



Part 3: Surviving Stress and Sickness

Second Corinthians is the most autobiographical of the Apostle Paul's letters in the Bible. He's very honest about his life of trouble, and very inspiring about where he finds hope.

"We don't want you to be ignorant, brothers, about the hardships we suffered." 2 Cor. 1:8

• Pressure

"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure... we despaired even of life. In our hearts we felt the sentence of death." 2 Cor. 1:8b

• Stress

"...hard pressed on every side..." 2 Cor. 4:8a

• Confusion

"...perplexed..." 2 Cor. 4:8b

• Sickness

"...outwardly wasting away" 2 Cor. 4:16

• Disrespect

"...genuine, yet regarded impostors..." 2 Cor. 6:8

• Sadness

"...sorrowful..." 2 Cor. 6:10

• Poverty

"...poor... having nothing..." 2 Cor. 6:10

• Rejection

"We aren't keeping our affection from you, but you're withholding yours from us." 2 Cor. 6:12

• Burnout

"I had no rest, but was harassed at every turn --conflicts outside, fears within." 2 Cor. 7:5

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." 2 Cor. 4:8, 9

• Violence

"Five times I received ...forty lashes minus one. Three times beaten with rods, once stoned..." 2 Cor. 11:24

• Accidents

"...3 times shipwrecked..." 2 Cor. 11:25

• Physical danger

"I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits... in danger in the city, in danger in the country... in danger from false brothers." 2 Cor. 11:26

• Physical exhaustion

"I have ...toiled and often gone without sleep, without food..." 2 Cor. 11:27

• Emotional exhaustion

"Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches... Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" 2 Cor. 11:28

• Pain

"...I was given a thorn in my flesh... to torment me." 2 Cor. 12:7

• Unanswered prayers

"Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." 2 Cor. 12:8

To grow through stress and illness I must...

1. _____ not _____
"We don't want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered..." 2 Cor. 1:8

"We've spoken freely to you, and opened wide our hearts to you."
2 Cor. 6:11

"Therefore I'll boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses." 2 Cor. 12:9, 10

2. _____ not _____
"...you help us by your prayers." 2 Cor. 1:11

"God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus. He told us about... your ardent concern for me, so my joy was even greater." 2 Cor. 7:6

3. _____ not _____
"I pleaded with the Lord to take it away... But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" 2 Cor. 12:9

4. Focus on _____ not _____
"...this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God..." 2 Cor. 1:9

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." 2 Cor. 4:7

5. Focus on _____ not _____
"...our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."
2 Cor. 4:17, 18

Daily Meditations

Here's a chance to "take it home": Thought provoking questions about this weekend's topic!

This week's memory verse: *"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*
2 Cor. 4:18

Monday

Look back over your notes. Which of Paul's struggles can you most identify with?

Which of Paul's secrets to getting better, not bitter, do you find easiest? Which do you find most difficult?

What spoke to you the most from this weekend's focus on 2 Cor. 4?

Ask God for strength and comfort for the struggles you are currently going through. Think of others in dire straits. Pray for them today by name, asking God to bring healing and hope to their lives.

Tuesday

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11. What pressures do you think Paul is facing that would cause him to despair even of life (See 7:5-7 and Acts 19:23-41)?

Paul found intense pressures led him to depend on God all the more (v. 9). How do you respond to pressures that seem beyond your ability to handle?

Whom do you know that is under intense pressure right now? How would Paul have you pray for them this week?

Pray for your friends undergoing trials right now. Perhaps you are at the point where you are "despairing of life itself" as Paul put it. Bring your concerns to God. Share your burden with trusted friends and ask them to pray for you as well.

Wednesday

When you are discouraged, what thought, song, or verse encourages you?

Read 2 Cor. 4:7-18. What truths keep Paul going in spite of his hardships?

Why does God allow Paul to go through these things?

How do these verses help you cope with your present difficulties and anxieties?

Bring to God specific worries and pressures you are facing right now. Ask Him for wisdom to know how to handle them. Ask Him to give you a sense of comfort. Continue to pray for others who are going through difficulties as well.

Thursday

Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-33. Paul's opponents are false teachers who are apparently trying to get the Corinthians to dislike Paul by implying that Paul is a blue blood, a Roman citizen of wealthy parentage and elite education who

has never known real suffering and is therefore out of touch. They are right about Paul's privileged background. So how does Paul validate his ministry in this passage?

Are you ever guilty of judging people on the basis of their background--dismissing them because you think they are more privileged than you?

How is the universality of suffering an equalizer?

Read 2 Cor. 11:6. How is Paul's suffering a better witness than fine speech?

How would you regard a minister coming to TLC who had been through these experiences?

What does Paul's example in verses 28 and 29 teach you about empathy?

What does Paul mean in verse 30? How does this apply to you?

Ask God to help you see when you are guilty of dismissing the credibility of people you see as more privileged than you before you really know what suffering they have experienced. Ask Him to help you "boast in your weakness" the way Paul does. Thank Him for His strength.

Friday

Read 2 Cor. 12:1-10. How has Paul's "thorn" affected his life?

Do you have something you would consider a "thorn in the flesh"?

How can it be used to ultimately bring you to a point of humility and closer reliance on God?

How do you react when God appears to be silent in answer to your urgent request?

How has God worked in you and through you in a specific time of weakness?

Bring to God your "thorn" right now. Ask Him to remove it. Tell him you are yielded to His will. Ask Him to help you grow better, not bitter, through your thorn experience.

Saturday

What lessons have you learned this week that will stick with you? What will you do to develop trust in God through times of weakness?

Please pray for this weekend's services, and for the ministry of the church in general! Thank you!

Some questions this week adapted from Serendipity Study Bible