

Comfort in Times of Trouble

Mike Connell

 Sermon Audio Transcripts

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Comfort in Times of Trouble

Everyone experiences times of pressure, difficult, distress. When we're in pain, our thinking is affected, we tend to lose perspective, then isolate, & turn to false comforts. The enemy of our soul likes to torment us, but God is a God of Comfort. We can position ourselves to experience great comfort in times of distress. Learn how to experience the comfort of God, & the reality of His presence.

[The Comfort of the Scriptures \(1 of 3\)](#) Everyone experiences, at some point in our life, times of pressure, difficult, distress. How can we find solutions that work for us in these times? How can we position ourselves to experience great comfort in times of distress. When we're in pain, our thinking is affected, and we tend to lose perspective. We then easily isolate, and turn to false comforts. The enemy of our soul likes to torment us, but God is a God of Comfort. Learn how to experience the comfort of God, the reality of His presence, and the comfort of Scriptures.

[Key Ingredients of Comfort \(2 of 3\)](#) Can you ever recall as a child being comforted during a time of emotional distress, when someone actually connected with you, and they listened for you, and they understood your pain, and they gave you reassurance afterwards, so you felt better? Sadly, many of us were not comforted, but developed ungodly reactions. Discover what comfort is NOT, and what really does help!

[Are You a Comforter \(3 of 3\)](#) Barnabus - The Son of Comfort - is a tremendous role model of a Comforter/Encourager. Study the key qualities in his life that gave him this ministry. All of us can be encourager's and builders of people. See what comfort looks like in the life of this great Apostle.

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Everyone experiences, at some point in our life, times of pressure, difficult, distress. How can we find solutions that work for us in these times? How can we position ourselves to experience great comfort in times of distress. When we're in pain, our thinking is affected, and we tend to lose perspective. We then easily isolate, and turn to false comforts. The enemy of our soul likes to torment us, but God is a God of Comfort. Learn how to experience the comfort of God, the reality of His presence, and the comfort of Scriptures.



Key Verse: Romans 15:4 – “Whatever things were written before, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.

“Whatever was written before” (speaking about the rest of the Bible) was written with a purpose in mind - for our learning “that we,

through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

One of the things that's inevitable is that, everyone experiences at some point in our life, times of pressure, difficulty, distress.

Even Jesus Himself had great distress. Jesus said: in the world you will experience tribulation, or pressures, or difficulties.

How many recognise that life is not all sweet? Lots of stuff happens that you don't like, or wish didn't happen. So what we're looking at is: how to find solutions that work for you in those times?

There are many sources of problems - you can probably add your own list to this, but let me throw out some I was thinking of...

Marriage can be a source of pressure and difficulty and pain. Family can be a source of pressure and difficulty and pain, especially when it comes to the beginning of the year - paying all the bills. Then in their teenage years... there's stresses and difficulty. So marriage, and broken friendships, can cause real pain and stress and difficulty.

Financial setbacks - how many have been through a financial pressure, difficulty, stress - and really felt something?

A criticism can be extremely distressful. Injustice can be extremely distressful; conflicts, disappointment. The list goes on.

The more you look around, the more you see that we face a whole range of things - betrayals, sickness, redundancy. Life is full of setbacks and difficulties.

The thing we also should expect: that as a believer - it's normal to have that; and as a believer - you'll have more, because you follow Jesus. How about that?

It says: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous". However, the good news: "The Lord delivers him out of them all" - and I'm interested how the Lord delivers. I want to know how to find, and experience, the comfort of God in the midst of stress.

The Bible tells us here: "that through the comfort of the scriptures". God has given you the Bible to produce specific things in your life: teaching, correction, reproof, and structure on how to live. But one thing it says here is: it's designed to bring comfort to you.

We need to learn how to get comfort from the Bible, and to understand a little about it. There's a reason we need comfort - we can learn how to position ourselves to experience great comfort in times of distress. In the next session, I want to share on how you can comfort others with scriptures, and we'll see that very clearly in just a moment.

So there are three reasons that I thought of, primary reasons, why we need comfort when we're in distress:

- 1) When your feelings are hurt - our thinking is affected, and we lose perspective. When you're in a lot of pain - it affects how you think about yourself, about God, about life, about people, about church, about government, all kinds of things.

Your thinking is affected when you're in pain, and the tendency is to lose perspective. Remember Elijah, when he got into tremendous fear and pain, he was fearful of losing his life. He totally lost his perspective. In the end he said: I'm the only one in the whole nation that's standing for God; and God had to tell him: actually there's 7000!

Notice his perspective is all screwed up - and it's messed up because of pain that he's feeling; so one of the things we have to recognise is: when you start to go through feelings of pain, it affects your perspective - how you think, and for a while you just don't think straight.

What you tend to do is to isolate. That's the problem, we tend to isolate.

Proverbs 18:1 – “He that separates (or isolates himself) seeks his own desire”.

When we're trying to escape from the pain, we have our own things we're trying to do, and we're isolating to survive. How many understand that?

I'm going to show you how biblical comfort addresses the core problem - not just how you feel, but the root issue that happens, when you go through pain; and this is what it is: becoming isolated.

Church is called to be a community. The Christian faith is worked out as a community. It's not just all about you; and God's answers, many of them are provided through the community - not just directly from heaven to you. This 'Lone Ranger' thing, where it's just 'God and me', is absolutely a fallacy - and people who get into that zone, end up isolating themselves.

