

## 2 Cor 1.8-11 – Trusting God in troubles

Clint Le Page

Main Point – God uses pressures to grow our trust in him, in answer to prayer.

I said last Sunday, I think most of us want a comfortable life – we want a life free of pain, and full of happiness.

Yet usually we don't get that.-----

We're shocked and disappointed when we get pain, suffering & stress in life.-----

I have seen suffering turn some people off God –**(SLIDE)** 'Why would I believe in a God who allows suffering in the world, when he could stop it?'

And I have seen people who professed to be Christian, turn away from the Lord, when suffering hit hard – making them question God's goodness.

The question of '**Why God allows suffering**, or ordains it?' is a huge one, that many people grapple with.

I'm sure many of you, or those close to you, have asked or struggled with that question.

**Dostoyevski** was a Russian writer.**(SLIDE)**

In 1849 he was arrested as a conspirator, and sent to a hard-labour camp in Siberia.

Dostoyevsky described his barracks, where they were housed at night:

In summer, intolerable closeness; in winter, unendurable cold.

All the floors were rotten. Filth on the floors an inch thick; one could slip and fall...

We were packed like herrings in a barrel... There was no room to turn around. From dusk to dawn it was impossible not to behave like pigs... Fleas, lice, and beetles by the bushel...

Dostoyevsky had his hands and feet shackled until his release 4 yrs later. He was only permitted to read his New Testament.

Dostoyevsky was a formal Christian when he left Russia, but his suffering led to his conversion, and a new deep conviction.

He went through periods of doubt but came to experience real faith in Christ.

He came to believe that God put him in the hard labour camp because he had hard lessons to learn. He knew there was a purpose in it.-----

I cannot tell you WHY you are suffering now.

Scripture doesn't give a perfect explanation for each person's suffering.

But Scripture gives us some answers, and our passage tells us some things.-----

And I'm convinced Christianity has the best answers, as we grapple with complex questions in a messy world.-----

Remember what's going on in 2 Cor.**(SLIDE)**

One of the key challenges Paul and the progress of the Gospel faced in Corinth, was the cultural pressure to impress – to look good, sound good, and enjoy the good life here and now.

As Gary Millar puts it, the apostle Paul's ongoing battle was to persuade the church to listen to him, stick with him, as he promised comfort in suffering now, and future glory to come, through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Every visit and every letter was about helping them to hold onto what they have in Christ.-----

The Corinthians were tempted to think that life and ministry is about success, giftedness, honour and impressiveness.

Yet here Paul tells them of how he was falling apart and facing death, and he encourages them from his suffering.

Paul wants to help them see there is a purpose in suffering now, but there is also hope beyond suffering.-----

We'll look at vv8-11 with **these 4 questions(SLIDE), What, Why, When and How?**

**Firstly, What? In v8, what suffering did Paul experience?**

'We don't want you to be unaware of the affliction that took place in Asia'.

Remember from v4 last week, 'affliction', describes pressures, things that weigh on you and make you suffer.

And he'd just mentioned 'sufferings' in v7.

Scholars suggest that based on the likely time line, this may refer to Paul's suffering in Ephesus in **Acts 19**.

For over two years Paul preached the Gospel in Ephesus (Acts 19.10). Heaps of people turned from idols to faith in Christ, and the idol-makers lost business.

Demetrius makes a formal complaint and gathers support against Paul. **(SLIDE)**

A mob forms, the whole city is impacted

And the enraged mob may have killed him.

Then in Acts 20v3 the Jews are after him.

We don't know for sure, but these events may make Paul say, we were 'completely overwhelmed' – beyond our strength, we even despaired of life itself.

Paul felt so weighed down.

He lost all hope of living, n' thought he'd die.

So sure of that, that he felt he'd received the death sentence, **v9**.

This goes against the prosperity Gospel of perfect health, wealth and happiness. For even the apostle didn't get that.

Paul felt his life was over and just awaiting execution.-----

The RSV puts it well **(SLIDE)** – 'we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.'

I'm sure some of you know what that is like – to feel pressured, crushed, out of strength, even despairing of life.-----

What affliction are you facing at the moment?

Maybe you're feeling weighed down by sin, and feel you can't escape it?

Maybe you're struggling in ill-health or hardship of some kind?

Maybe it's a struggle in a relationship, or with singleness, or relentless stress from something?

Paul knew what it was to be completely overwhelmed.

Yet he still believed that God was at work for his good.

Let's come to the **next question, Why?**

**V9**, Paul's saying, we felt the death sentence, we felt there was no hope we'd live beyond this. But this happened, 'so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead'.

They were in a situation where they couldn't rely on their own abilities, creativity, or efforts. Their only source of salvation was God.

They felt they were going to die, but God can bring even the dead back to life, can't he?

God raised his Son from the dead, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, he'll raise all his people on the last day, and he can save even now.

