the apostle Paul. He endured what he admitted here was the worst event of suffering in his life. He says, brothers, we don't want you to be unaware of just how bad it got. It was so bad that we literally thought we were going to die.

In fact, I think we probably would have welcomed death. But after that much difficulty, Paul comes back and he goes, He not only delivered us, He's going to keep delivering us. I have every hope that he will deliver us again.

In other words, he emerged from this trial with greater faith than he went into it with, you see. I think that's a very important thing for us to look at instead of

this trial weakening his faith it actually strengthened his faith And this is what we call hope, it's Biblical Hope.

And I want to make a point about biblical hope. And I felt like this point was important enough to actually put it up on the screen so you, we could read it together.

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And I want to leave that up for just a minute so that we can just, you can just let it sink in for those of you that are visual like me. It's nice to see it.

Biblical Hope is defined as the expression or as an expression of absolute confidence in God's promises for the future. Why? Because it's predicated on the fact that He has been faithful in the past. Biblical Hope. And I call it Biblical Hope for a very specific reason, because we need to set it apart from what you and I often call hope, which is nothing more than wishful thinking.

Americanized usage of the word, hope is something that we, I sure hope the weather is going to be nice tomorrow when we go on our hike. But I really don't have any expectation necessarily. I'm just it's just a pie in the sky. I hope right. That's not biblical.

Hope again, Biblical Hope is predicated upon the fact that God has been faithful Lord, you've been you ever when you're reading through the Psalms are you ever struck by how often in the midst of David's most poignant, sensitive, passion-filled prayers for deliverance, he also talks about how God has delivered him in the past. He'll actually make reference in his prayers to God's faithfulness past, and then he applies that to his situation present, and then going forward, right? We often don't do that.

One of the most powerful things the Lord spoke to me personally at one point, was a simple question that the Holy Spirit just dropped in my heart one day while I was praying. And He said this to me, have I not proven Myself faithful? It was simple as that and it was enough of a question that it stuck with me and it rattled me to the point where I've had to answer that question over and over again, and say yes Lord, You have proven Yourself faithful.

It doesn't mean I'm not an idiot and I'm still not going to worry sometimes. But please, Lord, don't let my lack of faith affect the reality of the true picture of what You've done in my life, because you know what, You have been faithful, and You have proven Yourself so.

Now, as we think about this idea of hope, which is predicated on God's faithfulness, I want you to see one of the characteristics that Paul gives us here of Biblical Hope. Look at verse 11, *"You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."*

Now you read that verse and you think about what Paul just got done saying, what he just got done saying was God delivered us. He will keep delivering us. Right. But then what's the next thing he asks them to do? Pray for him. Did you catch that?

Now, some people are going to think that, wait a minute. I think we just see a kink in Paul's armor because he made this declaration of faith in God. My hope is in God. And the very next thing he does is he goes, so pray for us, would you? Because, then as God delivers us dah, dah, dah, dah, dah.

You think to yourself, wait a minute. If he really, truly had hope in God, wouldn't he just know that God's going to take care of him and not need to ask them to pray? Do you see?

Paul didn't see any contradiction here. On the one hand, expressing hope God will deliver us and then saying now you guys pray for us. He didn't see a contradiction there and I don't think we should either because what we're seeing here. Is that hope, biblical hope is not passive, it's active.

And what we mean by that is it doesn't just sit around, waiting for something to happen outside of me. It's involved in the process of reaching that goal, which is the fulfillment of God's promise. Hear me people, this is important.

Not involved to the point that I was involved before which was manipulating circumstances and fixing things in my own strength, that's different. That's not what I'm talking about.

I'm talking about involved by prayer and faith and speaking the truth in faith and in love and so forth. That's an active involvement There's nothing wrong with you saying to someone when you're going through a difficult season, pray for me. Would you pray for me? Because that's not an admission on your part

that I really don't have my hope in God. In fact it's really buttressing that idea that your hope is in God.

Because your hope is in God, you're asking for prayer, right? You're not asking for solutions from that person. You're not saying, what would you do if you were in my place? What would you…, how would you fix this problem? That's not what you're doing.

You're saying, let's pray. Would you pray? Right? I think some people think that asking for prayer somehow expresses that I'm really not putting my hope in God or something, which is really ridiculous.

Paul didn't see any contradiction here. He says in verse 9. Hey, our hope is in God. He delivered us and He will deliver us. And then in verse 10, now pray for us. See that active element of putting our hope in God. In fact, let me show you this from another passage from Philippians chapter 1, verse 19. It goes like this,

**Philippians 1:19 (ESV)**

*for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,*

*for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,*

Did you see in that single verse, he talks about his faith and he talks about the active element of his faith through prayer and the Spirit of Christ. He says, I know, right? I know! That's faith. I know that He will deliver. I know He will. Now, I know also that there's going to be this active element, your prayer, the Spirit of Jesus. You with me?

It's very important that we see that because we've been sold a weird bill of goods by certain preachers and teachers over the years that basically tell us that real faith, or they try to define real faith and it just gets wacky. It really does.

Real faith is active and that's what I want you to see here and hope that is based in the promises of God is active so let's be active with our faith, right? Let's be active with our hope.