It says: “their heart rages against wisdom” - they don't take into account the wisdom of God. When our feelings are hurt and we go through pain - we tend to lose perspective

2) Our sinful nature leads us to isolate. We tend to isolate, and then want to find comfort in all kinds of unhealthy ways: eat chocolate; watch TV; alcohol... the list is endless, of the ways people try to feel better. Have a smoke – I've just got to have a smoke; and the reason usually people have to have a smoke, apart from addiction, is because they're in pain, they need comfort, and they turn to the drug.

The temporary solution to the problem has now created a new problem. The person who turns to alcohol to comfort themselves - do you feel better? Of course you do - today you do, while you're drinking - tomorrow you don't! If you keep doing that, then later on you've got a huge problem with alcohol.

So one of the tendencies we have is: not to follow God's process of dealing with pain. We tend to have our own way of dealing with it, and it's quite sinful and harmful to us.

People seek out sexual relationships, pornography - all kinds of things to try and find a solution to pain.

The solution is: the comfort of God. God wants to comfort us, and the whole nature of God is to comfort us - why don't we just turn to Him?

3) When you're in pain and distress, there is a personal devil who seeks to torment you, and drive you into isolation.

The devil seeks to drive you into isolation, so he can then begin to work on your mind, and your emotions, and cause you to feel no value, to feel distress, to feel pain/tormented, and to lose all hope that the future could be better.

Anyone been in a deep depression? It's like the future looks so bleak, you can't find your way forward. The way forward is to have hope for the future - but before you have hope, you need comfort, because the pain is real.

In the next session, we talk about how you can use the scriptures to comfort someone - we'll learn to comfort one another - because part of the comfort God gives to us, comes through the body of Christ.

So there it is - 3 reasons why we need comfort: 1) when feelings are affected, we think crazy, we think wrongly, our perspective goes. 2) Our sinful nature means we tend to react, and do harmful things - we isolate, and then we try to solve it in different ways.

Esau comforted himself - as soon as dad's out of the way, I'm going to kill my brother - and he felt good about that feeling. I know lots of people, and they're just planning revenge: you wait, you just wait - I'll get them back! They're comforting themselves, in their pain, by harbouring revenge. These are very destructive ways, and demons torment people.

2 Corinthians 1:3 - "Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies - and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation - that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort which we ourselves have been comforted by God."

What's the one word that really stands out there? Comfort turns up five times!

It's God's nature to comfort. Notice it says: "the Father of Mercies, and the God of all Comfort".

He's the Father (or the author) of mercy. He is deeply compassionate - all the time. He doesn't have: today I'm happy and compassionate; tomorrow I'm angry, and out to get you - it's not like that. He is full of compassion. He is very tender in His heart, and when we're in trouble - He loves us; feels tender feelings; and desire to engage and help us.

When the Bible's using the word mercy there, it's: the Lord is incredibly compassionate. Read how many times Jesus was 'moved with compassion'. Now He's also called "the God of all comforts" - so His nature is to comfort.

His nature is to comfort. We're going to have to look what that means, because when we think 'comfort' - we need someone to put their arm around you, and "there, there, there, feel better", and pat you on the back and have a good cry - here's a tissue, get on with it, you'll be alright. But it's not that! In fact, that actually can be incredibly harmful to people.

Biblical comfort has certain things to it that make it work, and that's why we want to see. God is the God of all comfort - so whatever situation that we find ourselves in, here's the one thing you can guarantee: God does not change, He's still a God of comfort, and He's a God of compassion. Because He's compassionate - He feels deeply for your distress, and because He's the comforter - He wants to do something to help you in your distress.

All comfort means: no matter what you're going through, you can rely on Him. You can't always rely on people, but you can always rely on Him. He never changes. It's God's nature to "come alongside".

The word "to comfort" means literally: to come alongside someone who is in pain and feeling isolated, and to stand with them in their distress. The primary meaning of the word: come alongside someone.

Remember how we said that when you're in distress - the tendency is to look to the wrong places, become tormented by spirits, and isolate. Think about that - how many times you have felt isolated, alone. You aren't alone - God has not shut you off, and people haven't - it's all an illusion you get in your mind, when you're in pain.

The main problem of humanity is: we're disconnected from God - and God's heart is always reconciliation, to reconnect us. So any time you're isolated, God is thinking: how can I reach through to you - to enter into the pain you're having, and assure you that I am with you, and I'll walk through it with you?

"Now the God of comfort" - so the nature of God is to show mercy and comfort. Mercy - we're not going to judge and blame you because you're in a mess - even if it's your own making. He just wants to help you.

"He comforts us in all our tribulations, so we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort we ourselves have been comforted by God".

1) God is willing to comfort you in every situation, even if it's a mess of your own making. Even if you totally messed up, and you're in the deep stuff because of it, He still wants to comfort you. That's a good thing to know, isn't it?

2) He wants you to experience something. He wants you to experience a reality of God in your life - in pain. He wants you to have an experience - not head knowledge; not just to have a verse. He wants you to experience Him, to know the reality. It's not just about the Bible. The Bible points us to a person; so when you look to be comforted by the scriptures, God wants to use the scriptures, to bring you to an experience of Him - so your experience in the problem is changed. Unfortunately most people withdraw.