God can turn things around, God can change circumstances, and do what seems impossible. Yet sometimes, often, he doesn't, or not straight away, because he has another purpose.

God was using those circumstances to rid Paul and his companions of any lingering tendency to self-reliance, self-salvation.

And it is just as true for us.

Rather than retreating from all suffering, avoiding it all costs, we must see it teaches us to put our trust in God.

God plans to use your suffering to help you run out of your own strength n' self-reliance, so you are forced to rely on Him.-----

God wants you to rely on him, the God who raises the dead.-----

The crushing hand of God can lay us low.

Many of you know that more than I do.

But it can be to reveal our pride, strip away our self-confidence, help us give-up our self-reliance, and to learn humility and faith.-----

We don't like suffering. We may even see it as a great evil, God should protect us from.

Because we want comfort, and think we deserve comfort, cos I've been a good person.-----  
A woman called **Tanya Ling** wrote a few years back, in Australia we often get a pretty comfortable life, and we're more affluent than most in the world.

[And]...It's easy to forget how much we need God. For the Israelites, this happened when they reached the promised land. After decades of relying directly on God's provisions to survive, they finally made it to a place where there was abundant food and comfort and security - and they began to turn their backs on God. And we can do the same.

Tanya lives with chronic fatigue syndrome, and she testifies that:

'when things are going well I am quick to forget what I learned in the hard times, and leave behind that closeness and reliance on God that I enjoyed. I start trying to be self-sufficient, and stop asking him for his help and provision. If my circumstances are good, my joy begins to come from things other than God. I still read my Bible and pray, but it sometimes feels like just another box to tick off before getting back into my day. Does this sound familiar?

When things are hard (such as when I am upset or stressed, or have a particularly bad time with my health), the difficult situation makes me cry out to God for help and serves to remind me how dependent I am on him. I pray more, I thank him more, and am more focused on trying to live for him.

(<https://gotherefor.com/offer.php?intid=29717&changestore=true>)

What is God's purpose in ordaining your suffering? [Deut 32.39]

Perhaps it is to help you learn to rely on him.-----

Maybe even force you, to rely on him more?-----

God wants you to keep trusting him, even when you're afflicted n' weighed down.

And the Psalms really help us in this.

We read **Psalms 13(SLIDE)**, about David's overwhelming experience.

His suffering went on and on; struggling with anxiety and agony.

He felt God was far away, and not answering his prayers.

And that he was close to death. Like Paul!

Still, he says in **v5(SLIDE)**, But I have trusted in your faithful love;

my heart will rejoice in your deliverance.

David chose to trust, and kept trusting in, God's unfailing love.

And like for Paul it seems, David was delivered, his circumstances changed, and he praises God for his mercy.

But for us as new covenant, Christ-believing people, we also trust, and have more reason to trust, in God's faithful love.

For Jesus has loved us and sacrificed his life for us.(**SLIDE – Gal 2.20**)

If we trust in Jesus, then we will be, forgiven by God, and loved, as a child of God.

And nothing in all creation,(**SLIDE**) nothing you go through, can separate you from God's unfailing, unbreaking, chesed-covenant-keeping love. (**Rom 8.38-29**)

God wants us to believe that. And rely on Him.-----

If you're suffering at the moment I cannot tell you specifically, why.

But God does want you to put your total hope and confidence in him and not yourself.-----

And maybe you're a young person, and you've not suffered much – well feed on this truth, so you can draw on it, on the day you need.-----

When **Paul Tripp(SLIDE)** experienced acute kidney failure and a pain that he'd never known before, for excruciating hours; he thought he would die, and nearly did. He cried out to God for help, over and over.

This was followed by more surgeries, more pain, more weakness, & sleepless nights. And each surgery and trial was a spiritual battle of the heart and mind. Suffering is spiritual warfare.

Tripp writes, physical suffering exposes the delusion of personal autonomy and self-sufficiency. If we were in control none of us would choose to be sick, or experience pain.

None of us likes being physically weak or disabled. Physical suffering forces you to face the reality that your life is in the hands of another. It reminds you that you are small and dependent. It humbles your pride.

He says, my weakness enabled me to admit things I'd never faced before. I'd always been physically fit and able to do things and produce. But suffering exposes what you've been trusting in all along.

Tripp suggests – perhaps we curse weakness because we are uncomfortable with placing our trust in God. Weakness demonstrates what has been true all along: we are completely dependent on God for life and breath and everything else. Weakness was not the end for me, but a new beginning.

So friends, we must learn to lean into weakness; and lean on the Lord.-----

We've considered what Paul went through and why, and **next is When?(SLIDE)**

**V10**, Paul says, God has delivered us from a terrible death, maybe referring to that Ephesian mob seeking to kill him; 'and he will deliver us'.

