LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

# 2 Corinthians 1 (Part 1) :1-11

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · November 01, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

We're going to start a new book study tonight. Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians. We're going to do a little bit of an introduction here. For those of you that are familiar with 1 Corinthians, you know that in that letter the Apostle Paul challenged the believers to walk in unity.

It's a very difficult thing for us to do as believers for some reason or another. But in this particular letter, in this second letter that Paul writes to the church at Corinth, he kind of switches gears a little bit and he challenges the believers to walk in a spirit of unity with him in his apostolic ministry. Paul was a man, you know, we look at the Apostle Paul today and we kind of think, wow, you know, the Apostle Paul. But he was highly criticized. People, there were a lot of people that didn't like him.

And there were people that did their best to kind of slander his ministry, his calling. In fact, he's going to in this letter respond to those critics about his calling. And we'll get into that and you'll see that as we go. But there were a lot of people, there were individuals who pointed to Paul's constant incarcerations as a proof that God had not called him to his apostolic ministry. Can you imagine?

I mean, you know, think about it for a minute. If we were talking about somebody today and we were saying, you know, hey, we're hoping to get a visit, you know, from so and so. He's in jail right now, but I think he'll be out soon. At least we're hoping. We're praying.

And, you know, he's been in jail a lot, but we're really looking forward to having him come and speak here at our church. Some of you guys would kind of go, he's in jail? What's he in jail all the time for? Well, and you guys know that the reason he was ever in jail or ever incarcerated was because of the gospel, simply preaching the gospel, preaching a God other than the Roman pantheon of gods. But because of the criticism that was being leveled at Paul by some in the church at Corinth, Paul is going to spend a fair amount of this letter defending his apostolic calling.

And we'll talk about it when we get there as to why that is important. Anyway, so there's going to be some interesting stuff. We believe that it was about one year between him writing 1 Corinthians and then this follow-up letter that we call 2 Corinthians. And as we go through the letter and look at the content, it

appears that Paul had essentially four basic goals in writing this letter. And I'm going to put these up on the screen so we can see them together.

They are essentially, first of all, to offer an explanation to why he had promised to visit but was either unable or unwilling to show up. And by the way, that was another point of criticism. Secondly, he wanted to follow up with the believers there in Corinth about some of the issues that he had addressed in his first letter. And so he's doing that. Can you imagine a year later?

Thirdly, he wrote to urge them to put together a collection for the saints in Jerusalem, and that was fairly common. Then in this fourth point, this is what I've been talking about. He spends, again, a fair amount of time reiterating and confirming his apostolic authority, particularly as it relates to responding to those who had been making the challenges and doing the criticizing. So very, very short introduction. I think you guys probably know enough about Corinth to know that it was a seaport.

In fact, it had really two large seaports on either side of the isthmus that it was on. And because of these seaports and the people that came in off these ships and spent time in Corinth, it was a very immoral place to live. There were several different temples to different pagan deities, and many of those deities involved worship practices that were sexual in nature. There were temple prostitutes that were commonly seen sitting at the doors of these various temples. And so Corinth was a place where there was great sexual immorality.

It's one of the reasons, you know, I had a lady write to me recently and said, what's a good Bible study, you know, for some young people? And I said, 1 Corinthians, because that's where Paul really addresses a lot of that. And the reason I say that is because I think the United States of America has a lot in common, frankly, with Corinth as it relates to the view, I guess, the attitude that people have about sex in the culture and that sort of thing, and the immorality of it all. But this was a very difficult place to walk with Jesus. And that's one of the reasons I like 1 and 2 Corinthians, because it is increasingly representative, or I should say maybe reflective of the culture in which we are living and the difficulty that we are experiencing as Americans.

I mean, in my lifetime, I, you know, I went from, you know, leave it to Beaverville when I was, you know, growing up to what where we are today, you know. And so in that amount of time, there has just been this absolute paradigm shift in this country, concerning morality and sexuality and so on and so forth. So these letters are incredibly relevant to the day. We're going to begin here tonight by reading the first 11 verses of chapter one. And then we're going to open in prayer and then we'll unpack these verses.

So I'm going to be reading out of the ESV. And that's why those of you that might have a New King James or some other translation might find some wording different here and there. But I think you'll see that the gist is the same. It goes like this. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother to the church of God that is at Corinth with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia.

Grace to you and peace from God, our father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. And if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you also share in our comfort. 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. 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. 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.

You also must help us by prayer so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessings granted us through the prayers of many. I'll have you stop there. Let's pray. Father, as we take these first 11 verses from 2 Corinthians, we pray for your Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts, to fill us with grace and insight, Lord, that we might be tuned to your voice, knowing as we do, Lord, that you are the teacher, and you come to instruct, and to clarify, and to bring wisdom and understanding through your word, and we pray that you would do that tonight. We ask you to use these verses, these, in fact, we pray ahead of this entire book study, and just really pray that our time spent here would have a powerful impact on our daily lives.

