

How To Turn Buffetings Into Blessings

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

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In 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, Paul said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation...” or “comfort” “...also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.”

Verse 8, “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead...” Paul said that because of what we went through, we can learn to trust in God who is raising the dead “...who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.”

One of the hardest things to endure in life is when you become the target of malicious gossip. It's not easy when people lie and malign your character. Paul the apostle was experiencing just that with the believers in Corinth. False teachers had come into the church and were accusing Paul of not being an apostle, because he was suffering. They assumed that if he truly was an apostle, he wouldn't be suffering, he wouldn't be sick, he wouldn't be going through troubles and trials!

Paul was going to argue just the opposite. He was going to say that the mark of his apostleship was his sorrow, suffering, troubles and tribulation. As a result, Paul was able to minister to the Corinthians and encourage them.

This reminds me of the word-faith, health-and-wealth, prosperity teachers today, who say if you had enough faith, you wouldn't be sick, you would be prospering financially and you wouldn't have afflictions. They are false teachers. That's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible says that “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

So false teachers had infiltrated the Corinthian assembly and questioned both Paul's integrity and apostolic authority. They attacked Paul in those two areas. Paul's enemies bare their fangs, but Paul bears his heart. 2 Corinthians is the most autobiographical of all of his letters. It is the epistle of his open-wide heart.

I want to point out some of the sufferings he mentions. In verse 4, he used the words “tribulation” and “trouble.” In verse 5, he used the word “sufferings.” In verse 6, he used the words “afflicted” and “sufferings.” In verse 7, he again used the word “sufferings.” And in verse 8, he used the word “trouble” again and used the statement “burdened beyond measure” and “despaired even of life.” They didn’t even think they would survive.

So as Paul explains his sufferings, we learn how to turn our buffetings into blessings. Eleven times in our text you find the word “comfort” or “consolation.” God is our Comforter and brings us comfort.

I want to point out four things you need to remember or do, if you’re going to turn your buffetings into blessings. They are very simple but not simplistic. Number one, when you are being buffeted and going through suffering, remember who God is. Verse 3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” It’s not just some comfort, but “all comfort.” “All comfort” comes from God.

Whenever we pass through the fire, when we pass through difficulties or adversities, God always wants to reveal Himself to us. John Bunyan, who spent so much time in the Bedford prison and wrote the spiritual classic, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, said that in times of affliction, we most commonly meet with the sweetest of experiences of the love of God. I agree. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” God wants to reveal Himself to us in our time of sorrow and suffering.

I want to point out three things we can learn about God when we go through suffering. First, we know and learn that God is to be praised or God is to be blessed. We get our word “eulogy” or “eulogized” from it. Verse 3 says, “Blessed be the God...,” so this is actually worship and praise on Paul’s part.

Paul was going through a lot of trials and troubles. Yet he started out saying, from his own lips, “Blessed be the God....” So when you are suffering and being buffeted, don’t forget to bless God and worship Him. He is worthy of our praise (Psalm 145:3). When Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison, at midnight they were singing praises to God (Acts 16:23-25).

If that was me in jail, I would have complained and said, “Thanks a lot, God! I’m not going to serve you ever again!” But Paul and Silas worshipped and blessed God. So God is worthy to be praised.

It’s easy to acknowledge the blessedness of God when life is easy. It takes a tender, yielded spirit to confess with Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). You look through your pain and begin to praise God because of who He is. He is the God who is worthy to be blessed and magnified.

Second, we find out that God is merciful. In verse 3, God is called “the Father of mercies.” That means that all mercies come from God. He is the source of mercy. “Mercies” is in the plural, showing that God’s mercies are available in all kinds of difficulties. I like Lamentations 3:22-23,

which says, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed....They are new every morning." God's mercy is called manifold, tender, great and "new every morning." David said, in Psalm 103:10-11, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him." He is the God of mercy.

Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. When we go through a trial, we may say, "Aw, I deserve better! I deserve a better job! I deserve a better house! I deserve a better wife! I deserve a better husband!" What we all do deserve is hell. So don't gripe and complain. If God gave you what you deserved, you'd be in hell right now.

He is the God of mercy, and His mercies "are new every morning." How wonderful that is! He is "the Father of mercies."

Third, we learn that He is the "God of all comfort." What great, two titles for God: "Father of mercies and God of all comfort"! Compare that with the pagan's view of God; that He is a God of judgment, anger, wrath and must be appeased. That's not the God of the Bible. Sometimes people say, "The God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, anger, judgment and hellfire." No; it's the same God in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. There is only one, true and living God. In the whole Bible, God is "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."

Roy Lauren said, "There are two, great human needs met by these two areas, the greatest, divine provisions. Man is both a sinner and a sorrower. He needs mercy for his sin and comfort for his sorrow." I like that. We need mercy for our sin and comfort for our sorrow. Jesus died for our sins and rose for our sorrow. He's the God of all comfort.