3) God intends you to be able to minister to others, with the comfort you've received. You can't give easily something to someone else, if you haven't received it yourself; but if you have experienced God in the deep, dark place - come to you in your valley - and you encountered Him, and He reassured your heart, and you overcame your isolation, and strength came in; and you stood and you walked out of that valley, into a place where it all changed - then you have a testimony that someone else needs.

When God allows you to go through difficulties in your life...

1) He wants to deepen your faith in Him. He wants your roots to go down, to engage Him in that problem.

2) He's got people prepared for you, to be able to help when you get out of your problem.

3) They won't get that solution, if you don't break through. That's why we say: people are waiting for you to break through.

This is why your testimony is important. Your testimony is: how I experienced God in my difficulty.

Think of Dave and Janine, when they lost their daughter - how they experienced God upholding them in the midst of their difficulty. I can remember when I went over to my daughter, how as I came - I came there just to be with her, not to solve it - I couldn't solve the problem. When you've lost a child, you can't solve that problem for someone. You can't fix it up. You can't tell them to get over it; you can't tell them: it'll be over soon. You can't tell them: it'll be better.

The person is in deep pain and shock - they're in a place of pain. What they need is someone alongside them. You don't always have to say anything, but I encouraged and directed her heart to the Lord. In the midst of it - right at the most painful time of the funeral, actually at the point of cremation - she had an encounter and saw God, and saw her child with the Lord (amazing isn't it) - and felt comfort. The reality of God comforts us. This is a great thing - God of all comfort.

John 14:6, Jesus said: "I'm not going to leave you alone". Aloneness is the source of the problem. "I'm going to send you another comforter, even the Holy Spirit, who will never leave you".

Here's the thing you can absolutely be sure of: even if you've messed up big time, even if you've sinned and failed, and your awareness of God is quite restricted now, and you're aware of your problems, nevertheless He says: "I won't leave you". He's never going to leave you. He's never going to let you be isolated. You can let yourself be, but He will never isolate you. He will always seek to reconnect with you. Isn't that fantastic?

Romans 15:4 – "Now whatever things were written before, were written for our learning - that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope". That's fantastic! Notice: "what's written beforehand" - so the whole of the Bible is written for your benefit.

You read about David going through his mess with Bathsheba - that's written for your benefit. How did he get through it? How did God handle it? How did God treat him? What did God do in the midst of that? How did God help him out of the mess? That's what that's for.

When the people of Israel went through the wilderness, and they messed up and fell over, and did all kinds of crazy things - it's written for you to learn from.

When Abraham lied about his wife, then had a sexual relationship with her concubine, and made a huge mess - that's there for you to learn from.

God has recorded things about people, and their encounters with God. This is not just a book of stories - it's a book of people, and their relationship and engagement with God. It's about people engaging with Jesus in various points of history, and how He engaged with them. This is why the Bible's been given to you, one of the reasons.

1) That you can learn, from the experience of others, what God is like. You can read what God is like, when you read someone's story. You say: that's what God's like? I was thinking He was like something else.

2) You can look at your life differently, and see it from God's point of view. When your emotions get stirred up, your thinking gets messed up, and you are the centre of your world. But when you get into the word of God, God begins to shift the thinking, so you start to see: what is God doing in the midst of this.

When we're in pain, it's all about me; but when I get into the word, it begins to lift my thinking to: where is God in all this? What is God saying in all this? What is God's perspective on all of this? So God wants me to align with His way of thinking. That's what helps you. That's what gets you through these things.

3) To experience the presence and comfort of God. God wants you to experience His presence. "These things are written, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures". God wants to use this word for you to experience comfort in the midst of pain and difficulties, by learning from the lives of others.

4) Here's the outcome – "that you might have hope". When you have turned to God in the midst of pain, engaged the comfort of the scriptures, and positioned your thinking and acting right, the thing you end up with is - a positive view about the future.

Think of how many people walk around depressed - it's a major chronic problem, all over the world now. How many people walk around uptight - full of rage and anger? It just gets triggered off at the slightest little thing. They're messed up. They don't have a positive view of life.

Listen to even how many Christians walk around, and they complain, complain, complain... - lose, lose, lose... That's unbelief manifesting. God wants you to have hope.

Hope means: because it's grounded in God, I can have a positive view about the future.

"Now the hope fills you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope" - I have to believe though! There's something I've got to do, in order to get to that place where my attitude is completely different. I have to engage the pain, and engage with God, and shift my thinking, and respond to Him. That's what gets me out of it.

A lot of people say: I want ministry, come and pray for me, come and pray for me. If you want to be a baby, and suck on a bottle for the rest of your life - do that. That's okay when you're a baby, but if you've been 20 years a Christian, and that's still your answer to your problems, you're in trouble.

God wants us to learn how to use scriptures to obtain comfort in times of distress - that's what the scriptures are there for. God is a comforter, the Holy Spirit is a comforter, Jesus is a comforter, the Father is a comforter, and the Bible can comfort us - but we've got to learn how to engage with that, and end up with fresh hope and looking forward to the future.

Two keys that are given here: 1) I've got to receive comfort from the scriptures, and get my thinking right; 2) I have to exercise patience.

I need to engage with the word and person of God, and let my emotions and thinking be shifted - so now I'm thinking right, and starting to act right. Then I need to continue to do what God wants me to do - I know God is giving me a great outcome with this. I know this is going to work for good for me.

There are some things we have to do. 1) Receive comfort of the scriptures; and 2) I've got to be patient.