We look to you to do these things, Lord, for we desire not that they would be done in the flesh, but rather through the power of your Spirit, for we ask these things in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen. Amen. I want you to notice here that Paul begins his letter by saying, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. Now, that was something that Paul would say, and on a fairly regular basis, but it was something that he always wanted to be known, as it relates to his apostolic calling, that it was not his own doing.

Paul wanted his audience to know, I didn't ask for this. I would never ask for this. You know, nobody in their right mind would want to be an apostle in the first century. I mean, the vast majority of these guys were martyred for their faith, and the kind of things that Paul went through, and you know from reading your Bible, shipwrecks, scourgings, stoning, left for dead, in prison, good amount of time of his public ministry. Who would ask for that?

Who would sign up for that and say, Lord, get a little bit more of that, please? It's just not something that you would ever want. So Paul is making the point here, before he goes into anything he's going to say to these people, because remember, he's gonna be answering his critics. And so he begins by saying, I want you to know beyond a shadow of a doubt, first of all, that I am an apostle, but not just an apostle. I am an apostle by the will of God.

And he believed that God brought confirmation of that calling through signs and wonders. In fact, Paul is gonna point in this very letter, in fact, when we get to the 12th chapter, but I'm gonna put it on the screen ahead of time, go ahead and put, for look at this, 2 Corinthians chapter 12, look what Paul says. He says, the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. Did you catch that? He says, they're the signs of an apostle.

So how did people know if someone was a genuine apostle? Well, Paul believed that a distinguishing mark of an apostolic authority was these signs and wonders that Paul performed in their midst. And you know, whenever we talk about apostles, this always brings up two questions, and I do get these from time to time. First of all, and you know what? We'll put these up on the screen so we can see them together.

This common question is what is an apostle? But even a more common question is, do we still have apostles today? And the reason that is fairly common is because there are parts of the world, and I don't think it's quite as much here in the United States, but we find that from the continent of Africa and some other places in the world, there are men that love to call themselves apostle. And so that brings up the question, do we have apostles today? But let me answer the first question.

First of all, the word apostle gives us a place to begin to understand the calling. The Greek word is apostolos, and it is derived from a root word that simply means to send, to send. So an apostle is one who has been sent. Essentially though, the specific and proper definition of apostolos is messenger. He's a messenger, or if you will, one sent on a mission.

All right? Now, again, the most important detail here is who does the sending? Because frankly, anybody could claim to be an apostle sent by, I suppose, somebody. But that's why Paul began this letter by saying, Paul, an apostle of God, he's the one who did the sending. And see, that's the important thing.

You know, I used to say that modern-day missionaries were kind of the equivalent of what we see in the Bible as an apostle. But I'm not so sure that's true anymore, because the apostles were sent by God. We send missionaries usually from a church or from an organization. There might even have been some missionaries that came up out of this fellowship and others. You know, they get sent out.

But, you know, they're sent out from the church. The church, you know, they watch their lives, they recognize their ministry, they maybe give them an opportunity to go overseas, and they decide, hey, we're gonna live here, wherever it may be. And they minister, and it's great. But that's not the work of an apostle. And that brings us to the second question, are there apostles today?

Well, like I said, I used to say missionaries were kind of a modern-day example, or as close as we get. But I've kind of changed my thoughts along the way, to be completely honest with you. And I do not believe that the office and authority of an apostle exists today. I don't believe they do. Although, you know, the apostles were critical to the establishing of the church, which Paul, by the way, explains in his letter to the Ephesians.

Let me show you on the screen. From Ephesians chapter two, notice that Paul says, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Notice this, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Right? Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

Notice the emphasis that Paul gives to the establishing of the early church. Apostles and prophets, critical, absolutely critical to the establishing of the church. But here's the reason I no longer believe apostles are present in the church today. And that is because nowhere in the New Testament do we read about the qualifications or the instructions for raising up apostles. We've got the pastor elder overseer, which are synonymous in the New Testament.

We've got the deacon. The qualifications were given, their instructions were given. And Paul even said, you know, somebody desires to be an elder, they desire a noble task. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find instructions or qualifications for an apostle. It's God, you know, left it out.

So we don't even know. I mean, the only qualifications that are given in the book of Acts when they were gonna choose a replacement for Judas was we gotta just pick somebody who was here from the beginning. That was it. But that was for the 12. That wasn't for the church to, you know, and so forth.

So, yeah, I don't believe that apostles are active today in the body of Christ. And yet there, again, as I said, there's a lot of places where men choose to call themselves apostles, but they do it without any biblical warrant. There's nothing biblical for them to be able to say, I am an apostle, because how would you know? How would you know what a qualification is? Or even the instructions for raising up an apostle?