So Paul was delivered in the past, and he's confident he will be in the future.-----

In Acts 9 the risen Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus and he got converted, trusting in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

And in **Acts 9.15(SLIDE)** Ananias is told some things about Saul, which no doubt, he heard. Saul later called Paul, would speak Christ's name to Gentiles, kings and Israelites.

Paul hasn't yet preached before Kings.

He'll speak to King Agrippa in Acts 25 but he hasn't got there yet.

So maybe Paul was confident God would deliver and spare his life again, until he could do that – fulfil the ministry the Lord gave him.

However, the deliverance Paul ultimately looked forward to, and which we do as well, is resurrection from the dead. As he said in v9.

When we come to Christ, we are snatched from the jaws of eternal death and the gates of hell.

We die to enter eternal life, waiting for the return of Jesus and our new resurrection bodies.

Our ultimate and greatest hope should not be the healing from illness, the remission of your cancer, or depression turning into happiness, or whatever change in circumstances you long for in this life.

Our great hope is resurrection to eternal life, and being with the Lord.(**SLIDE**)

**1 Cor 15.52 and 1 Thess 4.17.**-----

Being rescued to enjoy eternal life in new bodies with God is our hope.

So friends, God will deliver us from our trials too, maybe by bringing an end to them in time, but certainly and ultimately by us our going to be with the Lord.

We often receive get interim deliverances from our day to day problems, but it's always partial. One day instead of helping us cope through our suffering, or rescuing us from it, he will bring us out of suffering to be with him forever.

So if your trust is in Jesus, know that your future is utterly secure in him.

Put your hope in God, brothers and sisters.-----

He has a purpose in what you're going through.

And one way or another, He will deliver you.-----

### **Last question, How?**

How can you ever keep trusting in God and not give up?

How can Paul, how can we, be rescued from an overwhelming situation?----

Paul says in **v11**, it's as the Corinthians, and Christ's people help him by their **prayers.(SLIDE)**

The gift comes through the prayers of many.

How can Christians be delivered from overwhelming situations?

Well God chooses to act in response to the prayers of his people.

The word 'join' means 'join in serving', or 'help together', that is, we don't do it alone.

We serve others by praying together.

That's why meeting to pray together, on Sundays, in prayer meetings, growth groups, prayer triplets, 1-1's, is so important.

God hears and answers the prayers of his people.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5.16)

So when we're in need, it moves us to pray, and to ask others to pray.-----

Even our interim deliverances, the cancer going, the conflict ending, the pain reducing, this often comes in answer to peoples' prayers.-----

In prayer, human weakness casts itself at the feet of God's almighty power.-----

v11 literally says, you help us by your prayers, 'so that many will give thanks on our behalf, for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many'.-----

In other words, answered prayers result in praise & thanksgiving which glorifies God.-----

So what we're told is, maybe like for Paul, God has permitted you or your loved one to suffer, so that many will pray for them. Then if God delivers that person, we'll all be able to say, thanks be to God. To God be glory!-----

This isn't a promise he will always deliver in this life. But we have people in our church who've been healed of cancer in answer to prayer; to God's praise.-----

So pray for those among us who suffer.

Pray for one another as we suffer for the Gospel.

And if you're going through a trial, don't go through it alone.

Don't be too private.

Share your burdens, open up with some, with more people, and seek their prayer support.

How are you going at that?-----

Serve in your weakness by praying for one another, for others going through hardships.-----

I'd like to close with some words from **Nancy Guthrie**, from the Presbyterian Church in America. She and her husband had two children pass away in the first 6 months of their lives, from a rare genetic disorder. She knows grief and suffering.

And Nancy **says in, (SLIDE) I'm Praying for you**, 'Even if we are smart enough to know that "God helps those who help themselves" is not in the Bible, we still sometimes live as if this is gospel truth. Most of us don't enjoy being needy or having to depend on others. We want to come up with and carry out our own solutions to our problems. We want to be strong and capable, and be recognised for overcoming our difficulties. We tend towards self-reliance but God values something else.

Our heavenly Father God works in overwhelming circumstances to cause us to fully rely on him rather than ourselves. It is good for us to realise that God is our only hope.

God uses hardships to teach us to rely more fully on him.

When we come to the end of our rope, the end of our resources, God uses those situations to draw us towards him, to remind us that he values dependence, not independence.'-----

God uses pressures to grow our trust in him, in answer to prayer

So pray for yourself and others, that we will trust God in our trials, and God will deliver us from them, or grow our reliance on him through them.

Let us pray.

And I'm using a prayer from Nancy's book on our passage:

Lord, there are days when we or our loved ones feel crushed and overwhelmed beyond the ability to endure. Help each one to see this trouble as an opportunity to learn to rely more fully on you. You are the God who raises the dead, which means you have power to bring life from death. Show your power in your people's lives in the way you see fit. Amen.