

# Understanding the Storms of Suffering and Loss

## INTRODUCTION:

- I. Sooner or later, every one of us will come face to face with a severe trial that will bring us to our knees and may even shake our faith to its very foundation.
  - A. For some, those trials are still in the future. For others, those trials have passed. But for some, you may be going through a trial at this very moment.
    1. When we encounter these storms of suffering or loss our hearts become overwhelmed with emotions and feelings.
      - a. We will begin to wonder, "Why me?" "Why this?" "Why now?"
    2. Understanding the storms of suffering and loss is not an easy task to accomplish.
    3. Because, when we encounter these moments in our lives we're forced to deal with REALITY – we're no longer able to live in denial.
      - a. We may have seen the storm coming on the horizon, and kept hoping it would somehow pass us by.

- b. But when the gale-force winds ramp up to hurricane force, and our sails are shredded by the fierce winds, we're no longer able to live in denial.

B. The one thing we all have in common at moments like this is SUFFERING and a sense of impending LOSS.

1. These storms can come in all forms – from a life-altering injury, disease, terminal illness, and death, to the loss of a job, or financial bankruptcy, or scandal, or even a family splintered into a thousand pieces by divorce.
3. It's times like this that we look toward heaven, straining to see some break in the clouds that will signal calmer waters are just ahead.
4. But if the storm clouds remain black and threatening, we strain to see some purpose, some design, some reason for all we're encountering.

II. Fortunately, the Bible gives us a glimpse of these storms from God's perspective.

A. The Scriptures allow us to see the unseen – they allow us to see the presence of God and the work He does when our life becomes overwhelmed with SUFFERING and LOSS.

1. Once passage of scripture is found in the opening remarks of the apostle Paul's SECOND letter to the church at Corinth. In fact, it's a passage I read Wednesday evening when we were talking about prayer.

a. **2 Corinthians 1:1-11** – *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 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. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 6 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. 7 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. 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.*

*9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, 11 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.*

2. Let's take some time this morning to look more closely at these words of Paul – a man who endure so much suffering and loss in his life – so that he can help us to understand the storms of suffering and loss that sweep into our lives.

**BODY:**

- I. This letter begins with warm words of introduction, written by a man whose authority as an apostle had often been called into question.
  - A. He begins by affirming his credentials as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

1. **2 Corinthians 1:1** – *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:*
  2. Paul identifies himself "*an APOSTLE of Jesus Christ*" – from the Greek word "a-pos-to-los" which literally means "one sent forth."
    - a. It was used to describe that unique first-century individual who had been appointed by God and endowed with spiritual gifts to speak as an oracle of Jesus Christ.
    - b. There were only twelve men who had been specifically chosen and appointed by Jesus as apostles.
    - c. Even though Paul was not one of the twelve, he was still an apostle. He had been specially appointed as an apostle "*by the will of God.*"
- B. With those formalities out of the way, Paul greets these saints warmly.
1. **2 Corinthians 1:2** – *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
  2. "*Grace*" is a key word in the vocabulary of the apostle Paul.
    - a. It pertains to those things God does for us which we don't deserve and which we can never repay.
  3. And coupled with "*grace*" is "*peace*" – freedom from inner distraction and trouble.

4. Grace and peace don't come from ourselves – no matter how positive our thoughts may be – nor does grace and peace come from others.
    - a. They come only from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- II. From this introduction, Paul launches out into the storm of suffering and loss to give us understanding and hope.
- A. The first thing Paul wants us to know is that we're never alone when these trials come sweeping through our life.
    1. **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 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.*
    2. The word "comfort" literally leaps off the page. In fact, Paul uses the same root word TEN TIMES in FIVE VERSES (comfort, comforted, consolation).
      - a. The word comes from the Greek "parakletos" – which is from the prefix "para," meaning "alongside," and the root "kaleo," meaning "to call."