You don't, you don't know. All right, moving on. You'll notice that Paul gives Timothy credit for being with him in the writing of this letter, and then he identifies his intended audience. He says, to the church of God that is in Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia, and that's the region that Corinth was established in, he says, to the church of God in Corinth. First of all, we want to look at that word, church, because this is the Greek word, ekklesia.

It simply means a gathering, and nothing more than that. This building is not a church, it's a building. You could say it's a building for the church, because you are the church. The people make up the church. But again, the word has always meant the gathering, and Paul calls it the church of God, or if you will, the gathering of God.

What did Paul mean by that? Why did he use those words, the gathering of God? Well, you know, frankly, the word ekklesia, the Greek word for church, would have been well-known to Paul even before he started using it in his letters, because the Greek version of the Old Testament, which of course was originally written in Hebrew, but the Greek version had been around for a few hundred years, and Paul, I'm sure, being a Greek speaker, would have understood and read that, and he would have heard, even in the Old Testament, that that word used as the Old Testament was translated into Greek. Let me show you an example from Judges, on the screen from Judges chapter 20. It says, the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God.

Now again, in the Greek version of the Old Testament, that word is ekklesia, the ekklesia of God. So this was something that Paul understood to mean a gathering of God's people. In other words, it's an assembly of God's people who come together in God's presence, who come to hear God's word. This is what you're doing tonight. You're gathering, you're assembling together with other people, you're coming to hear the word of the Lord, to be in the presence of God.

You are the ekklesia of God. You are the gathering of God, right? And so it's all part of who we are, not the building that we are in. We do kind of tend to use it that way, you know. Anyway, we shouldn't.

But this particular gathering, as we know, was in Corinth. I'll show you a quick map of the, kind of the region, and I've circled there the area that is the region of Achaia, and you can see Corinth. Now, here's what's interesting. I don't know if you like to play around on Google Maps. I do.

But if you get onto Google Maps and you type in Corinth, let me show you what you get. Yeah, there it is. It's there. I put an arrow. I mean, you won't see the arrow there.

I put that in for you. But there it is. It just, it's right there where it was. And you know, that's what's cool about the Bible. I love that we read about cities and countries, and they're still there.

Many of these countries still have the same name. Many of the cities still have the same name. The ruins, the place where Paul spoke, the Areopagus, the ruins are still there. You can see those places. You can see the steps that Paul walked up when he went to go tell the people in Athens about Jesus.

So it really is wonderful that we can see these things, and we can know that these places are historically accurate. And then Paul finally writes here in this first verse, he says, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia, and the word saints means holy ones, plural, and it doesn't mean what you think it might mean. A lot of times we use the word saint to describe a morally excellent person, or somebody who's just, we think, really good. Oh, he's a saint. She's a saint.

You know, because usually there are people who are kind and so forth. And then of course you have the Roman Catholic definition of a saint, which means, first of all, that they're dead, but that there are a certain number of miracles that have been done in that person's name for the church to officially give them sainthood. Well, that's a product of the Roman Catholic Church. That has nothing to do with the Bible. The word saint in the Bible applies to every single person who has come to Jesus and put their faith in his finished work on the cross.

Period. You are a saint. I've actually got a city named after me, St. Paul. I don't know if you've ever been there.

Minnesota? Actually was around a lot longer than I've been around. My dad was actually born there, interestingly enough. But yeah, you are a saint, and it doesn't speak of your moral character. It speaks of your standing in Christ.

I wouldn't go around putting saint in front of somebody's name, necessarily, but that is, in fact, what it means. Verse two comes Paul's fairly typical blessing. He says, grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know, it was common back in Paul's day that after you gave the name of the writer, and you always gave the name of the writer at the beginning because letters back then were in scroll form, and so you wanted to unroll the scroll just far enough to know who the letter was from. And that's why the name of the writer was always at the beginning.

But it was also common practice to speak some sort of good wishes, or if you will, kind of a blessing. And this was the blessing, this is the blessing that Paul uses in most of his letters. But what made this blessing so perfect is that it perfectly aligned with Paul's gospel message. Notice he says, grace to you, and peace from God. So he starts off, and he wishes his audience grace, okay?

Grace, what is grace? Grace is favor from God that you haven't earned. In fact, you can't earn. It's just he favors you. He favors you because he chose to favor you.

He chose to bless you. He chose to save you. The Bible says we're saved by grace through faith, and this not of ourselves. It is the gift of God. So our salvation is by grace.

And what that means is if you lived a really creepy life before you came to Jesus, or maybe even indulged in some creepiness after you came to Jesus, that doesn't affect your salvation because your salvation was never established through good works, and it can't be lost through bad works. That is an understanding of grace. When I started receiving emails from people who had kind of caught onto our YouTube channel, I was introduced, as a pastor, I was introduced to some attitudes about salvation that I frankly was kind of unaware of, I was ignorant about. And what I was unaware about was how many Christians, and people who call themselves Christians, go through life believing that they've somehow sinned beyond God's ability to save. And this is, it's more common than you would think.

