

RISKING ALL FOR LOVE**Suffering, Comfort and the Power of Prayer****2 Corinthians 1:1–11**

*“For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives,
so also through Christ our comfort overflows.” 2 Corinthians 1:5*

Introduction: 2 Corinthians is a letter written to the church (located in modern day Greece) that Paul had previously established. After founding the church, Paul returned for a second time to address someone in the church who had seriously offended him. The visit did not produce good results and caused Paul great sorrow. Subsequently, Paul heard of genuine repentance in the church and 2 Corinthians is written to express his thanksgiving for this, but also to confront those in the church who are challenging Paul’s authority.

Day 1: Read 2 Corinthians 1:1–2.

1. Paul begins his letter by identifying himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus” (vs.1). What were the criteria to qualify one as an apostle?

_____ Acts 1:22b, 1 Cor. 15:7–8
 _____ Matt. 10:1–7

2. How was Paul eligible to be an apostle? (Acts 26:12–18) Who commissioned him with this apostolic authority? (vs. 1a; Gal. 1:1) If one rejects the truth and relevancy of Paul’s message, who is actually being rejected?
3. How is the fact that Paul is an apostle important in light of what is going on in this church? (2 Cor. 11:3–5; 13)
4. To whom is this letter written? (vs. 1b) In what way are the people in this church saints? Are they especially virtuous? (Read Eph. 1:3–8; 2 Cor. 3:18.)

Day 2: Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.

5. In verse 3 how does Paul take the traditional Jewish blessing of God used in the synagogue—‘Blessed art thou, O Lord our God and God of our fathers’—and reshape it? Why might this have been important in light of what the false ‘apostles’ were preaching? (2 Cor. 11:4)
6. In these five short verses how many times can you find the words trouble(s), distressed or suffering? How many times is the word comfort(s) employed? What might this show us about what is on Paul’s heart as he writes this letter?
7. Although Paul was particularly called to participate in the “sufferings of Christ” (Acts 9:16), what are the afflictions Jesus himself forecasted for *all* those who follow him? (See Jn. 15:18–20.)

Day 3: Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.

8. Rather than promising instant relief from suffering, what two facets of God's character does Paul emphasize to encourage this Corinthian church and Christians throughout the ages? (vs. 3)
9. Because God's character is unchanging, what does he do in the midst of Paul's suffering that He will surely do in the midst of ours? (vs. 4; Ps. 46:1-2; 94:17-19; Is. 49:13)
10. What is one of God's sovereign purposes both in our suffering and in the comfort he showers on us? (vs. 4) Share a time when due to your own suffering you were able to fulfill this purpose.
11. As we allow the comfort of God's presence to envelop us in our suffering, and as we trust in God's purposes, what does God develop in us? (vs. 6)

Day 4: Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

12. What were the two lessons Paul learned as he felt the "sentence of death" (vs. 9) looming over him? (vss. 9-10) Are you in the midst of a situation where you are suffering for the sake of Christ, or simply suffering as a result of living in a fallen world? Pray that God would give you faith to learn these two lessons in your own life.
13. Whether Paul had lived or died, what was the source of his hope and comfort? (vs. 10; Ps. 33:18-22; 1 Pet. 1:3-5)
14. Think through the last 24 hours; how might you have lived the day differently if you were truly placing your hope in the hands of a God who has assured your future and has promised to work everything for your good in the present? (Rom. 8:28) Consider sharing your reflections with your group.

Day 5: Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

15. List some of the open and honest phrases Paul uses as he asks for prayer from the Corinthian church. (vss. 8-9) What are some barriers that prevent you from requesting others to pray for you when you are going through difficult times?
16. Paul ends this passage (vs. 11) as he begins it (vs. 3), with an emphasis on the power of prayer and thanksgiving. How does giving thanks to God for who he is and what he does (especially in the face of adversity) demonstrate a complete reversal of a sin-sick heart? (Rom. 1:21)
17. Expand on the effects corporate prayer has on lives. (vs. 11) Who do you feel receives the greatest blessing through corporate prayer? Why?