We're in an instant age - no one wants to be patient. People get impatient just trying to start your computer up. I just want to yell at it - it's so slow starting up, I can't stand it. No one likes to be patient. Everyone just wants it all, and wants it now; but actually patience is part of receiving the promises of God.

Through Patience, and Faith, we receive the promises. If I want to see my situation move and turn around, I have to: first of all - engage the scriptures; secondly, I need to make a decision - I will do what God wants me to do in the midst of this difficulty, and then it will pass. I'll have a great attitude, because I'm confident it'll pass, because I've got connected to God in it.

So what practically, would you do? Being comforted by the scriptures is not about just feeling good; it's actually about God putting something into you, to get you thinking and believing right. It actually requires you hold on to what God says - in spite of what you feel. That's the decision.

God wants you to learn to deepen your belief and trust in the time of difficulty; and He uses the word to enable you to do that. Get the idea?

Three practical ways that God does bring comfort from the scriptures. I kind of ask the question: I'm in pain right now, so how do I use the Bible to feel better? I feel in pain right now, so what do I do? Where do I even start? Here's my Bible - now where do I start? How do I use the Bible to obtain the comfort of God? That's the question to ask.

We've learnt that: everyone has pain; what people do when they're in pain; that God is willing to comfort you in scriptures, inspired by the Holy Ghost; and the way He does it. There's a part I have to play in it. How do I get the comfort from the scriptures in the first place?

1) Use scriptures and verses you already know. If you read the Bible regularly, you'll have verses, and they kind of stand out to you. They become great verses, so get those verses and read them.

Isaiah 40:27-31: "Those that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint".

How many know that scripture? Why don't you get it in your mouth, and start to speak it out aloud. Why speak it out aloud? Because your emotions are going so strongly, you'll find that if you've got it in your mouth, and start to speak it, and start to in your heart embrace what you are saying:

"I thank You. I wait upon You Lord, I mount up with wings like eagles, I thank You, I run and not weary, I walk and will not faint. You are with me! I believe Your word! Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord God delivers him out of them all. Lord, I thank You in the midst of my affliction, Lord You deliver me out of it!"

Now you've got to actually make a decision, to get hold of the word of God, and do something.

Isaiah 43:2 – "Though you walk through the fire, it shall not consume you. Though you walk through the water, it shall not overwhelm you, because I will hold your hand. I am with you. Be strong!"

That's what the Bible says - you have to put it in your mouth and use it. What will happen is, your soul will start to shift, and your spirit starts to 'YEAH! YEAH!' and your emotions start to subside a bit. That's why you speak it out strongly.

It's not trying to make something happen. The core of it is not just speaking - a parrot can speak, but they don't get into faith. As I speak, I am choosing to hold that God's word is true.

"My words will not pass away, my word will not pass away, my word will not pass away. What you say to me, you will do."

You've got to actually engage the person of God through the word. This is not anyone's word. The Holy Ghost is a comforter, but He comforts us directly by touching us in meetings and so on. He touches us by: quickening the word; and by

comforting us through prophetic words, or encouragement from someone else. We'll get to prophesy - that's another part, but I want to get the word - the word is there to comfort you.

So number one: mark out scriptures that are great scriptures - and learn to pray them. Learn to speak them out, and repeat them over and over - and get them around and in your heart, so when adversity comes: "though he slay me, yet will I trust him, for at the scent of water, the tree shall rise again!"

There's a whole range of verses. You'll find of them in Psalms, in Proverbs, everywhere - and you mark them out. If you don't know how to find them, just get on the computer, and search for: words from the Bible to help me, comfort me - you will be amazed how many sites will come up. They'll give scriptures on Grief, Death, scriptures on this and that. They're all saying: the Bible, go back to the Bible, go back to the word of God.

Use the word to build and strengthen your inward man. You'll find, as you do that, you become conscious of the presence of God. Even if you don't become conscious of the presence of God, what will happen is: emotions subside somewhat, and your head clears. You start to think differently for a little while - faith can grow, and come, and arise in your heart.

Don't turn it into a works thing, where you're striving to make God's word work. It's His business to make the word work - our business is just to believe it, and respond to it. Don't get into the thing where you're trying to 'make it work', and your faith is in 'your confession', or in the word. Your faith is in God - trusting Him.

He says: "I exalt My word above My name. No word shall drop" - so that's one of the ways. There's a whole heap of scriptures like that, so you read it, read it aloud, personalise it, speak it out over your life, and embrace it in your heart as you feel it.

2) Expect the Holy Ghost to quicken a scripture to you. How many of you have found, as you're reading through the Bible, you just suddenly spot a verse, and it comes alive, and it just touched your heart? What did you feel? God is near! What were you feeling before that? God is far! I'm isolated! Now God is near. Oh man, that cheers me up. There's hope, because God and me can do this thing.

Ask the Holy Spirit to quicken a scripture. It's His job, He wrote the Bible. Start to just read with expectation. Don't try and make something happen, just read with expectation. It's His job to open your eyes up and see something you never noticed before, and He can do it.

How many have looked at scriptures, you read whole sections, and suddenly one day as you're reading: oh, that stood out. I didn't even know that thing was there? It was the Holy Ghost quickening a scripture - and now you've got that scripture, you do what I just shared - begin to personalise that, pray that, and declare it over your life. Why? Now you've got a quickened word to hold onto. Before you just had the scripture - and prayer, and meditation, and confession helped quicken it. Now you've got the quickening - now you begin to hold it, and choose to believe it, and then

stand. What does God want you to do in that? You've got to stand and continue to do that.