And it breaks my heart. And what that tells me, whenever I get a note like that, it tells me that person has not embraced grace. Because they're, and there's something that all these letters have in common from these people. All they talk about in their letter is themselves. They don't talk about what Jesus did.

They don't talk about how wonderful it was what Jesus did. They talk about how bad they are. And they tell me about their sin. They tell me how badly they've sinned. And they tell me about periods of their life where they just engaged in rampant sin.

And now they say, Pastor Paul, do you think I can still be saved? I came to Jesus when I was, you know, 20 years old, and then I went through this 10 year period where I just lived this worldly ungodly

life. And then I just came to my senses, and I've been going back to church, and I've been trying to read my Bible and pray, but I just feel so condemned all the time. Oh, oh, again, it just breaks my heart. And I wanna remind them that you are saved.

Your salvation was by grace through faith, by God's grace. That isn't something you can do. You can't earn it, and you can't lose it by messing up. God already made provision for us to mess up. Good grief, he knew you were gonna mess up.

Did you think when you got saved you were gonna stop sinning? I ask people that sometimes, because they're like, I'll get notes from somebody, and they'll go, Pastor Paul, I came to Jesus a year ago, and now I'm deep in sin, worse than I was before. And I'm like, well, what did you expect? Now you got an enemy on your tail who hates your guts even more than he did before, and all this condemnation and all this stuff that's going on in your life, this is coming from the enemy of your soul. Do you believe Jesus died for you on the cross?

Yes, I do, with all my heart. Then you are a born-again Christian. Well, then why am I sinning? Because when you got saved, you didn't get rid of your sinful nature. You now have two natures living within you, and that's what Paul says.

He says that the nature of sin that still resides in us, which he calls the flesh, and the nature of Jesus that is now in us, the new nature, they are at odds with one another. There is conflict. Can you relate? If you don't have conflict in your life, I wouldn't even know what to say to you, because that's the Christian life, you know? I've told you guys before in our study of Romans, you know, people will sometimes say to me, Pastor Paul, I'm just struggling with sin, and I go, praise the Lord, it means you're saved.

It's through the Holy Spirit that you are now struggling. And what I mean by that is, before you had the Holy Spirit living in you, we didn't struggle with sin, we just sinned. We just did it. I didn't struggle with sin before I knew Jesus. Once I met Him and accepted Him, then the struggle began, because now I knew what sin was.

I knew how much it hurt my Savior. I knew how much it was hurting me and the people around me. And I knew that I was grieving the Holy Spirit. And that grieved me. And now I was struggling.

God's grace is what gives us peace. I had a guy write to me just today, just before I came here tonight. Pastor Paul, he said in his note, why can't I get any peace? And I said, peace comes from knowing God's grace it by faith. You are fixated on yourself and you need to learn to get over yourself and you need to fix your eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith and get your eyes off your sin because the more

you look at your sin the bigger it gets and the more monstrous it becomes and the more consuming it becomes.

Get your eyes off yourself. We're never told to put our eyes on ourselves. We're told to look Christward always. Isn't that what, you know, I quoted Ephesians. Let me go ahead and put it on the screen for you so you can see it together.

He says, for by grace you've been saved through faith. Look what he says. This is not your own doing. He says it's the gift of God. It's not a result of works.

Nobody can boast who's saved. Nobody can say I'm saved because I was a good person. No, it's not possible. Our salvation is literally based on God's grace and that's why Paul says to them, he wishes them grace and then peace. Do you have peace tonight?

Do you have peace knowing that you are saved and knowing that nothing is going to change that? Do you have just, do you have the peace of just knowing that if you died tonight you'd be fine? I'm going to go be with the Lord. Yeah. I hope you have that kind of peace tonight because that comes from grace and if you don't have that kind of peace tonight, I want to encourage you just say, Lord, help me to understand grace.

Help me to understand your grace so that I can walk in peace, you know, and know that I know that I know that I'm saved and I know where I'm going and God's in control of my life, you know. Look what Paul wrote in, you know, we saw this in Romans. Check out Romans chapter five. Therefore, since we've been justified by faith, and that means we read this in Romans, it means acquitted. What do we have now?

We have peace. Isn't that what it says? Isn't that what your Bible says? We now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have peace.

Ah, peace. Do you know that's why the world is so crazy? They don't have peace with God. They don't even know that they need it. But I think there's an innate understanding in unbelievers that they just don't have peace, that peace just isn't there.

And so they run after all the things of the world that they think are going to bring peace into their lives. What brings peace into your life is the grace of God that knows beyond a shadow of doubt, God loves me. He saved me. I'm his. And nothing's going to change that.

