

NO EMPTY WORD:
Confident and Compelled

A Study on 2 Corinthians

by Paula Miles



Presbyterian Church in America

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

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How to Use This Study

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

– 2 Timothy 3:16-17

“They are not just idle words for you—they are your life.”

– Deuteronomy 32:47 (NIV)

Content

God’s Word is breathed out by Him and gives us life. It is through the living and enduring Word that God brings our dead souls to life (1 Pet. 1:23-25) and then continues to nourish us with His life-giving words (Matt. 4:4) as we walk with Him. His Word is written for us, and so it is my prayer that through this study you will grow to love His Word more and learn how to glean from it on your own.

Each Week

Each week you will move through a portion of the book of 2 Corinthians in personal study. You will be asked to carefully read each passage and pray for the Spirit’s help. As you look at the text, you can expect to find three different types of questions:

- **Observation** – This is the *what* of the text. You will be able to lift most of these answers “off the page” and determine what is happening in the passage. Observation is the action or process of noticing or perceiving something or someone carefully in order to gain information.

- **Interpretation** – This is the *so what* of the text. You will be asked things such as what does this mean or why do you think this was said? You may be asked to look at other places in Scripture to gather insight into the text. Interpretation is the explanation of something that is not immediately obvious. We begin to understand at a deeper level what is being said to us.
- **Application** – This is the *now what* of the text. The purpose of Bible study is never just information; it is transformation. By the work of the Spirit, we want to be changed. How will my life look different as a result of being in His Word? Application is putting something into operation, bringing something to bear, using it for a particular purpose. It is implementing or exercising something into our everyday lives. What will this practically look like in my life?

Allow the Spirit to teach you as you spend time in the Word and answer the questions prior to reading the summary found at the end of each lesson.

Memorization: Memorizing Scripture is a spiritual discipline that has been extremely valuable in my life. I am thankful that as a child I was encouraged to hide God’s Word in my heart. (It gets more difficult the older I get.) God has used His Word to anchor my heart and mind on many occasions as I have recalled verses committed to memory. Second Corinthians 10:5 speaks of taking “every thought captive to obey Christ.” Memorization is just one tool for doing that. Joshua 1:8 (NIV) encourages us to “keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night.” Deuteronomy 11:18 (NIV) reads, “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” The psalmist proclaims in Psalm 119:11 (NIV), “I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You,” and Colossians 3:16 exhorts us to allow with no hindrances the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly.

At the beginning of each lesson, you will find a Memory Verse in bold letters. Consider hiding these truths in your heart by committing them to memory each week. Ask someone in your small group to hold you accountable as you seek to make this a regular part of your study of God's Word. I have no doubt the Lord will use this to bless you as you walk with Jesus.

Teaching Videos: These are available for each lesson and may be a valuable resource for gifted teachers as they lead you. As another option, I encourage you to watch these videos after completing each lesson. You may choose to view these individually or with your group. A QR Code with the link to the videos can be found on the next page.

Community

You can walk through this study individually, but I want to encourage you to gather with a group of gospel-friends to learn and grow together. The biblical model of discipleship we read about and see in Scripture is certainly Word-based, but it is also relationally driven. It is the content of the gospel taught in the context of covenant relationships that validates the gospel. It is here that God grows and matures us, and we learn more fully what it means to love, worship, and glorify Him.

Throughout God's Word, He calls us into community. His Story has always been about a people. In addition to your personal study, my hope is that you will gather with other believers to discuss your lesson. You will grow as you listen to the things the Lord is teaching others in your group. Discussion, encouragement, prayer, and accountability should be a part of your meetings. Most of the *so what* and *now what* questions in each lesson have been marked with an asterisk (*). Focus your discussion with your group around these questions.

In Ephesians 4:1-16, we are told that as we place ourselves under Word ministry in the context of relationships, we grow and mature. Growing up essentially means looking more and more like Jesus. As we grow, the body of Christ is built up. We

are healthier and so are our churches. What a joy it is to watch God do this great work of transformation! Be expectant of what God might do as you study 2 Corinthians.



Lesson 1

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11

MEMORY VERSE: But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. – 2 Corinthians 1:9b

Second Corinthians is a letter written to a struggling church with a complicated and somewhat tense relationship with the apostle Paul. After visits and other letters, Paul wrote seeking reconciliation with this church whom he was highly invested in and deeply loved. He began his letter by reminding God's people of who they are in Christ and their connection to other believers in their surrounding community. Paul then broke out into doxology to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (v. 3) and proceeds to share his own experience of God's comfort in affliction. Paul's greeting sets the tone for a deeply personal letter that teaches us much about the heart of gospel ministry.

Day 1 – Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-2

Thank God for His Word. Ask the Spirit to teach you as you study the book of 2 Corinthians. Pray for transformation, not just information.

1. Who wrote this letter, and how did he describe himself?
2. To whom was the letter written?
3. Paul began his letters to the churches with some version of a common greeting. What common greeting is given in 2 Corinthians 1:2?
4. Define *grace* and *peace*.

According to verse 2, where do grace and peace come from?

Take a minute and consider the implications of this common greeting. Pray for grace and peace as you continue your study in 2 Corinthians.

Romans 8:16-17 –

Philippians 3:8-10 –

1 Peter 4:13 –

Day 3 – Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

9. *How have you experienced the comfort of God in your sufferings?

10. *How has being comforted by God in your sufferings enabled you to comfort others?

11. What does 2 Corinthians 1:6 imply about our suffering?

*How have you seen this in your own life and in the lives of others?