3) Look at stories of people who went through adversity. Read the story over a few times, just reflect on it, and ask the Holy Ghost to speak to you - and then enquire: what is this person facing? What would they have felt in that difficulty? What would they have gone through, as they went through that? What thoughts would they have had? What feelings would they have had? Then you think: how did God respond to them? Lord, I believe You'll respond to me the same way, because You're my God also.

For example, take Jonah - Jonah's running away. He's feeling a resistance - there's a rebellion, a resistance to God. He's really opposed to what God wanted him to do. He's now taking a hike, and a walk, and he's running away, and he's in a storm. In the middle of the storm, he's hiding in fear of being discovered - and they discover him and throw him out. What did he feel as he was out there, and then there he is in the sea? You might feel you've been thrown out of the boat, and you're in the sea, and you're just going to sink.

That happens sometimes! Anyone feel you've been thrown out of the boat - and there you are in the sea, you're swimming in the sea - and it's in a storm. What do you feel? You feel like he does. God had prepared something that would take him, and make him ready for the journey that he had, or the work that he had for him. God, what have You prepared for me, that I can find refuge in at this time?

You've got to engage with God. The scriptures are to bring us to God. Jesus said: "you search the scriptures, you think in them there's life - they speak of Me, come to Me to find life".

Next session I'll share with you how you can take scripture, and use it to comfort someone. First you've got to receive comfort.

The Bible says: "God comforts us that we may be able to comfort others, with the comfort we have received".

Closing Prayer

Open your heart to the Lord just one more time. There may be someone here who's never received Jesus Christ. This would be a great day to make a decision to become a believer, a follower of Christ. Become a follower of Christ requires a decision:

I will acknowledge that He died on the cross for my sins, He died on the cross to pay the penalty of those things separating me, that I could be reconnected to God.

You say: "but I've messed up so badly" - nevertheless He's for you. "You don't understand all the things that happened to me" - nevertheless He's for you.

He's a God of compassion, God of all comfort, wants to help you.

I wonder if there's anyone here today, and you're in a place of distress in your life, needing comfort. The first thing is to actually acknowledge it, say: God, I'm in distress.

Father, I just pray for each person here right now, that they would experience the comfort that you offer them.

I pray Lord, as a church, we'll learn how to get hold of your word, and experience the strength of Your presence coming near us. Help us to do that.

Summary Notes

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1. Introduction

- Key Verse: Rom. 15:4 "For whatever things were written before, were written for our learning. That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope".

- Every one of us experience seasons of pressure, difficulty, pain – no one is exempt.

- Possible sources:

Marriage Financial setbacks Conflicts Severe sickness

Family Criticism Disappointments Redundancy

Broken friendships Injustice Betrayals Opposition

- Jn 16:33 "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world".

2. Why We Need Comfort

(i) Hurt feelings affect our thinking and cause us to lose perspective.

- When you are in pain you don't think straight and tend to isolate (Prov.18:1)

(ii) Our own sinful nature leads us to isolate and find comfort in unhealthy ways.

- Alcohol, drugs, entertainment, relationships, pornography, distractions e.g.

Gen.27:42 and 2 Sam. 4:1

(iii) Satan actively seeks to isolate us during painful seasons of our life.

- He wants to separate us from a loving God and loving people.

- He wants to torment us with loss of hope, depression, loss of value, loneliness.

- Math.4:4

- Prov. 18:1 "A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire, he rages against all wise judgement."

3. God's Nature is to Comfort Us

- 2 Cor. 1:3-4 "...the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulations, that we might be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

(a) The Nature of God – what He is like!

- Father of Mercies – NT3268 to have a deep compassion for those suffering.

- God of all comfort – NT3874 to come alongside to bring comfort, consolation, understanding.

- Whatever painful or distressing situation we face God expresses His compassion

by coming alongside us to comfort and strengthen us.

- God's nature is to come alongside not to abandon (Heb.13:5 "I will never leave you").
- God has tender feelings towards us – He is attentive to our trouble and distress.

(b) The Actions of God – what He Does!

- God is willing to comfort us in all our painful situations.
- God wants us to experience the reality of His comfort personally.
- God intends us to be a source of His comfort to others in pain or trouble.
- Painful experiences are used by God to deepen our faith and prepare us to serve others.
- Jn.14:16 "I will pray to the Father and He will give you another (of the same kind) comforter that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of Truth."

4. The Comfort of the Scriptures

- Rom. 15:4 "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."
- Other people in history have experienced pressures, difficulties, pain and opposition. (1 Cor.10:13)

· God's Word has Recorded their Experiences with God for our Benefit

- (i) Learn from the experience of others what God is like.
- (ii) Look at life from God's perspective and change thinking.
 - May not be able to change our circumstances but we can change how we think and respond.
- (iii) Experience the presence and comfort of God through His Word.
- (iv) Overcome despair and look ahead with fresh hope – anticipate with pleasure or confidence.

- How Does This Happen?

- (i) Receiving comfort from the Scriptures.
- (ii) Exercising patience – your choice how you will behave.
 - Continue to walk with God
 - Persevere in doing what is right.
 - Exercise faith in God that He will keep His Word.

5. Practical Application

How to receive comfort from the Scriptures:

- (i) Use Scripture Verses you already know (i.e. Heb 4:12 "God's Word is living and powerful")
 - Read the verse aloud Examples
 - Personalise the verses Is.40:27-31
 - Speak it aloud - repeat (Eph..6:17) Is.41:10
 - Picture it as you speak it Is.43:1-4
 - Embrace its truth into your heart Ps.34:17-19 Ps 23
- (ii) Expect the Holy Spirit to 'quicken' a Scripture (Jer. 15:16 "Your Words were found and I ate them ...")
 - Ask Holy Spirit to speak to you.

- Read the Bible with expectation. E.g. Psalms, Proverbs
- Does any verse “stand out”, draw attention?
- Speak it aloud over your life (as above).
- Keep looking if nothing immediately apparent.

(iii) Look for God in the Bible Stories of adversity

Read the story over several times Example: Mark 4:35

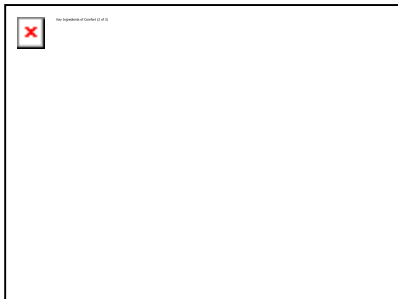
- Picture the story – enquire - What did the person face?
- What did they feel? - How did God respond?
- What can I learn about God? - Turn the story into prayer.

Key Ingredients of Comfort (2 of 3)

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Can you ever recall as a child being comforted during a time of emotional distress, when someone actually connected with you, and they listened for you, and they understood your pain, and they gave you reassurance afterwards, so you felt better? Sadly, many of us were not comforted, but developed ungodly reactions. Discover what comfort is NOT, and what really does help!



Review

Last week we were sharing a message called Comfort in Times of Trouble. I started off by sharing about God's nature, and we're going to look at that again, and we're going to look at another aspect of it today. I talked specifically about the comfort of the scriptures, how the word of God is designed to put strength in you, when you're in a time of difficulty.

Thessalonians – “It changed your lives, because you received it not as the word of man, but as the word of God - which works powerfully in you, when you believe”.

There's a part we have to play, for God's word to work. You can get hold of God's word in a time of trouble, and it strengthens you. I have been strengthened greatly by scripture over the years. Sometimes a vision, an impression, a prophetic word hasn't been enough, but a scripture has just given substance and strength.

2 Corinthians 1:3 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort”.

God is a Father (or an author) of mercies - of tender compassion. The heart of God is never against us, He's always for us, full of compassion. When you're in trouble, His heart is soft and tender and affectionate. He wants to help - He's the Father of mercies, many mercies.

We're even called to come to the throne of grace to find mercies - that's what God is like. His heart is to be tender and merciful to us - He's the God of all comforts. One of the ways that God shows us His mercy is: He comes to us in difficult times, to comfort us.

In a difficult time - you don't feel that God is near you at all. He feels a long way off, but nevertheless, He is nearer than at any time in your life - in the difficult times.

Everyone experiences hard times, pressure, difficulties. Things you thought would happen, didn't happen; things happened you didn't think would happen - and the tendency, when we get into pain is: we lose perspective - and we tend to isolate.

We discussed why people isolate. The biggest difficulty people have in times of strain and pressure (marriage, family, etc) is the tendency to isolate and withdraw - and then problems become magnified and very big.

It says: "...who comforts us in ALL our tribulations." In ALL difficulties we face, in ALL pressures we face, God comforts us.

He has a purpose in comforting us – "...that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort we've received". So God has two purposes in comforting you: 1) to bring release and relief to you, in the time of stress - by bringing you into experiencing Him; and 2) having given you an experience with Him, that you would go and share that with someone to help them.

Main Message

God's purpose in your life is always redemptive. If you're in trouble, He gets you out - so you can help someone else get out. That's what 'redemptive' means. If you're in a mess, even if it's your own making, God still is tender. He still cares, He still wants to engage with you, get you out of it - and through the experience, give you something to share with someone else who is in trouble.

It's horrible having a person saying to you: "I know how you feel" - and they haven't a clue how you feel; but when someone has been through a difficult experience, and they come alongside saying: "I understand how you feel" - and they've been there before, they really do understand your feelings, to some degree, when you share them. An important purpose of God comforting you, is so you'll be equipped to help someone else. God wants every believer helping others.

Notice how easy it is. I was just in a book store just the other day, started to talk to the person there, and began to ask and enquire, and just talk into their heart. Next thing I know, the person's opening their heart - tears, this person's standing there in the middle of the place, where they're supposed to be selling. They're just blubbing and tears are all coming down, and they're starting to share. Why? Because they felt God come near them, because of what I said to them. We're called to bring comfort to others, and I was able to really help that person.

Here's a 'comfort' question (from a book I read): "Can you ever recall as a child, being comforted during a time of emotional distress - when someone actually

connected with you, listened to you, understood your pain, and gave you reassurance afterwards, so you felt better?"

I thought: ooh, I don't like that question. The answer I had was no - and I was quite shocked when I thought: well actually... no.

Next question: "what do you do when you get in pain?" I came to the horrible recognition: over years, when I'm in pain - I isolate, and the pain increases. I used to read books to try and feel better.

Isn't that what people do when they get in pain - isolate? Or they react - get really on an edge; or we can receive comfort from God.

God doesn't always comfort you directly. Sometimes, His way of comforting you is through another person. You might be sitting next to the person that God has called you to comfort - or the person that God has sent to you to comfort you.

The word 'comfort' in the Bible is not just putting your arms around, and just: there, there, there and make you feel better. Instead, the word comfort addresses the root of the problem - it means literally: to call near; or to: come alongside you, in your distress, and be there for you.

Jesus is a comforter. He said: I'm going to send you another comforter, just like Me. His name is: Emmanuel, God with us. The biggest aspect of comfort in the Bible is that God doesn't leave us alone. He comes and connects with us to help us, and walk with us through the difficulty - it doesn't always change the difficulty, but someone is there with us.

You can see what comfort looks like in 1 Samuel 23:16. David is now hunted down. He's gone from fame, to he's now number one on the wanted list. There's a poster out: shoot him on sight. So he came out into the wilderness.

"then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and went to David in the woods, and strengthened his hand in God. And said to him: do not fear, the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, I shall be next to you. And even my father knows that. The two of them made a covenant before the Lord."

Here's a man who strengthened. If you comfort someone, after your ministry to them, they are strengthened in God. They feel stronger, more able to handle what they're facing.

There are some things you need to learn to do - I'm going to give you the not-to-do's first, because I know there's things that we've all done. I have observed over years in ministry, that when people are in trouble, the worst people that come to help them sometimes are Christians. I know this isn't you, but just in case you know someone who did some of these things, then you could just tick these ones off!

When someone has trouble, don't come to them and say: "I just know what you're feeling", and "I know what you're going through". You don't!

“Don't worry, it'll soon pass” - don't say that. “Get over it” - don't say that. “It's not that bad really - you want to hear what I went through, blah blah blah...”

None of those things help. Actually they make them more miserable - and somewhat angry. Murder rises in the heart! They think: shall I kill him now, or not? Would God forgive me, if I did?

Don't joke or make fun of it – “oh it's nothing, come on, you'll be okay - get over it”.

Don't say to them: “you need more faith brother!” More faith! More faith! Now I do want to kill you! All the faith I have - it's still not getting me through. Don't tell me I need more faith.

“You just need to praise the Lord anyway”. It might be true - but it's not helpful, it can actually really upset people.

“We all have days like that - move on”. Move on! None of that helps.

“oh, you shouldn't feel that way - you're a Christian - you shouldn't be angry. You should trust in God!”

“You should forgive!” Feel the word 'should' - it's the law coming. There's no grace and mercy in that. I know I should forgive - I just don't want to. I'm too angry to even think and go there, so don't tell me I should. I already know the Bible, I know that verse. It's not going to help me. I won't be comforted - just get more angry.

“You must have sinned”. There must be something you've done wrong. There's a problem, there's a fault in your life - you're reaping something. I'm really comforted now, after I've heard that. The spirit of murder is nearly unable to stop getting a hold of me, and to throttle someone. None of these things help. This is what people do.

“God's dealing with you, brother”. Is that right? Well I'm out of here already. None of those things help - they sound good, they sound spiritual.

“Oh, you've been treated really badly, - you're right. This is really bad what's happened to you”. That may be true, but it's not going to help them either – it fills them with self pity, and reinforces their bitterness.

“You talk too much”. Some people - they start off: “how are you doing?” Before you've even given half an answer - they're away blabbing. It is really hard for it to be a Christian at a time like that - isn't it hard?

Here's another one [laughs] that doesn't help - when they invade your space - and all you want is to be left alone.

I remember when a member of our family had gone through a trauma experience, and it was all I could do to come to church. I had to preach, but I was in tremendous grief. I just wanted to be left alone, but people would come up to me, and tell me stupid stuff. It was hard for me not to want to kill them. Before I preach, or after - I'm not sure when it should happen! It was very difficult, very difficult.

I just wanted to say: LEAVE ME ALONE! I just want to worship God, and cry. Sometimes you get into a worship session, you want to cry. You don't need someone to come up, put their arm around and smother you - and then prophesy over you. It's not going to help - I just need to cry – and then afterwards be encouraged and comforted.

It's good to know what doesn't work. How many have had some of those things happen to them? They actually increase the pain, and the isolation.

Jonathan strengthened his friend, and this is how he strengthened his friend - “he arose and went to him”. He connected intentionally with him. He made a decision to leave where he was comfortable, and actually go to be where his friend was. He went to him, didn't wait for him to call.

Secondly, he addressed his emotions. David was filled with fear, and he understood the fear that was in his life - the emotion, what he was feeling. Don't try and comfort anyone, until you understand what they're feeling. “You're not allowed to have feelings - you shouldn't feel that way...”? No, he understood it, so he directed him to the promises of God: you will be king. He drew his attention to what God had spoken to him.

Finally, he made a commitment to stand with him, and walk through the issue with him. That's what biblical comfort looks like.

1) Connect intentionally with the person. David did want to see him. If people don't want to see you, - don't go to them; give them space - some people need some space.

He addressed the emotional area. He understood the emotions. He spoke, and directed David to the word of God - and then made an even stronger commitment to be with him.

We're not called to cure people's problems, or rescue them. Don't think you've got to rescue people, or cure their problems. Just come alongside to care for them and to comfort them.

