

“Living an Assured Life in an Un-assured World!”

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Intro. – Some of the world’s greatest men/women have been saddled with disabilities and adversities but they overcame these to be used in a mighty way. Blind her from six months of age and you have the most prolific hymn writer of all time, Fanny J. Crosby. Cripple him and you have a Sir Walter Scott. Lock him in prison and you have a John Bunyan. Bury him in the snows of Valley Forge, and you have a George Washington. Raise him in abject poverty and you have Abraham Lincoln. Burn him so severely in a schoolhouse fire that the doctors say he will never walk again and you have a Glenn Cunningham who set a world’s record in 1934 by running a mile in 4 min 6.7 seconds. Have them born black in a society filled with racial discrimination and you have a Booker T. Washington and a Washington Carver.

We use the above to illus. that life sure can be un-assured sometimes, can’t it? Maybe you’ve been deliberately mistreated, and circumstances have discouraged you, your health broke down or a financial risk did not pan out. And just when you need encouragement, people around you seem totally oblivious to your hurt.

This pretty much summarizes the church at Corinth. It was filled with people who were un-assured. In the first letter, Paul had to confront problems – division, immorality and simple thoughtlessness. After this epistle, matters grew worse. Paul eventually sent Titus to help straighten matters out. Several months, things began to improve. Paul, under God’s inspiration, writes 2 Corinthians to express encouragement to the church to grow and remain faithful. In this letter, Paul emphasized special resources available to Christians who are hurting.

Purpose: to learn four absolute truths with which to live assured lives in this un-assured world

One time or another everyone needs encouragement. This is the key idea in 2 Corinthians. Sometimes this word is translated *comfort* or *assured*. This word is used 29 times in this letter. In spite of all the hardships that he faced, Paul wrote this letter of encouragement. Why? Because Jesus had transformed him... Let’s look at these four absolute truths that will help us live assured lives:

I Adversities Are a FACT of LIFE (vv 1-5)

A. God Meets Our Two Greatest Needs

1. Forgiveness – everyone is a sinner and needs God’s grace – wages of sin paid in full...
2. Assurance – everyone is a sufferer -- suffering is a normal part of every life, including Christians.
 - a. Jesus made clear in this world we would experience trouble just as He did... (Jn 15:18-20)
 - b. 1 Cor 10:13 “...*God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear...*”

B. Culture Thinks It Knows Our Needs

1. “Avoid pain at all costs...” – this is culture’s clarion call today – we should never have to hurt...
 - a. overindulgent parents illus. – try to exempt their kids from every unpleasant experience... “I don’t want my kids to have it as rough as I had it... I don’t want them to hurt...”
 - b. what results some kids don’t know the pain of discipline, the unpleasantness of hard work, or the disappointment in not getting their way... growing up thinking life owes them everything.
 - c. one reason we have present epidemic of drug/alcohol problem = escapism from pain/hurt...
2. Health and wealth gospel = accommodating theology suggesting life CAN be free from pain...
 - a. “gospel” = confess your sins and work for God, you’ll always be happy, healthy and wealthy.
 - b. note: nowhere in Bible told Christian life “bed roses”... exact opposite is the case...

C. This World is Sin Sick

1. Bible teaches us from the beginning that suffering is a natural part of everyday life:
 - a. Adam and Eve disobey God – Eve told: “*I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children.*” (Genesis 3:16)
 - everyone of us here today because our mothers suffered to bring us into this world...
 - b. Adam told “*Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it... By the sweat of your brow you will eat of your food.*” (Genesis 3:17-19)

2. Paul used two examples to show nobody is exempt from pain:
 - a. Jesus – “*The sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives.*” (2 Corinthians 1:5) – from the moment of His birth, Jesus was *acquainted with grief*.
 - b. Paul himself 2 Corinthians 1:8 (read)
 - c. we think the pressures of 21st Century are difficult, look at the 1s Century Christians...
3. Not all trials are God’s discipline of His people – must realize we live in a sin sick world...
 - some people get AIDS because they disobey God’s Word, but other people get AIDS from having a blood transfusion.... – weren’t disobedient, simply living in a sin-sick world...
4. 1 Peter 4:2 “*Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.*” – i.e. It happens to everybody. You are no different.

