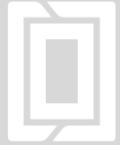


# FROM SUFFERING TO TENDERNESS

I Corinthians 1:3-7

AUGUST 4, 2019 | DANIEL TEETER



*God . . . comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)*

## **BIBLICAL BACKGROUND**

The ancient city of Corinth was a diverse metropolis in the Roman empire. Due to its strategic geographic location for shipping on the Mediterranean Sea, Corinth was a key economic hub and center of commerce. It was affluent and shaped by the wide mix of cultures that merged in this one city.

Though Paul founded the Corinthian church, he had a rocky relationship with them. This diverse community fractured over a number of issues. One was specifically the validity of Paul's apostleship, as he was undermined by a number of other competing voices with differing gospels. Seeing that the unity of the Corinthian church and his ministry to them was at stake, he wrote two epistles to them.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul argues for the credibility of his ministry not by his successes, but by his failures and suffering. God used these trials to give Paul experiences of His divine comfort, which then gave Paul the capacity to love the Corinthians. The consolation that Paul received from God as he suffered enabled him to pass this same care to this church.

## **APPLICATION**

The more we learn of each other's stories, the more common our experiences of suffering seem to be. Behind so many smiles and personal accomplishments lie deep lingering wounds. It is often easier to put our hurts away to be ignored or to find a distraction than it is to feel the pain. Sadly, often the church or the expressions of our faith are the context for suffering.

You might experience rejection from a person you are discipling. Someone in your HUB group breaks confidence. Your child walks away from the gospel.

God promises comfort to His people who are suffering for Him and the gospel. This comfort is described as overflowing, more than enough. It is not the removal of pain and sorrow or necessarily deliverance *from* these circumstances, but is care *in the midst* of these circumstances. The church community is often the means through which God imparts this consolation to us. We can lean into the Body of Christ with our suffering to be loved, accepted and embraced. Deep pain can bring deep intimacy.

Why then can two people experience the same trauma, and one grows pessimistic, resentful and cold, but the other becomes tender, gracious and compassionate? Those who allow themselves to be loved in their suffering become the best equipped to care for others who suffer.

When we face our suffering with “I can take care of myself” self-sufficiency, we deny ourselves the experience of God’s comfort, and our hearts grow hard from our affliction. The brutality of this world has no meaning or significance, so we reject addressing the wounds of our heart and later others’ hearts.

Those who are the most loving are those who are the most willing to receive love. This means that our suffering can enable us to better care for others. It prepares us to minister to others in pain. We do not have to have the same suffering, nor do we need to seek out suffering, but we must have allowed ourselves to be filled with comfort. We are then able to share God’s comfort with them. How can we share if we have never received?

We also must give ourselves time. When we suffer, our hearts need time to be filled with God’s comfort. The person who is suffering and is letting himself be loved is not being lazy or whiny, but doing exactly what he needs to be doing. He is storing up experiences of comfort that he will share for a lifetime. We often short-circuit the process by moving on too quickly or denying or minimizing the trauma. We do not wait to receive and to be filled, and then we end up being unable to minister to others in pain in the future.

## **REFLECTION**

Consider setting aside some time reflect on this topic of suffering. Invite the Lord into this process and consider some of these questions:

- What events or circumstances have caused you suffering?
- When you have suffered, what has been your experience of finding comfort?
- How can you allow someone to love you more in your suffering?
- How does past suffering affect you today?

I pray that you will find God’s comfort in the midst of your circumstances and that you will risk sharing your pain in safe spaces. God will not waste your suffering, but will use it in His plan for you. For now, let others love you.