I'm his. Right? Now, the next five verses are another kind of common sort of a thing that you would find in some letters, they particularly have Jewish roots. And this is where, after Paul has blessed his

audience, he then speaks a word of blessing toward God. So he says this in verse three, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

And you're going to notice, as I'm sure you already have, that comfort dominates this section of Scripture. He goes on to say who comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we can comfort those who are in any going through anything, with the comfort that we ourselves are comforted by God. And he goes on to say for as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, we're going to talk about that. So through Christ, we also share abundantly in comfort. So he says, if there's afflictions going on in our lives, you know, the intent is that it would be for your comfort and salvation.

If we're comforted, well, that's also for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you, he says, is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you'll also share in our comfort. So Paul gives this blessing that focuses on three kind of dovetailing ideas. And I'm going to put these on the screen one at a time. And the first idea that he gives is that the sufferings of Jesus carry over to us.

And this is when Paul wrote in verse five, that we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, he was telling us that there exists a spiritual union between the believer and between and Jesus. And, and that is something that cannot be broken. If you're in Christ tonight, you are tied to him, you are connected to him. And just as he suffered, you will suffer. And this is expressed clearly by Jesus in John 15.

Let me show you this on the screen. John chapter 15. He says, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. Does that give you comfort? If he says if you were of the world, well, the world would love you.

Because they recognize you and say, yeah, you're one of us. But he says, because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you. Well, we just answered a lot of questions why some people don't like you. It's because you belong to Jesus. Yeah.

And you have a particular aroma to you, we find out elsewhere in the New Testament. And you are actually you are the aroma of life. But to those who are perishing, it smells like death. It's crazy, sort of a paradoxical sort of a deal. But Jesus says in these verses in John, that he's articulating this connection between you and him.

And he says, listen, if people end up hating you, just remember, they hated me first. And Paul also wrote to Timothy talking about this connection to the way we live. Let me show you on the screen from

2nd Timothy. Paul wrote, he said, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. He doesn't say might, doesn't say they might, maybe happen.

No, he says they will be persecuted for living a godly life. And why is it that just living a godly life is going to get you persecuted? Because the world is going to recognize you as something other than their own. And they don't like people like that. The next thing Paul communicates in these opening verses is we'll put the next point up on the screen.

And that is that God comforts us when we suffer. And that really was the message that he gave in verses 3 and 4. He refers to God the Father as the Father of mercies. Did you catch that? He calls him the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions.

Right? What is Paul saying here? Guys, he's saying that God is the source of compassion and comfort. Let me ask you a question. When you're upset, when you're anxious, when you're struggling, and you need comfort, who do you turn to?

Or what do you turn to? Because Paul tells us here that our God, this Father of mercies, is the God of all comfort, all comfort, not just some, but all comfort. So we should always go to him, shouldn't we? I mean, it just kind of makes logical sense. We should go to him.

And we should probably go to him first. I want you to notice what the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah up on the screen concerning this comfort. He writes, as one whom his mother comforts, so the Lord speaks here to Israel. He says, I will comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. And even though this word here that you're seeing on the screen is directed toward the inhabitants of Jerusalem, it tells you something about the heart of God.

It tells you something important about God's heart, that he longs to comfort his children. He wants to reach out and comfort you. Right? Jesus, you know, also expressed this desire to comfort. There's a passage that talks about, you know, Jesus was overlooking the city of Jerusalem.

And he started to weep. He started to cry as he was looking at the city of Jerusalem. Let me show you on the screen what he said. It's from Luke 13. He said, Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.

Look at this. Read this. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you are not willing? Why does a hen gather her brood under her wings? You know, comfort, to bring comfort and protection.

And Jesus is now expressing that heart of the Father, how I longed to comfort you, to bring you in, to hold you close, to speak words of comfort over you. But you wouldn't, you wouldn't receive it. And then finally, Paul makes one other statement in these opening remarks. We'll put this last one up on the screen, and it's the third one there. And that is that we comfort others with the comfort we have received.

And so he's saying that just as we are united with Jesus in His sufferings, so also we are united with one another in our shared sufferings. And later in this letter, I'm giving you guys a bunch of previews of coming attractions here. Paul is going to share a time when the Lord brought comfort. Let me show you this from chapter 7. We're going to skip ahead to chapter 7 on the screen.

Paul writes, but God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by His coming, but also by the comfort with which He was comforted by you, as He told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. So Paul is now relating. He told them now in this first chapter that our God is the God of all comfort. Then he gives them an example of when the Lord comforted him. So these comforts sometimes come through other people or other circumstances.

So that's my next point. When you are expecting the comfort of the Lord to come your way, or when you call out to God and say, Lord, I need your comfort, will you accept His comfort however it comes? It might come through someone like, you know, who brings you good news, whatever, whatever the comfort may be, whoever it comes. You might read a passage in the Bible, and you're comforted. You might hear a Christian song on the radio, and you're comforted.

