**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the small group study God’s Will and the Church. God speaks through His church. One way we see this is through our shared affliction and shared comfort. Paul outlines this in 2 Corinthians 1.

**Introduction:** In his commentary on 2 Corinthians, Kent Hughes tells a rather remarkable story beginning during World War 2 and stretching a few decades later. To be a German in the early 1940s meant that you were either Team Hitler or you were in prison. One of those who chose the latter option was a young man named Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a leader in the Confessing Church—the only church in Germany which stood against Hitler and the Nazi regime. His stance and resistance got him arrested in April of 1943.

After the war Bonhoeffer’s *Letters from Prison* became a best-seller. One of the last letters he wrote was to his fiancé entitled “New Year 1945”. The third stanza reads:

> Should it be ours to drain the cup of grieving, even to the dregs of pain, at thy command, we will not falter, thankfully receiving all that is given, by thy loving hand.

Three months after writing this Bonhoeffer was hung in the prison for his resistance to Hitler. Fast forward some 18 years and a young lady, grieving the loss of her fiancé, found comfort in Bonhoeffer’s poem. Her fiancé, who died from a sledding accident was the son of author Joseph Bayly. Having received much comfort from that Bonhoeffer poem she shared it with her would-be father-in-law who also received much comfort from the poem.

Bayly having been comforted wrote a book of his own poems entitled, *Heaven*. Now fast forward again to the year 1975 when Joseph Bayly received a letter from a pastor-friend who wanted to encourage him that his book was being used by God to help others. He said that he was ministering to a dying woman who had received much comfort from reading Bayly’s book. She would stay awake late at night and read it and find great comfort. In fact the last book that she read only hours before she died was Bayly’s book of poems…*Heaven*. That woman’s name was Maria von-Wedemeyer-Weller. Who would have been known as Maria von-Wedemeyer-Bonhoeffer. She was the fiancé who had originally been the recipient of the “New Year 1945” poem which had comforted Bayly.

This is not a unique story. You’ve probably got your own stories of how comfort has traveled. You’ve likely heard the old phrase “misery loves company”. I think that’s true, but I’d also say that comfort loves company. And maybe the reason why misery loves
company is that we know this about comfort as well. This seems to be what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians 1. God speaks to us through His church. And one particular way we see this is through the churches shared affliction.

1. **We must share in our afflictions because Christ is there**
   In verse 3 we discover that God is the “father of mercies and God of all comfort”. What is that telling us? It means that God is the author…God is the source…of all possible comfort. There is no lasting, meaningful, comfort apart from Him. Paul is drawing the Corinthians into this comfort. There is such unity in Christ and this unity connects us with other Christians. All affliction—even the affliction that comes from us being foolish and sinful—is wrapped up in these sufferings of Christ. He died for our idiocy. He suffered for our stupidity. He bled for our foolishness. He was crucified for our rebellion.

   In verses 5-7 Paul shows them as they share in Christ’s sufferings they also share in His comfort, and when they are comforted they then share that comfort with others. He is drawing them into the sufferings of Christ because he knows that it is here that Christ will be found.

   We talk much about wanting to see Jesus move and see Jesus work. But where does he do that? If you notice the places Jesus is found in the Gospels its usually around hurting and broken people. Paul calls them into his suffering because He knows Jesus is there. We hear God’s voice better in the furnace of affliction. And as the church shares in suffering, she also shares in hearing God’s voice and His comfort.

2. **We must share in our afflictions because others need us**
   When Paul is suffering and when Paul is given comfort it doesn’t terminate with him. Notice this. Look at verse 4. “who comforts us...SO THAT…” that’s a purpose statement. He is seeing in God’s comfort not something primarily for himself but he starts thinking outwardly.

   What if the suffering you are enduring isn’t primarily about you? What if it’s for the sake of another? What if you need to go through something and what if you experience the comfort of Jesus…not simply for your own good and your own benefit but what if it’s for the sake of another?

   You see Paul’s ministry was kind of like that of a woodcutter. He would go into places where Jesus had never been. He experienced some really rough stuff because of this. “Beaten times without number” he says. But what happened so often was that his suffering…and the comfort that he received from Jesus…was kind of like being a woodcutter. He chopped down the brush and made a path so somebody else could build on his work.

   What if you have to do something like this?

3. **We must share in our afflictions because it is a means of hope**
   Notice what Paul is doing in verse 6 & 7 and then again in verse 11. He is calling them to help them through prayer, “so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many”. What he is doing is inviting them into the story of God. He’s inviting them to participate in his suffering and his comfort.

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because ultimately this is the story of the gospel. This will point to God's glory and everyone will see how God works in an amazing way.

This is the power of testimony. Ultimately our hope and the grounds of our faith is not in the story of what God did to change our life. People have stories like that all the time in the world and they have nothing to do with Jesus. You could say the same thing about oils, a new kind of underpants, eating at a new restaurant…all those life-changing things. So the ground of our faith is in a much greater Story. But our testimonies are also powerful because they testify to that bigger Story. We need the stories of one another to grow in hope.

**Conclusion: What is that greater story?**

It is that God is making all things new through Jesus Christ. He is redeeming everything. There is song by Shane & Shane called Though You Slay Me. Awhile back there was a video making the rounds with them performing that song and a snippet of John Piper preaching about God’s comfort in the middle of it. The song comes from a statement in Job.

Job was comforted by God. He shared this comfort. John Piper lost his mother in a horrific car accident. He has been comforted by God through Job. Shane Bernard was going through a difficult season in his life, he was comforted by these same truths. The comfort of Piper and Bernard merged into a beautiful expression of the comfort they’d received. I was going through a difficult season myself and was given great comfort through the song. I shared this with our congregation and shared the hope and comfort I had received. A man and his wife were in our church that Sunday who had just buried their stillborn son. They were deeply comforted. Do you see the cycle?

We need each other to tell the beautiful story of God. You can know God’s will through the work of the church.

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