For the Father, in verse 3; God the Son, in 1 John 2:1, which says, "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"; and the Holy Spirit, in John 14:16, where Jesus is speaking and says, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper" or "Comforter" or "Paraklétos" in the Greek, which literally means "with strength." That means that God doesn't just pat us on the back and say, "Now, now; don't be upset." It means that He comes alongside of us to strengthen us, to help us, to enable us in need. Notice, in verse 4, that God "comforts us in all our tribulation." I like that. So whatever we're going through, we have the Paraklétos, and we have the Word of God.

His Word and the Holy Spirit through His Word, His love poured into our hearts to comfort us and other people, the body of Christ. He uses His Word, His Spirit and His people to come to comfort us, strengthen us and help us.

So number one, when we go through times of difficulty, adversity and we're being buffeted, remember who God is. We sing the song,

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,

Look full in His wonderful face,

And the things of life will grow strangely dim,

In the light of His glory and grace.”

Remember to “Be still and know that I am God.”

Number two in the steps we need to take to turn our buffetings into blessings is to remember to comfort others, verses 4-7. Don't just wallow in self-pity. Get busy giving to others what God has given you. It is God “who comforts us in all our tribulation....” We're going through the thrashing in our tribulation. This is not the great tribulation that follows the rapture of the church. This is the tribulation from the world, the flesh and the devil that all Christians encounter. And notice the word “that” in verse 4. This is the reason God comforts us in tribulation: “...that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” Comfort comes to us from God, so that we can share it with others who are in need of comfort.

Starting at verse 5, “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us....” This is not to atone for our sins on our part; “Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe.” It is through our identification with Christ that we suffer in a hostile world. So we are suffering for Christ's sake. “So our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation.” Paul is saying that the reason he is suffering is not because he isn't an apostle; it's because God wants him to be equipped and prepared to be able to minister to the Corinthians and others, who are going through a time of suffering and difficulty.

So if they are afflicted, “It is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.”

Why does God comfort us? Verse 4, so that we can comfort others with the comfort God has given us. We are not comforted to be comfortable but to be comforters. There are so many people in the world today who need comfort. They need someone to come alongside them, put their arms around them, encourage them and strengthen them. We need more Barnabases in the church of Jesus Christ. There are so many suffering and so few comforters. God works in us, so He can work through us. There is comfort in the Psalms. Someone said, “David dipped his pen in the ink of affliction.”

If you want comfort, you go to somebody who has experienced comfort. Have you ever gone to someone with a problem that is tearing at your heart and you need encouragement, but they look at you like, “What's your problem?! I can't believe you're freakin' out over that! Get your act together”? You'd want to smack them. If I'm going to someone to bear my sorrows, I want someone who has had sorrows. If my heart is broken, I want to go to somebody who has been brokenhearted, so they can help heal me. What God has done for them, He can do for others. What He has done for others, He will do for you. That's so important.

A preacher by the name of George Matheson said, "Despise not the school of sorrow, O my soul. It will give you a unique part in the universal sorrow." I like that.

When Joni Eareckson Tada speaks to encourage the saints, I listen. In 1967, she dove off a platform into a lake. It was much shallower than she thought, and she hit her head that broke her neck and injured her spine. She became a quadriplegic for all these many years.

I think about some of the things I go through physically and have to endure, but then I think of Joni. "A quadriplegic year after year!" It's no wonder that when she speaks, my heart is blessed. I can't help but listen to her and weep to see the grace, strength and blessing in her life.

Out of brokenness comes blessing. God has to break us to use us, so we can comfort other's hearts. There are times when people come to me and say, "Pastor, my daughter/son was killed in an automobile accident this week." I can't tell you how many times I've said, "You see that man over there in the gray shirt? I want you to introduce yourself to him." I tell them his name. "I want you to share with him what you're going through."

I send them to that person, because I know that he has lost a child the same way. They have gone through the very same thing and have come out the other side. They can share with you what God has done in them. The comfort they were comforted with they want to be able to comfort you with. It's wonderful when God uses our sorrows to be a blessing to other people.

As Christians, we should be comforters. Not like unbelievers; they avoid the trials of life, so they can't comfort anyone else. But if you have been comforted, it's your obligation to be a comforter to others. We can't heal our sorrows by nursing them; we heal them by helping others in their sorrow.

Number three in the things you need to remember or do, if you're going to turn your buffetings into blessings, is to remember to trust God, verses 8-10. We are to remember who God is, we need to remember to comfort others and we need to remember to trust God. And not to just trust God but to utterly, totally, completely trust in God.

Verse 8, "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble..." he wanted them to know what they were going through "...which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure..." or "under great pressure "...above strength..." or "beyond our ability to endure "...so that we despaired even of life." Paul doesn't give us any specifics of their troubles, but there was a great riot in Ephesus, which he could be alluding to. Needless to say, it was a very severe trial. You talk about having a bad day! Paul was going through it. It was beyond their ability to handle it. They "despaired even of life."

