

Pacesetters Devotional 2 Corinthians 1:3-6

*2 Corinthians 1:3 (ESV) 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 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. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If 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.***

The God of the Bible is not an impersonal force, or a distant authority figure, but a Person who cares deeply about us and delights in comforting us in the midst of our sufferings. How insistent Paul is that there is no suffering – small or large, external or internal, acute or chronic – that is immune to God's abundant comfort!

If this is so, why do we often not experience God's comfort? While there may be many specific answers to this question, the basic answer is clear in the Bible. God's comfort, like all of His blessings, are not earned by our good behavior; they are appropriated by faith. When we lack God's comfort, let us not seek for a deficiency in our worthiness; let us seek rather for a more full-orbed faith in God.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, Paul speaks of several elements of this faith that appropriates God's comfort. It is a faith that is willing to pass God's comfort on to others (1:4,6), rather than hoard for ourselves. It is a faith that is willing to let God lead us into situations beyond our



strength (1:8,9), rather than insisting on controlling our lives. It is a faith that is willing to receive God's comfort through others (1:4; see also 7:5,6), rather than insisting that God always comfort us directly. Each of these insights is worthy of our prayerful reflection.

But Paul speaks in 1:6 of another element of faith that is often overlooked: "(You) experience God's comfort when you patiently endure (your) sufferings." The NASB says: "(God's comfort) is effective in the patient enduring of (your) sufferings." Our experience of God's comfort requires our willingness to patiently endure our sufferings with a humble trust in God. This may sound simple enough, but most of us find this attitude difficult to adopt in practice. Consider some of the alternatives to this patient endurance which seem much more natural to us:

- We may rebel at the thought that God may have good reasons for allowing us to go through this suffering. We know that God does not cause most suffering in the world. We know that God will ultimately eliminate all sufferings when Jesus returns. So we wrongly conclude that God should not allow this present suffering. Many voices in our culture, as well as our own fallen natures, reject the possibility that God can bring great good through our sufferings (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20). How can we patiently endure our sufferings unless we agree with God on this crucial truth?
- We may resort to illegitimate pain-reducers to alleviate our sufferings. Intoxication makes us comfortably numb. Distraction keeps us focused momentarily on more interesting or pleasurable alternatives. Anger gives us a sense of empowerment to combat the powerlessness of suffering. For many of us, these pain-reducers were the only way we survived painful childhoods. They helped us to survive – but now that we are God's children, He wants to comfort us when we suffer. But we cannot receive His comfort unless we learn to trust Him, and we cannot learn to trust



Him if our hands clutch on to these survival strategies. Much better to lay these pain-reducers aside and ask God to teach us how to trust Him to care for us.

- We may demand the right to dictate the timing or means of God’s comfort. We may say: “I will trust You with this suffering – but only for so long.” A painful marriage, a wayward child, a ministry disappointment, a physical sickness or disability – we decide that we can only endure such things for a certain period of time. If God’s wisdom prolongs our sufferings beyond our decreed limit, we become estranged from Him and doubt His love. Much better to explicitly affirm that His timing in such matters is perfect, and to ask Him for the help to keep trusting Him.

Likewise, we may say: “I will trust You with this suffering – but You must comfort me in the way that I deem necessary.” We may demand an intense rush of ecstasy, or a miraculous deliverance, or sympathy and encouragement from a certain person. We are free to *ask* God for any or all of these forms of His comfort; He sometimes grants them. But to *demand* them from God is the opposite of patient endurance. Such demands block the comfort that God is extending to us. Much better to say: “Help me to trust You to comfort me in whatever way You deem best.”

To patiently endure our sufferings is to embrace them as means through which a good God is seeking to do good *to* us and *through* us to others. Jeremiah’s words can help us to adopt this faith-posture:

Lamentations 3:21 This I recall to my mind,

Therefore I have hope.

²² The LORD’S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,

For His compassions never fail.

²³ They are new every morning;

Great is Your faithfulness.



*24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I have hope in Him."*

*25 The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,
To the person who seeks Him.*

*26 It is good that he waits silently
For the salvation of the LORD.*

*27 It is good for a man that he should bear
The yoke in his youth.*

*28 Let him sit alone and be silent
Since He has laid it on him.*

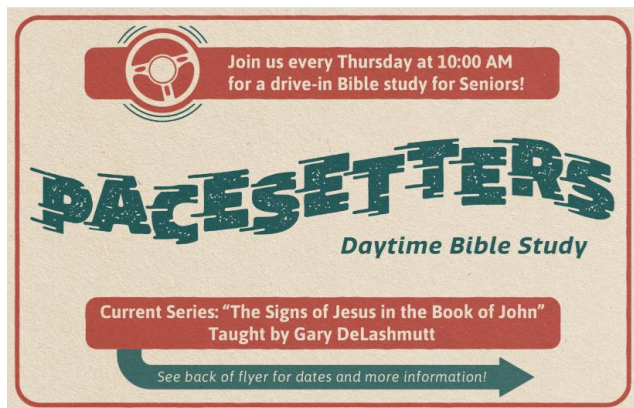
*29 Let him put his mouth in the dust,
Perhaps there is hope.*

*30 Let him give his cheek to the smiter,
Let him be filled with reproach.*

31 For the Lord will not reject forever,

*32 For if He causes grief,
Then He will have compassion
According to His abundant lovingkindness.*

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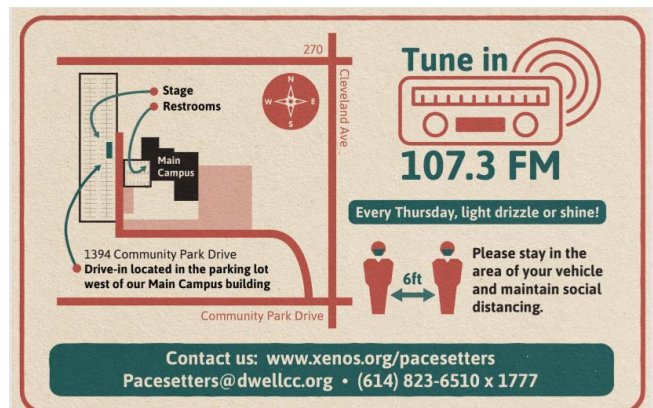


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