

Suffering is a normal, to be expected, part of the Christian life.

- John 16:33 (NIV)- ...“In this world you will have trouble.”...

For the Christian, suffering is never meaningless or arbitrary; God always has a purpose.

- Romans 8:28 (ESV)- “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (ESV)

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who 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. ⁵For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶If 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. ⁷Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Context:

The Corinthians did not understand suffering. They wanted / expected glory and so they could not understand why the Apostle Paul was suffering, and why they were suffering. Thus, Paul writes to encourage them, and to explain what the purpose of their suffering is.

Part of God's purpose for our suffering: To increase the experience of our...

I. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

- God of *ALL* comfort (v3)→ God is completely able to comfort us in every single circumstance of life.

- Paul has been comforted in *ALL* of his afflictions (v4)

2 Corinthians 11:23b-28 (NIV)- ^{23b} I have... been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

- In and through his sufferings, Paul got to experience the deep comfort of God (v5)

II. FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER

- God comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we can bring that comfort to others in any affliction (v4)

- Not just sharing suffering, but sharing comfort (v7)

- Christ is the guarantee that we will all share together in comfort (v7)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that for the Christian, suffering is never meaningless or arbitrary? Why or why not?
2. Have you personally experienced the comfort of God in the midst of suffering? If so, share about the experience. If not, why do you think that is? Are there other things that you turn to for comfort in the midst of suffering?
3. Are there ways in which you can actively seek to bring comfort to others who are suffering in ways that you have suffered?
4. Do you firmly believe that God can and will comfort you in all of your afflictions? Why or why not? What can help you to firmly believe this?