The result is in verse 9: "Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves..." they thought they were going to die "...that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead." Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" or "guide your steps." Don't lean on your own strength, your own understanding, your own ability.

I like the fact Paul said that they had to go through these things, so they would learn not to trust themselves. That's so contrary to the philosophy of the world. The world says, "Believe in yourself, trust in yourself, be strong, be courageous, you can be whatever you want to be." The Scriptures say no; we shouldn't trust in ourselves, but we need to trust "in God who raises the dead."

If God can raise the dead, He can be trusted. He can give us spiritual life by raising the dead. He regenerates us and gives us life. He raises us physically by giving us a new body and raising us from the dead, so we can trust in the Lord.

When I say we should trust in the Lord, I want to point out three things that we need to remember in light of this. First, in verse 8, God is in control of our trials. Paul uses the phrase "which came to us." It came to them through and by God's allowance. The idea is that God was in control and God is sovereign, so the trials had to be filtered through His love, grace and mercy. Nothing can come through your life as a Christian that God has not first been aware of and allowed for your good and for His glory. That doesn't mean that it is good in and of itself, but God can turn it and use it for our good and for His glory.

Speaking of the fact that God is in control of our trials, Warren Wiersbe said, "When God puts His children into the furnace, He keeps His hand on the thermostat and his eye on the thermometer."

Aren't you glad God doesn't put us in the oven and forget about us? Sometimes my wife will put something in the oven and tell me she has to go on an errand. "When you hear the timer, can you take the food out and turn off the oven?"

"No problem." About a half hour later "Ding!" "What was that? That's a weird noise!" About 20 minutes later, the fire department pulls up to our house. Smoke is coming out the windows! "Oh, I forgot!" I'm so glad God doesn't do that. God keeps His eye on us. He keeps His hand on the controls.

Second, not only is God in control, but He helps us bear our trials, verse 9. "We should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead." It's another way of saying, "If He can raise the dead, He can take care of your problem." Trust Him completely. Trials are meant to bring us to the end of ourselves. We don't have the resources, the strength or the wisdom. We must trust in the Lord with all our heart (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Third, God will deliver us. I like verse 10, which says, "...who delivered us..." past tense "...from so great a death..." probably referring to what he went through in Asia, in verse 8 "...and does deliver us." He looked around at his present circumstances; God has taken care of them. Then Paul looked ahead: "...in whom we trust that He will still deliver us."

God said in Jeremiah, who is called the weeping prophet, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). That's not prosperity; that's faith and trust in God. Whatever we pass

through, He will be in control of. He will be working. He knows what He's doing.

How wonderful it is to be able to look back—and sometimes I have to force myself to do this—and remember all the times the Lord has provided, guided, protected and taken care of me. Isn't God good? And I look around at all the blessings God has given me. Then I look forward and realize He's the God who has, the God who is, the God who has the will to yet deliver me, provide for me and take care of me.

Number four of the things we need to remember to do to turn our buffetings into blessings is to remember to pray for others who are going through suffering, and remember to give thanks to the Lord. Verse 11, "...you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift..." some kind of grace endowment or gift of the Spirit "...granted to us through many." Maybe the gift was a prayer or financial gift or simply the comfort they gave to Paul.

God delivers us through but not always from our trials. God put Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into a fiery furnace, but He delivered them through it; the Lord was with them. The Bible says that Peter was delivered from a prison (Acts 12), but James was beheaded and went to be with the Lord. So God does not always deliver us from, but He delivers us through. How does God do that? By people in the body of Christ, Christian brothers and sisters, praying for one another.

I've been on a campaign lately to solicit people to pray for me. Pray for me, especially on the weekends, Friday and Saturday, as I'm prepping for the preaching on Sunday. It seems that often the devil wants to show up at the pastor's house and attack. Pray for strength, for wisdom, for health, that I stay in the Word and keep my focus on Christ. And you can also pray for me the rest of the week. If Paul can ask for prayer, John Miller is asking for prayer. I know that through your prayers, God will answer on my behalf.

And I am praying for you. I wake up a lot in the middle of the night and pray for our church and pray for the people of our church and for those who are going through suffering, going through trials, going through difficulties. I pray that God would comfort them, that God would strengthen them and that God would help them. Paul says that they pray for them, "for the gift granted to us through many." As a result of their prayer, God answers and God is praised.

So we pray for others, because it brings glory to God. Preacher George Matheson said, "You cannot cure your sorrow by nursing it, but you can cure it by nursing another's sorrow." I like that.

By way of summary, number one, remember who God is. Let God reveal Himself to us. Keep your eyes on the Lord when you're going through suffering. Number two, remember to comfort others. Don't get introspective. Don't just wallow in self-pity. Find someone else who needs to be encouraged and comfort them. Number three, remember to trust in the Lord. I just plead with you as God's people: trust in the Lord! He will not forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). He will not let you down. Number four, remember to pray and give thanks.