Somebody might just say something to you in passing, and you're comforted. And that's the comfort of the Lord. In our study of Romans, we saw how the apostle gave us specific direction of how to render comfort. Do you guys remember? Let me show you on the screen.

From Romans chapter 12, remember he said this? He said, rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. And that's one of the ways that we render comfort to one another. And it's not, you know, rejoicing with those who rejoice, that's fairly easy. It's easy to be happy around somebody who's happy.

What's challenging is to be sad when somebody's sad. And you're really not sad personally, but they need to be comforted. And you know, sometimes some of the most powerful comforts that come our way come from people just expressing their own heart of grief, you know, about what's going on in our lives.

Yeah. Anyway, the bottom line is that God's comfort meets us at the point of our greatest need, and we should look to Him.

We should look to Him for our comfort, and then we should turn and extend that same comfort to those around us. Speaking of suffering, Paul is going to go on now in this first part of chapter 1 to tell of a specific time of difficulty. And so he's giving another example. And it was a very intense time of difficulty. And I want you to know that in these following verses, 8 and following, Paul is going to give us some of the most powerful insights about enduring suffering and difficulty that are, I believe, in the whole Bible.

So pay attention. Verse 8. Paul says, For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of our affliction, of the affliction, rather, we experienced in Asia. So that would be in Ephesus, in that area, okay? Look what Paul goes on to say.

For we were so utterly burdened, beyond our strength, that we despaired of life itself. What is Paul saying in that? I mean, it's a rather poetic language as far as the ESV renders it. But what Paul is saying is, it was way beyond our ability to endure. And he says we despaired of life itself.

That means we longed for the release of death. I don't know if you've ever been there. I don't know if you've ever been in a situation where it was so bad, you prayed to die. Because that would have been better. That would have been preferable.

But that's what Paul is saying. He says it was way beyond, it was way beyond us. And we despaired of life. Look what he says in verse 9. He says, indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

In other words, he said, not only did we want to die, we thought, this is it, we're going to die. We are going to die. And again, I don't know if you've ever been there. You've ever thought, this is it, I'm gone. I'm heading out, you know?

But then he goes on, and he says, but that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. Oh, mercy. I mean, it's almost like, wow. But you know, we learned a good lesson from this, he says. Yeah, we went through a situation that was way beyond our ability to endure, right?

And oh, and by the way, have you ever heard somebody say, God will never give you more than you can bear? It's a lie. It's not in the Bible. That saying is not in the Bible. The Bible says he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear.

But when you are tempted, he'll provide a way out. The Bible does not say that God will not give you more than you can bear. Paul says right here, we were burdened beyond our strength. Actually, the NIV

says we were burdened beyond our ability to endure. So if that saying was true, Paul got ripped off here on this one, because he's telling you right here, it was way past my ability to tolerate or endure that sort of a situation, way past.

But you know what he says? We learned something important. We learned that we can't rely on ourselves. We got to rely on God who raises the dead. And that's an important little statement there at the end.

And that's what we learned, right? So we wouldn't rely on ourselves. You know what? Can I just say, that's the Christian life. I don't know how long you've been a believer, but I'm just going to tell you, for the rest of your days, God is going to teach you one very important lesson over and over and over and over again, and it's not to rely on yourself.

That's kind of the lesson of life. And He'll bring things into your life, He'll allow things into your life that will remind you again that you can't do that, because it'll be too much. By the way, Paul's going to say a lot more about this in the coming chapters, so stay tuned. But notice what he says in verse 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. And you can hear the confidence, can't you, in Paul's writing there? He says, hey, He delivered us in Asia, and you know what? We have every confidence that He will deliver us again. And you might say, that's great.

I like that. I'm going to adopt that same attitude. God delivered me. And you know, I mean, the fact that you're sitting here tonight in church means that God has delivered you so far from everything you've come up against, right? Otherwise, you wouldn't be here.

And you know, it's great to say, you know, and He will deliver us. He will deliver us. But there's something you need to understand about deliverance, at least as it relates to the way the Apostle Paul understood it. You ready for this? He considered death deliverance.

Yeah, you need to know that. And the reason we know that is because when he wrote to Timothy in his second letter, which by the way, in that letter, he said two very interesting things. Let me show you on the screen. First thing that he said was, for I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. Now that's Paul, and he, by the way, he refers to death as departure, because it's, you know, you are departing the body, and your spirit and soul go to be with the Lord.

So that's the term. So there you go. But you can see what Paul is saying here. He's telling Timothy, it's time, it's time. I know that I'm not going to get out of this one, this fix, and so forth.

But I want you to, later on in that very same chapter, let me show you what he said about that. He said, the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. In other words, the final deliverance will be the Lord taking me into His kingdom, His never-removed presence, and His never-ending kingdom. That will be my final deliverance. And you know, that's our lives.