12. What word did Paul use to describe his hope in verse 7?

What firm hope did Paul have for the believers to whom he wrote?

16. *What hardships or sufferings are you experiencing right now?

*What hope do you have? What keeps you from believing this hope?

Day 5 – Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

17. How are we helped by others during hardships and suffering? What is the result?

18. *What is our confidence according to this passage?

19. *How are you compelled by these truths?

Lesson Summary

CONFIDENT

God is a God of comfort and compassion.

In the first seven verses of 2 Corinthians 1, the word *comfort* is repeated ten times. This literary device of repetition intends to highlight something important. Do not miss it. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is the God of **all** comfort, full of tender mercies for His people. Because this truth is so glorious, the letter begins with a heartfelt doxology to this God who comforts His children in all their affliction. The text begs these questions: Do you know this God? Is He your Father? This is a God who steps in and stoops down, easing and alleviating our grief and distress. As we, the people of God, His children, experience the mercies of this compassionate Father and “share abundantly” (v.5) in His comfort, we can comfort those around us—it is an overflow of what He has poured into us.

God is sufficient for all our affliction.

The keyword here is *all*—every kind of affliction or suffering. Elisabeth Elliot, a woman well-acquainted with suffering, described suffering this way: “having what you don’t want or wanting what you don’t have.”¹ This definition of suffering has reshaped my thinking and made me more thoughtful and compassionate toward those around me. For some, affliction shows up in traumatic, invasive, and inexplicable pain. I am sure many of you have experienced that kind of suffering. It upends our lives and threatens to crush us. How can we stand? For others, suffering plays out in less devastating ways: a difficult conversation, a broken air conditioner, or a tiresome

job. There is no threshold for God’s sufficiency. He doesn’t withhold His provision, comfort, or care until we are

***He is sufficient for every single affliction—
all of them!***

breathless with pain. He is sufficient for every single affliction—
all of them! His mercies and comfort invade our lives at every turn. He is the “God of **all** comfort, who comforts us in **all** our affliction” (2 Cor. 1:3, emphasis mine).

This is the God who raises the dead.

This declaration of confidence is closely connected to the last, because Paul, who had “despaired of life itself” and “felt that [he] had received the sentence of death,” was relying on the sufficiency of God. However, as Paul made separate proclamations testifying to the absolute, expansive, unbounded nature of God’s power, he himself seemed to be comforted. “The Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (v. 3) is the “God who raises the dead” (v. 9). This is not hyperbole. Confidence in this reality gives us the fortitude to press on in circumstances which seem destined to destroy us because we understand that even in death, we will experience resurrection by the power of God. As believers, we have this hope in our literal, physical death, but we

¹ Elisabeth Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing* (B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 9.

also experience resurrection life—eternal life, abundant life—as we die daily to self and sin.

Suffering produces a reliance on God, not on ourselves.

Paul wrote, “For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. . . . But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:8-9). Through intense pain and affliction, we grow in deep dependence on God. Although this is not compensation

Undergoing pain and grief gives us genuine empathy, the overflow of our experience of God in suffering, and it becomes a powerful balm for our brothers and sisters.

for our loss, it provides perspective, giving us hope that our suffering is not in vain. God is taking difficult circumstances and working them together for our good. “And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for

good, for those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). There are redemptive purposes in our pain which include our deeper trust and reliance on the One who raises the dead.

COMPELLED . . .

. . . to comfort others in their suffering.

Our deep desire to understand why God allows disappointment, heartache, grief, and despair is one of the most challenging and exhausting aspects of life. When suffering comes, one truth, already mentioned, that gives us perspective is our learning to rely on God not ourselves. Without minimizing the pain, another viewpoint from these verses is that God allows these hard circumstances, at least partially, to let us experience His comfort. As we do so, we can share comfort with others even if their suffering vastly differs from ours. We do not have to walk in someone else’s shoes to offer them the comfort we have received from our merciful Father. Undergoing pain and grief gives us genuine empathy, the overflow of our experience of

God in suffering, and it becomes a powerful balm for our brothers and sisters. One author has said, “God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.”² Isn’t that a glorious thought?

. . . to endure patiently.

Because we believe in the sufficiency and power of God to deliver us from any affliction, even and ultimately from death, we can endure suffering. Enduring does not suggest passive resignation but instead carries the meaning of bearing up under strain with unflinching hope. Endurance requires an eye focused on the future and the ability to set one’s mind to what is beyond the current heartache. Suffering is painful and difficult to bear, but it reaps a harvest of discipline, wisdom, and grace that perfects us to minister to the people of God. Do we welcome and seek out suffering? Of course not. But when, not *if*, it comes, we know that God is sufficient and has the power to deliver us. So, we lean in, gaining all that we can from the hand of God to be a source of strength and encouragement to our brothers and sisters.

. . . to understand that we are helped and we help others through prayer.

While we are confident in and dependent upon God’s absolute, life-giving (and taking) power, we are reminded here and throughout Scripture that in some mysterious way, our prayers are often the catalyst for His power to be displayed. Paul certainly believed that the prayers of the Corinthian church made a difference in his ability to endure patiently, continue to hope, and ultimately experience deliverance in his suffering. He ends this section with the assurance that the prayers of this church would result in blessing for those needing deliverance and in thanksgiving to God. It is an incredible truth that our faith,

² John Henry Jowett, <https://www.preceptaustin.org/2-corinthians-1-commentary#1:6>. (call out quote under “Patient enduring”). Accessed April 2025.

informed and impassioned by our encounter with the God of mercies and all comfort, blesses and sustains others as we pray.

Notes:
