



# On Him We Have Set Our Hope

Relying on God, Not Ourselves

## **(2 Corinthians 1:8-11 ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup> He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. <sup>11</sup> You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

## Introduction

One question that perhaps every human being has asked—whether a believer in God or not—is why does God allow us to go through periods of suffering? Why do we have to go through seasons of affliction? Why must we experience days of difficulty? Have you ever asked this question?

Isn't it interesting that we are wired to assume that the events of our lives have a purpose?

Christians have the unique blessing of having been given specific promises that the seasons of affliction in our lives indeed do have purpose and meaning. The Bible teaches us that God is sovereign over even the smallest details of our lives and that he intends our good through them, even the most painful of experiences.

**(Proverbs 16:33 ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> *The lot is cast into the lap,  
but its every decision is from the Lord.*

God exercises his sovereignty over even the smallest role of the dice. *"It's every decision is from the Lord."* There is no event, outside the rule of God's sovereignty. He rules over presidential elections and over electrons and protons (even if we are not aware of this).

**(Romans 8:28 ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

For those who love God and are called to his purpose, God works all things for good—all things. Even the hard and painful things. Joseph's summary of his painful life, which included experiencing the brutal betrayal and hatred of his brothers as they sold him into slavery, then later being wrongfully accused and serving prison time for a crime he did not commit, was this:

**(Genesis 50:20 ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

People may intend evil against us, but we have the clear teaching of Scripture is that God is intending our good through it. This is intended to give us deep comfort. If we do not know this, then our affliction and suffering will be wasted. If we do not seek God during seasons of suffering, then we will miss his purposes for us through it. That would truly be a tragedy to go through a season of affliction and fail to slow down and seek the Lord and ask him what he intends to teach us through periods of difficulty.

**Don't waste your suffering.** During seasons of suffering, seek his face with single-hearted devotion. If you are in a season of affliction, then don't let go of God until you know why he has grabbed hold of you. Don't stop seeking him until you know what he intends you learn through the adversity.

There could be any number of reasons for which God might be taking us through periods of affliction. The passage we just read teaches us that one reason that God might lead us into days of difficulties is to rid us of self-reliance.

**Self-reliance is one of the greatest spiritual dangers we face.** This is true for believers and unbelievers. If you are an unbeliever, then self-reliance will prevent you from turning to Jesus for salvation because you'll mistakenly think that you can get into heaven by our own righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

If you are a believer, then self-reliance can deceive you into thinking that you can serve God in your own strength rather than relying on "the strength that he provides"<sup>2</sup> through his Holy Spirit who dwells within you. If we attempt to serve God in our own strength, rather than continually relying on the power of his Spirit, then our service will be lifeless and our efforts in vain.

When we are in seasons of self-reliance, one of the means by which God gets our attention and reminds us of our desperate need of him is through affliction. Affliction is a strong remedy against self-reliance.

## The Reality of Affliction

Affliction and difficulties are an inescapable reality of life in this broken world, but God has good purposes intended for us through them.

(2 Corinthians 1:8-9a ESV)

*<sup>8</sup> For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.*

Paul opens this letter to the Corinthians by making plain to them the reality of his affliction. He wants them to know that life in Asia has been difficult. In fact, far more than merely "difficult." Paul reports, "*we were so utterly burden beyond our strength that we despaired of life. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.*"

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<sup>1</sup> Lk 18:9-14.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Ptr. 4:11.

Paul does not explain the exact nature of the affliction, but he declares *"we were utterly burdened beyond our strength."* He and his companions had faced a situation that surpassed their strength to bear it. They had no strength to endure. They were over-burdened and their own strength was not sufficient to carry the load. Like an the donkey that has strapped to a load he cannot bear, it's too much. Have you ever felt like you were strapped to a mountain you couldn't move?



## Potential Death, Present Depression

Things were so bad that Paul thought he was going to die. He was in state of depression. He said, *"we despaired of life itself."* All hope had faded from him. He was in despair. Paul was thinking that his life was over. *"Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death."* This is an intense place in which to be. All hope had gone, deep depression and despair had come, and he was convinced that he was a condemned man.

Paul was as certain that death was coming as is a convicted criminal who has received the death sentence. Paul felt that he was on death row, awaiting his execution. He has no advocate, no system of appeal, no strength to fight, and no hope of clemency or vindication. The judge had ruled, the sentence had been handed down, and death was certain. This is a place of dark despair. Yet through this darkness, God had Paul's good in mind.

## The Goal of Affliction

God has a goal for this dark affliction, and this is a message for each of us today. God's purpose in the pain was to rid Paul and his companions of their self-reliance.

### 2 Corinthians 1:9b-10 (ESV)

*But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.<sup>10</sup> He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.*

God pushed Paul to the point of death in order to free him from trusting in himself. Self-reliance is so deadly that God will take his children to the door of death in order to remove it from them. This is a very loving thing to do. God will not allow his children to trust in anyone or anything that does not have the power to deliver them. We cannot save ourselves. He will not let us trust in that which will eventually fail us. God will go to extreme measures in order to purge the halls of our hearts from the idolatrous reliance upon self.

God wants our trust and reliance to rest upon him, not upon our selves and this is very good. The reason this is good is because we are weak and he is omnipotent. It would be unloving for him to allow us to trust in ourselves because we will consistently fail to be strong enough to

deliver ourselves from the foes we will face, while he will consistently succeed to deliver us. David wrote,

**Psalm 34:6 (ESV)**

*<sup>6</sup> This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him  
and saved him out of all his troubles.*

**(Psalms 34:19 ESV)**

*<sup>19</sup> Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the Lord delivers him out of them all.*

God does not deliver his children *from* all afflictions, but he will deliver his children *through* all afflictions, or as David writes here, “*out of all of them all.*” It is as God carries us through afflictions that we learn of his power, that he—and he alone—is the only one in whom we can trust. We must walk through these dark doors so that we will discover the strength of his mighty arms. David learned this by the many afflictions through which the Lord delivered him. He wrote, “*It was good for me that I was afflicted...*”<sup>3</sup>

Paul also learned this. He learned this as God “*delivered him from such a deadly peril.*” Paul learned that God was able to carry him safely through the “deadly peril” he endured. He learned that he was not strong enough to deliver himself, but God was strong enough. Therefore, he would put his trust and hope in God and not in himself. Because God delivered him, Paul writes,

**2 Corinthians 1:10 (ESV)**

*<sup>10</sup> He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.*

Paul learned the lesson. God was worthy of his trust. God would deliver him. He had delivered him in the past and he was confident that God would deliver him again in the future. Paul learned the futility of trusting in himself and the blessing of trusting in God. God used affliction to teach Paul trust and hope. Affliction removed self-reliance, and yielded God-reliance. It was through affliction that Paul learned to set his hope in God and God alone. This is where our trust and hope must be—in God and God alone.

If you are an unbeliever, then set your hope in him to forgive your sins and give you life. If you are a believer, then set your hope in him to teach you rely on him and not yourself in order to accomplish his will for your life and ministry. For “*apart from him we can do nothing,*”<sup>4</sup> and that “*with him all things are possible.*”<sup>5</sup> Apart from him, individually and corporately, we will

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<sup>3</sup> Ps. 119:71.

<sup>4</sup> Jn. 15:5.

<sup>5</sup> Mt. 19:26.

bear no fruit. Yet with him, we will bear much fruit and so glorify the Father.<sup>6</sup> On him we must all set our hope.

## Present Affliction

We are currently in the middle of some affliction. I assume by now you have read your email and you have learned that Emanuel Oglice, our Associate Pastor for the Next Generation has resigned. Emanuel has chosen to resign because his understanding of the role and the work of the Holy Spirit is quite different than mine and all the other elders. Both views represented are entirely orthodox and have historic roots within the church of God.

However, given the depth to which we each hold our views—each basing our views upon Scripture—and the practical outworking of those views, it became clear over the past two weeks that it would be impossible for us to continue to partner together in ministry. There is no animosity between us and Emanuel was very respectful in expressed his disagreement. It will not be awkward when I bump into in the grocery store. We have simply agreed to disagree.

Emanuel will finish out the ministry year and we will send him off on Sunday, June 19. We will work with the children's church volunteers to continue that ministry. The volunteer youth leaders and I will take the reigns of the youth ministry going forward into the summer.

We as elders have decided to take this time to begin to discern the Lord's will for next steps and spend some time reevaluating the position. We will be seeking input soon from parents, volunteers, and leaders. We will once again seek the Lord regarding the scope of this position and evaluate whether or not we think the job description should be changed or remain the same.

If you would like to understand more details, first read the congregational letter (copies are available in the lobby), then if questions remain, please speak with any elder.

## The Response to Affliction

What should be our response during times of affliction and during these days? Paul answers that question in verse eleven.

### 2 Corinthians 2:11 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> *You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.*

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<sup>6</sup> Jn. 15:8.

Prayer is the appropriate response to affliction. Paul asks that the Corinthians *"help us by prayer."* Paul believes that if the Corinthians pray, God will respond to those prayers and help will come to Paul. Paul believes prayer matters and he and his companions will be helped by the prayers of God's people.

The result will not only be help granted to Paul, but also many will give thanks when God answers those prayers and sends help to Paul. So there are two results, immediately help for Paul and his friends and God will receive praise when people thank him for answering their prayers.

I invite you to pray during these days. If you find yourself in a season of affliction, then pray to God to send help. And follow Paul's example by inviting others to pray for you and with you. God does not intend for his people to struggle alone and in silence. He intends for burdens to be shared. You must be humble enough to share your burdens with someone and ask them to pray with you. We have people from the prayer team available to pray with you every week at the end of the service. If you're looking for a biblical example on why should invite others to pray with you, then here it is. Invite others to pray with you.

I also invite you to pray for Emanuel, Bianca, Elyza, and the baby girl due to be born in mid-August. We have agreed to keep Emanuel on the payroll through the end of July and keep their health insurance through the end of August which will get them through the delivery. Obviously, these are not easy days for them. Pray for them. Pray that the Lord will lead them to the next of service.

Pray for our children's ministry team, youth ministry team, our young adults, and us as elders as we all begin to readjust to life without Emanuel. Pray that God will help us all and send a great blessing upon us during these days. May we see the hand of God at work among us and give him thanks for his gracious work.

## Conclusion

Affliction is a reality in this broken world. There are many reasons why we experience affliction. One of the reasons why God brings affliction into the lives of his children is to rid us of self-reliance, and cause us to grow in reliance upon him. Difficulty in our lives reveals where our trust hope truly lies.

Affliction exposes the foundation stones of our faith. God's purpose in our pain is cause us to hope in him and to trust in the strength he provides rather than in ourselves and our own strength. God exposes our weaknesses in order that we be strengthened in him. Don't fail to examine your heart during seasons of affliction. Affliction is not merely punishment for bad people, but a call for good people to more deeply trust and hope in the Lord.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>7</sup> During seasons of affliction, God is shouting to us to examine our lives. Don't stop up your ears and refuse to listen to him. We must ask ourselves "Am I truly trusting in him or secretly trusting in myself?" Does the stability of my soul rest soundly in an all-powerful God or in my all-resourceful abilities? Are you content to remain in a constant place of dependency upon God?

Trust in God and dependency upon God is expressed through desperate, earnest prayer. Are you continually crying out to God for strength, wisdom, and guidance? Do you know in the depths of your soul, "Apart from him I can do nothing?"

May we together, during this difficult season, seek the Lord together with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We determine to set our hope on Him and repent if we have any hope in ourselves. Affliction teaches us that we cannot hope in any human person, but the one who hopes in the Lord will never be ashamed. We will rely on Jesus, and not on ourselves. In him we will set our hope.

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<sup>7</sup> C.S. Lewis, [\*The Problem of Pain\*](#) (New York: HarperCollins, 1940/1996), 91.