

# **BaptistWay Bible Series for October 16: Use your difficulties to help others**

October 4, 2011

As a pastor, hospital visitation is a part of my vocation. When entering the hospital lobby, I may greet the volunteer behind the desk with a “Hi. How are you doing?” That is a common greeting. When I arrive at the patient’s room, I no longer have to ask, “How are you doing?” I assume the patient in bed has a physical problem that has led them to being in the hospital.

The Apostle Paul did not have to ask the Christians in Corinth how they were doing. He knew they were facing troubles. He knew everyone in this life faces problems and hardships. The letter of 2 Corinthians begins with Paul’s usual greeting of “grace and peace” (v. 2). He combined the Hebrew idea of “peace” and the Greek concept of “grace” into one greeting. More than that, Paul genuinely wanted the Corinthians to experience God’s grace and peace.

## **The character of God (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)**

God’s grace and peace bless life. God blesses the lives of believers by acting with compassion and extending comfort. This comfort should not be misidentified with the idea of being comfortable. God does not seek to bless everyone with a recliner or a chaise lounge. Instead, God brings comfort or encouragement to those facing troubles.

Who faces troubles? Everyone. It is unrealistic to believe life’s troubles can be avoided. A brand-new car will one day break down. A new washing machine will at some time fail to wash. A new computer will malfunction at some point in time.

God does not act in such a way as to supernaturally protect us from all of life's troubles. Many believers have this expectation from God. It is incorrect that if a believer lives obediently to God and his word, then he should protect them.

I call this attitude a Road Runner mentality. Road Runner always was being chased by Wile E. Coyote. Nothing ever happened to Road Runner. He never fell off of a cliff. He never was snared by a trap. He never was caught in a bomb explosion. He lived a blissful, even blessed, life.

What every believer must realize is that Road Runner is not real. He is a cartoon character. Life is not a cartoon.

God knows the troubles life brings and extends comfort. This comfort is not an end in itself, but should motivate those who receive his divine comfort into comforting others.

Here, life's troubles take on purpose. They open an avenue for God to comfort, and the one receiving God's comfort can extend that comfort through ministry to others in need (v. 4).

Paul explained the encouragement he received from God enabled him to minister to the Corinthians (vv. 5-7). Thus, a by-product of the cross of Christ was comfort for those who suffer.

We have a savior who understands our sufferings and brings comfort and encouragement to us. When we suffer, we share the sufferings of Christ (Romans 8:17). We also can experience his comfort, and this comfort we are to pass along to others who are suffering.

### **The character of suffering (2 Corinthians 1:8-11)**

Paul knew suffering is real. He had faced hardships in the province of Asia (v. 8) along with his companions. These hardships are not described in the passage, but it is known Paul already had experienced being imprisoned,

beaten, whipped, stoned and left for dead. The experience Paul described in verse 8 left him on the brink of death.

It was at the point of death that Paul and his companions realized they could not help themselves. They needed God to work, and God raises the dead (v. 9).

God's ability to raise the dead brings hope to all who suffer and face troubles. If God can deliver someone from one problem, then he will be able to raise that same person out of the next hardship.

Everyone faces hardships. These hardships enable you to minister to others facing hardships. If you are facing a hardship now, persevere with patience (v. 6) knowing God is at work. He will redeem your situation to the point where in the future you can comfort others facing problems.

Do not fall into the temptation that suffering presents. Suffering tells us to focus on our pain, our troubles, and our anguish. It wants us to think only of ourselves. Instead, let your suffering be of benefit to others. Pray for those who are facing hardships, and let them know that you are praying for them. What an encouragement it is to know another person is praying for you (v. 11). In turn, you need to encourage others through your prayers.

In these verses, Paul did not explain the problem of suffering in life. He did, however, show how suffering can be redeemed by Christ and be used for the mutual benefit of the body of Christ which is the church.