We go through, we go through situation after situation after situation in which the Lord delivers us until He finally does the ultimate deliverance, you know? And you depart, and you go to be with the Lord. And sometimes, even as Christians, we talk about that. about that ultimate deliverance as a failure. And people will say, you know, we prayed, you know, we prayed for my Uncle John or whatever, you know, he was sick and we prayed and we believed and we called upon the Lord and he died, you know.

Well, was Uncle John a believer? Yeah, but you know. You know, if you could talk to John right now and you'd say, hey, would you like to come back? He'd go, ah, no way. I'm good, right here, in the presence of the Lord.

That's not a failure. If the Lord takes somebody home, that's not a failure. You know, in another part of the New Testament, Paul talks about death. He says, you know, he says, I'm not really sure if I'm gonna go to be with the Lord or stay, but he says, I think I'm probably gonna stay because you need me to stay. But he says, I'll tell you what, and I'm paraphrasing this, if I had my druthers, I'd just go to be with the Lord because he calls it, listen, better by far.

He calls departing and being with the Lord better by far. Right? Now, we don't think that way. Even though we have these things in the New Testament, we just, they don't permeate our thinking sometimes. So, finally, Paul asks in our last verse that we're looking at here tonight, Paul asked for prayer.

He says in 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. So, in addition to seeing the obvious that Paul is asking in this last verse that we're looking at tonight for prayer, we also see here that something also very important, and that is Paul believed in prayer. You don't, there's something very interesting about prayer. People will do something, or they will invest in something if they think they're gonna get a return for their investment. If I came to you and I said, hey, I got a deal for ya.

Now, I know I would never do that, but if I came to you and I said, I got a deal for ya, and it's an investment opportunity. You give me 50 bucks, and in a month, I will hand you 500. And I said, it's 100%

guaranteed. And if you believed me and believed me to be a person of integrity about financial dealings, you'd probably dole over 50 bucks, you know? Why?

Because you believed you'd get something out of it, right? I've always looked at prayer the same way. Prayer is, it's an investment. It's an investment in the kingdom. It's an investment in your life.

It's an investment in your marriage. It's an investment in your family. It's an investment in your culture. It's an investment in your nation, state, city, and so forth. Your church, you know?

So how's the investment going? Are we investing our time in prayer? You know, you guys know, I pastored for 35 years over in Ontario. Whenever I would have a prayer service, I knew it was gonna be the smallest service that we would have in a given period of time. I knew it.

I knew we'd get the least amount of people. I believe that there is a chronic disbelief in the power of prayer. And I believe that the reason Paul asked the Corinthians to pray for him is that he believed that it was going to make a difference. I mean, why else waste your breath? I get a lot of, you know, a lot of people struggle with prayer.

I have even confessed over the years that prayer, consistent, ongoing prayer has been a challenge for me. I believe in the power of prayer, but it's also been challenging. But I get tons of questions from people. Let me show you just a few of them on the screen. Very common.

Why should we pray if what God wants to happen is going to happen anyway? That's a very common one. How about, what good does prayer really do anyway? And can prayer change God's mind? These are interesting questions, but they show up on a fairly regular basis.

And frankly, people's questions betray their lack of true biblical understanding of what prayer is and what it's for, to be honest with you. Because we're not praying to change God's mind. In fact, God even says in the scriptures, I'm not a man that I should change my mind. I can think of three good reasons to pray. You ready?

One, Jesus prayed. That's a pretty good one. I mean, I kind of think Jesus is an authority on stuff like that. And he prayed, and he prayed a lot. He would often pray all night long.

Have you ever tried praying all night long? It's really hard. I did it one time. And it was a long time ago. I was in my 20s, and I thought, I'm up for this.

And I invited, I was an assistant pastor at this church in Montana. And I went to the pastor and said, how do you feel about me having an all-night prayer service? He goes, hey, knock yourself out. He didn't come. He stayed home and went to bed.

But I got a bunch of people that kind of got jazzed about it. And so, we had prayer, we had a little bit of worship time, and we started praying. And boy, I tell you, and it's great for a while, but you start getting up to midnight and past. And I can't remember how late we got. We probably got around two or three o'clock in the morning.

And I started realizing that my prayers weren't making any sense. You know, how your mind, it's kind of like you go into dreamland while you're praying. It's like, and Lord, the car is red, and I needed bath. And it's like, oh, wait a minute, that doesn't make any sense at all. And I realized I was saying ridiculous, nonsensical things.

So I called it, I went up to the group, and I said, that's it, go home. And they all were like, okay. But it was hard, and Jesus did it often. Another good reason I can think to pray is that Jesus told us to pray. In fact, he taught us to pray.

And I don't believe the Lord's prayer was meant to be recited verbatim. I believe he was giving us guidelines for prayer. But that's a side issue. And then thirdly, the Bible exhorts us to pray. We're told throughout the course of Scripture, you know, to pray.