- b. In other words, comfort and consolation comes from someone who is called alongside to help – like rescue boat that responds to the call from a sinking vessel.
  - c. The word is also used as another name for the Holy Spirit:  
**John 14:16-17a** – *"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper [Comforter], that He may abide with you forever — 17 the Spirit of truth..."*
- 3. When the storms of tragedy strike and we are in danger of perishing, that's when we cry out to God.
    - a. That's when we need comfort.
    - b. That's when we need someone to come alongside – to be there, to listen, to help.
  - 4. Though God is silent during those times, He's always there. He's the "Parakletos" – the *"Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."*
- III. But Paul doesn't simply assure us that God comes alongside during our trials, the inspired apostle goes one step further. He explains why we suffer. In fact, Paul specifically mentions three reasons.
- A. The first reason we experience suffering and loss is so that we will be able to comfort others.

1. **2 Corinthians 1:4** – Paul says God is: *The 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.*
2. When His comfort has done its work in our lives, then we, in turn, become a source of comfort to others.
  - a. God uses our experiences of suffering and loss to bring comfort to others going through similar circumstances.
3. No one can offer comfort in times of trial and loss more than someone who has experienced the same thing in their own life.
4. This is why Paul adds:
  - a. **2 Corinthians 1:5-7** – *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 6 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. 7 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.*



- b. God uses our suffering and loss, and the subsequent comfort He brings, so that we can bring compassion, counsel and comfort to others.
  - c. In other words, we become the very lifeline God uses to rescue others who are drowning in the storms of their lives.
5. However, Paul goes even one step further in explaining this unique purpose for suffering and loss.
- a. He shows this is not just some theological theory, but provides us with an example from the deadly storms he encountered in his own life.
  - b. **2 Corinthians 1:8-9a** – *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. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves...*
  - c. The word "*despaired*" in verse 8 means "to be utterly at a loss," "to be in the depths of depression and despair with no way out," "to be in an oppressive situation from which there is no escape."

6. Although Paul doesn't specify what the *"trouble"* was that overwhelmed him in Asia, it was so severe that Paul was standing on the brink of death – where he *"despaired of life."*
  - a. This means Paul had become convinced that his own life, and the lives of those with him, were about to end, and there wasn't a thing he could do about it.
  - b. He was trapped, with no way out – facing the certainty of death.
  - c. This is why he adds: **2 Corinthians 1:9** – *Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves...*
- B. But it was at this moment that Paul understood another purpose for suffering and loss – that we should not trust in ourselves.
  1. **2 Corinthians 1:9-10** – *Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us...*
  2. Paul understood that intense suffering and loss is designed to remind us of our utter helplessness – for it's when we are the most helpless that we are the most dependent.
    - a. Solomon also reminds us of our limited understanding and helplessness.

- b. It's only when we finally realize that we are helpless to save ourselves that we turn to One who can: **Proverbs 3:5-8** –  
*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. 8 It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.*
3. One of the reasons we don't depend on God more is because the wisdom of the world has taught us to be self-sufficient, independent, to stand on our own two feet, to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps!
4. But the fact remains that sometimes we face storms so HUGE and so DEADLY that there is NOTHING we can do to save ourselves.
  - a. That's when we MUST call for help – that's when we MUST empty ourselves of our own arrogant pride and sense of self-sufficiency and reach heavenward for help.
5. The bottom line is, we experience suffering and loss so *"that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead."*
6. If God has the power to raise the dead – to give life and health to a dead body, as He did when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead –

then God has the power to deliver you safely through any storm you may be encountering in your life.

C. But there's a third reason for the overwhelming trials we experience – namely, that thanks may be given.

1. **2 Corinthians 1:9-11** – *Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, 11 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.*
2. It's not until we come through these deadly storms of life that we truly learn to be thankful.
  - a. We not only learn to thank God for being the "Parakletos" – the "*Father of mercies and the God of all comfort,*" and...
  - b. We not only thank God for teaching us to depend on His strength and to "*not trust in ourselves,*" but...
  - c. We also thank God for the prayers of others on our behalf that played a major role in seeing us safely through the storm.