II Adversities Give OPPORTUNITIES (vv 6-9)

- A. Egotism of Self-Reliance (Drawing Away from God)
 1. We all are egotistical at times – we think we can be *self-reliant* = results in following thinking:
 - a. if we can make just enough money, buy enough insurance, have enough money saved, every future contingency will be covered and we won’t have to depend on God...
 - b. get enough education – establish own guidelines for right/wrong... Bible won’t be needed...
 - c. if we belong to enough organizations, meet enough people and be popular enough, we’ll have plenty of relationships and we won’t need the Church...
 - d. if we can perfect the right medical procedure and have the right pills, we’ll be able to prevent diseases and unwanted pregnancies and we won’t be stifled by God’s restrictions...
 2. Here is the point – Humanism (people relying upon themselves) is so prevalent today... but Paul writes 2 Cor. 1:9 “*...so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.*”
- B. Trust and Assurance (Drawing Toward God)
 1. God occasionally *permits* hardships in life to knock us to our knees to remind us John 15:5 “*...apart from Me you can do nothing.*”
 2. When sufferings come, and they will, it’s important that we turn to God and not away from Him.
 3. Illus. – J. Vernon McGee (Bible commentator) tells when the Principal said to he/friends, “Boys, I know you’ve skipped school to go fishing. I’m going to whip every one of you.” McGee said he was petrified but then an older/experienced friend of his told him, “When he whips you, don’t run – he’ll wear you out. When he whips you, move a little closer to him. He won’t have as much leverage and it won’t hurt as much.” McGee said that was the best advice ever received in his life.
 4. Same principle applies with us – when there’s pain we’re tempted to withdraw, blame and get angry with God. Only intensifies the pain. As tough as it is, the closer we move to God the less hurtful pain is... -- Psalm 48:10 “*Cease striving and know that I am God.*”

III Adversities EQUIPS Us (vv 4, 6-7)

- A. The Reason Behind Adversity
 1. 2 Corinthians 1:4 (read) – so we can identify with hurting people!
 2. If ever lost a child, you can understand the hurt of parents losing a child... If sense marriage takes effort, talk to Harold and Janice Worley who will assure you the effort is worth it!
 3. If you are prone to depression, you can identify with people who are melancholy in spirit... If you’ve ever had a kidney stone you can identify with those who also have...
 4. When we go through hurt, God equips us to identify with others with similar experiences, and enables you to be a help, assurance, a comfort to those going through same experience.
- B. Assurance is Compassion in Action
 1. Illus. – little girl took first aid course. Wks later burst into house excitedly said, “Mom, saw a terrible accident and I got to use my first aid training.” What did you do?” asked mom. “I saw all that blood, I sat down on the curb, put my head between my legs so I wouldn’t pass out.”

2. James 2:15-17 *“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is that? In the same way; faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*
3. Thus, if you have recently or are presently experiencing deep hurt and you don’t understand it, there will be a day when God will use that hurt to comfort/assure somebody else if you’ll let Him.

IV Adversities ENABLES Us (vv 10-11)

A. We Are Being Watched

1. Any kind of difficulty we go through is putting the spotlight on our faith.
2. The world is watching to see whether Christians really are different...
3. A Stephen Brown suggest that for every pagan who undergoes cancer, there’s a Christian who goes through cancer so the world can tell the difference. For every pagan goes through bankruptcy, there’s a Xtian who goes through bankruptcy so the world can see the difference...

B. Seize the Moment

1. 1 Peter 2:11-12 *“I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.”*
2. Every day each of us are given opportunities to testify of our faith/trust in God and His promises. Are we giving the world a reason to draw near to God or to draw further away from Him?

Conclusion: 1971 Andrae Crouch wrote a song that summarizes this message. 2nd verse goes like this:

So I thank Him for the mountains,
 And I thank Him for the valleys,
 And I thank Him for the storms He’s brought me through.
 For if I’d never had a problem,
 I’d never know that He could solve them,
 And I wouldn’t know what faith in God could do.

I ask today, do you know what faith in God can do? Do you turn toward God or away from God when difficulties present themselves to you?

A worker climbed up the superstructure of a tall building under construction. It was nighttime but he had some welding he had to finish. It was damp and he slipped.. He caught himself by his fingertips on a ledge. He tried with everything he had to pull himself up, but he didn’t have strength to do it. He screamed with all his might for help, but the noise of the traffic muffled him. His arms ached and his fingers became numb. Finally, he could hold on no longer, he simply let go, expecting to plunge to his death. What he did NOT know that one foot below him, unseen in the darkness, was scaffolding platforms. He landed safely on a platform...

Maybe you’ve been hanging on for dear life. Maybe you’re going through a hurt and you’ve been desperately trying to pull yourself up and solve it on your own. Isn’t it time to release yourself to the Lord? Isn’t it time to take God at His word and trust Him?!