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, look what he says up on the screen. From Colossians chapter four, he said, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Guys, we're supposed to be steadfast. I can tell you right now that there have been a lot of times in my life when I would probably get an F for being steadfast in prayer, but I want to get better, don't you? And then I love what Paul wrote to the Philippians in Philippians chapter four.

He said, don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, and that's important, let your requests be known to God. But I want you to notice they're requests, they're not demands. We don't demand that God do things, we request. Lord, here's my request. But you know, Jesus taught us that the most powerful prayer that we can pray is not according to my will, but your will be done.

And so we make our requests. And you know, I gotta tell you, quite frankly, the questions that I get about prayer usually come from someone who has been disappointed by God because they prayed for something and they didn't get what they wanted, and so they got disappointed and they gave up. And that's

really common. But many people forget that prayer is more than just getting what we want from God. I've always told people, don't treat God like a vending machine that you walk up to, you put your faith coins in, push the button, and boy, I better get what I want, or I'm gonna write a letter to the manager.

That's not how God works. He's not a mindless vending machine. He has a will, he has a purpose, he has a plan. We bring our requests to him, but we don't come to him just simply to get what we want. Guys, praying is about aligning our hearts with God.

Praying is about seeking his face. Praying is about discerning his will. Lord, I wanna know your will. If all we do with God is come before him and kind of treat him like our divine Santa and give him our wish list, and then... and run out the door, we've short-changed ourselves because what we forget sometimes is that prayer is about fellowshipping with God.

You know, this is something that really caught my attention when I was teaching through the Old Testament and God was going through the different sacrifices that the people of Israel were to bring before him. One of the sacrifices was a fellowship offering. And that's what God called it. It was a fellow, and you know what a fellowship offering was? It was basically you bring an animal and you sacrifice some of it to the Lord and you cook the rest of it for yourself.

And it's kind of like God inviting you to a picnic or to a barbecue, and you're gonna hang out with God and we're just gonna fellowship. You know, it's a fun way to fellowship with people. Hey, you wanna come over? We're gonna put some ribs on the grill, you know? And we'll just sit and talk and we'll just get to know each other.

And that fellowship offering is this picture of what God wants to have with you and me. He wants to have fellowship. He wants you to know him. He wants you to know his heart. He wants you to get acquainted with his heart.

He wants you to hear his voice. That's a hard one. Because we live in such a busy, chaotic world. We rarely take the time to quiet our hearts before the Lord, to really hear him. That still, small voice.

But you know, there's something about just spending time in his presence. Even if you're not praying, you're just in his presence. Like, go for a walk and just say, Lord, I'd like you to come with me, please. And we're just gonna hang out. And I don't need to say anything.

I mean, if you wanna talk, that's your business. But if you don't, that's fine too. We'll just, let's just be together. I'd like to just hold hands and go for a walk with you today. Because I need your presence.

It's like nutrition, spiritually speaking, you know? Learning to rest in him. Learning to enjoy him. You know, it's been said that God created mankind that we might enjoy him. Do you enjoy your time with God?

I'm gonna end tonight with a quote from one of my favorite authors, A.W. Tozer, up on the screen. He says, the Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into him, that they may delight in his presence, may taste and know, I love this, the inner sweetness of the very God himself in the core and center of their being, their spirit. You know, the Bible says that. It says, taste and see that the Lord is good.

Do we ever take the time to taste? And you know, that word taste is an interesting word to inject there because it speaks of an experience, having an experience with God, you know? Lord, I want to experience you. I don't think that's a wrong thing to pray. In fact, I think that's something that really would bless the Lord for you to say to him in prayer.

Lord, I want to experience you. I want to experience what you're all about. I want to know your will. I want to know your heart. I want to know your purpose.

I want to experience what it is to know the joy of fellowshipping with you. We tend to limit things like joy to our personal circumstances. I'm joyful if things are going well, but have you ever experienced the simple joy of simply sitting in the presence of God and feeling his arms around you, embracing you, and affirming his love for you? I tell you, it's a life-changing experience. It's a life-changing experience.

And if you have an experience, don't get down on yourself. Just ask, because I believe he longs to do it. I think he longs to show us how much he loves us. Let's pray. Oh, Heavenly Father, thank you for these first 11 verses of 2 Corinthians, so much here to look at, so much to think about, so many challenging things, so many convicting things, as we are reminded of our intense need for who you are.

And Lord, I pray that as we go from this place, that we would be challenged to take these things to heart and to really think about them and to pray about them. Lord, I wanna turn to you first when I need comfort. I wanna turn to you to know the joy of your presence. I wanna experience you. I wanna have a greater expectation that my investment of time in prayer is gonna make a difference.

Lord, I wanna know you. I wanna know your love, your goodness, your mercy. And Lord, I want to understand grace in all of its fullness so that I might walk in the peace of the confidence that comes from you. We thank you and we praise you for your incredible goodness, Lord. In the name of Jesus, we pray all of these things and all God's people said together, amen.