## CONCLUSION:

- I. Centuries before the apostle Paul penned this letter to the church at Corinth, a prophet of God walked among the disobedient and rebellious citizens of the southern kingdom of Judah and the capital in Jerusalem.
  - A. His name was Jeremiah – often called "the weeping prophet" because he spoke and wrote with such passion and emotion.
    1. In his writing known as "The Lamentations of Jeremiah" the prophet laments – grieves over – the destruction that came upon the city of Jerusalem because of the wickedness of the people.
    2. He had given warning after warning about the impending doom of the city at the hands of the Babylonians in his prophecies found in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah.
    3. But now that destruction had come, he weeps for Jerusalem.
      - a. **Lamentations 1:1** – *How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow is she, who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces has become a slave!*
  - B. But despite all the sorrow, suffering and loss that he and the people of Judah felt over the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of her people, Jeremiah offers a ray of hope.

1. **Lamentations 3:26-33** – *It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. 27 It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. 28 Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him; 29 Let him put his mouth in the dust — there may yet be hope. 30 Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach. 31 For the Lord will not cast off forever. 32 Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. 33 For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*
    - a. Jeremiah told the people of Judah that they deserved the suffering they were experiencing, and that they needed to "*sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on*" them.
    - b. But then he adds: "*the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*"
- C. When we go through the storms of suffering and loss, we tend to think we must have done something to bring all this upon ourselves.
1. And sometimes that's true.
    - a. The Hebrew writer reminds us, as he quotes from Proverbs:  
**Hebrews 12:5-6** – "*My son, do not despise the chastening of*

*the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;  
6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every  
son whom He receives."*

- b. When our suffering is the result of our own actions, then we need to simply bear it, knowing that God is chastening us as a father does the child whom he loves.
2. But sometimes the suffering and loss we experience are not the result of sin and rebellion, but come into our lives for other purposes – such as:
    - a. To prepare us to comfort others.
    - b. To teach us to depend on God and not to trust in ourselves.
    - c. To help us to learn to be thankful for the prayers of others.
  3. But, despite the REASON for the storms we experience of suffering and loss, we need to remember Jeremiah's words – because they are just as true for people who DESERVE the chastening of the Lord, as for those who do NOT deserve the trials they are enduring.
    - a. **Lamentations 3:31-33 (NIV)** – *For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. 32 Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. 33 For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.*

4. We don't always know HOW the Lord will show compassion on us through His unfailing love – we just know that He will.
  - a. The Lord may show us compassion by bringing us THROUGH the storms of life so that we sail calm seas once again.
  - b. Or the Lord may show us compassion by bringing us TO HIM in heaven, so that the storms of life are gone forever more.
  - c. Either way, God will extend, "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" **(2 Corinthians 1:2)**
  
- II. Take a moment to think about everyone who is here this morning.
  - A. I can assure you that some of us are:
    1. Unaware of the storms of life that are forming on our horizon, or perhaps we're facing gale-force winds of a storm that is gradually worsening, or we're in the middle of the worse storm of our life.
    2. Unfortunately, these storms are inescapable – if we're not facing one now, we will be some day.
  
  - B. Now, try to imagine what it would be like going through those storms of suffering and loss without God by your side.
    1. Without Him and the help and comfort He brings, you simply will not survive the storm – at best, it will destroy your peace and



happiness and bring devastating loss into your life, or at worse, it could destroy your faith.

- C. Therefore, if you're a faithful Child of God and in the midst of the most devastating storm you've faced, know that God has come alongside as YOUR Father of mercies and God of all comfort.
  - 1. In His own time and in His own way, He will bring you through everything you're now experiencing.
  - 2. Take comfort in knowing He's standing by your side every moment and going through this ordeal with you.
  
- D. However, if the storms are still on the horizon – now is the time to make preparation.
  - 1. If you are NOT a follower of Jesus Christ, you need to become one now – while there is still time – by coming to Christ in faith and obedience, being baptized for the remission of your past sins.
  - 2. And if you are not a FAITHFUL child of God, you need to make preparation by repenting of the sins in your life that stand between you and the God of your salvation, and by confessing those sins to God so that the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse you from all sin.
  - 3. Or, if like the apostle Paul, you simply need prayers on your behalf for the storms you're facing, then let that be known now.