Luke 24:15 – “Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them”. He's got two of His disciples in distress, the first thing He does is: intentionally comes near to them. Jesus said: hey, can I join you? He walked with him. He didn't try and fix anything straight away, He just walked with him.

Sometimes you've just got to walk with people for a little while - be with them, but don't try and do anything. As you walk and show an interest in people, and connect with them, you get a conversation going about things, and you can start to talk. He said: Hey, I noticed you looking sad. What's up? That's all He did. He just asked him: what's happening? I noticed you're sad. He said: I see you're quite sad, what's happening? What's going on in your life? He identified the feelings, and the pain. You seem to be shut down, drawn back - is there something wrong? Is there any way I can help?

The first aspect of comforting people is to connect with them sensitively, and just walk with them for a little bit. Sometimes a conversation opens up quickly, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes people are ready to talk, sometimes they're not - but you have to come near them, and just stay on the journey with them a little bit. Sometimes it's just: hi, how are you? Just thought to drop this into you, to bless you and to help you - and that's it. Then you come again, and you're on a journey with them. It takes just little encounters to open their heart. Kindness will open people's hearts.

2) Ask Questions - Listen to their heart.

Proverbs 18:13 – “If you answer a matter before you've heard it - it's a folly and a shame for you”.

You can't comfort people if you don't give them a hearing. They may be right, or they may have done something wrong themselves. When you listen to people, you have to realise they only tell you their version of the story. There's another version - and the other version changes the picture completely. Realise that, but you do have to ask people: what's going on? Ask questions to draw out the facts and the feelings behind it - just talk to people, ask about them.

When Adam had sinned, imagine God just turning up in the garden. He must be making a bit of noise, because it says: “he heard the voice of the Lord walking” - so maybe God was singing? No, no, but Adam heard His voice - this is what it says. Genesis 3:9 – “God spoke to him and said: Adam, where are you?” God's got all these cameras everywhere, scanning everything. He can see it all, so why would He ask: where are you? It's a relationship question: Adam, what's up in your life? What's happening?

If you were to make a decision, that wherever you go this week, you take an interest in people - connect with them in just a very positive way, then enquire about: where are you, what's happening, what's going on? I notice you look a bit sad - what's up? If you were to just take that line - now don't try and fix anything - just take the line: that I want to draw near to people, and position myself with a heart that is interested, and cares to just ask them some questions about how they're doing. How are you doing? What's happening?

That's all I did with this girl in the book shop: hey, how are you doing? From the way she answered, I could tell something was going on - the feeling in the answer. I said: you just seem to be sad, what's happening? She started to tell me, and then that gave the doorway in, to then help her and comfort her. She walked away totally changed. You can do it, but you've got to get into the person's heart

Ask questions - draw out the feelings that they have. What are you sad about?

In Luke 24:17, that's what Jesus said - what's going on? I noticed you're down, you're heavy. What's happening there? So help people.

People often need help to identify what they feel, and put some words on it. They need 'soul words'.

If you ask a guy what he's feeling, he'll say nothin'! How are you feeling? Nothin'! So you ask a guy tell me what kind of feelings you have? Well... angry - very angry, that's it, you know? A lot of men are not in tune to connect with feelings, people just need help to put words to the feelings. Just, this is what you feel - oh you're feeling sad? You're feeling upset? Feeling angry? Oh no, I feel hurt, and a little bit angry? Just find a way to draw out of people what's going on; because if you don't do that, then they don't actually share - they don't feel you've understood them at all.

I can remember sitting in a place, a woman asked me for help: her husband had just had an accident on a work site. One of the guys had been electrocuted, and she was upset; so I listened and found out what the problem was, and gave an answer, but she didn't want to hear it. I gave it again, she still didn't want to hear, and I thought: this is a waste of my time.

Then the Lord spoke to me, He said: "you're not even listening"; so whether your answer is right or wrong is irrelevant. She doesn't feel you heard her. She didn't want an answer; she actually wanted to be heard. I thought: oh, my male thing - a 'fix it' thing, you know? So I just changed mid-talk, and said: I guess you're feeling quite afraid over what the consequence of this would be? Then out it all came, and once she'd shared it, she knew exactly what to do, and she was fine. I didn't even need to give her anything much more than that.

3) Guide them (if it's possible at that point, and it isn't always possible) - to trust God.

That's where your testimony comes in - where you can share how God helped you: this is how God helped me. Someone this week was in a great distress, and I just texted them a verse, and they replied: this put strength in me - I've moved past that text, and I'm down into this part of it now. I just sent a text - that's all it took. Thinking of you, care about you in this distress. Sent the text, sent a verse, and was able to make a connection in a very simple way.

I was with Pastor Kong, and Pastor Kong's going through a tremendous stress related to the ministry, accusations being made. Now it all comes to Court, they're threatening him and six of his followers with years and years and years in jail. They just want to get rid of him. This is incredibly stressful - millions of dollars going in lawyer's fees - it's a horrendous situation; but it's the making of a man of God! That's what it looks like - it looks horrible! He said: some people just don't want to come near me now. Some people avoid me. He said: some people think that if they're connected to me, their reputation will be tainted, and their ministry tainted. I said: well Kong - we're here with you, whatever happens. We've been on this journey too long to quit now - we're sticking with you, and we choose to stay with you, however it works out. We're with you, and for you, to do whatever we can to help. He said: can you bring me something from the Lord. I thought... and God just dropped something in - I had a scripture for him.

The word of God (it was a word God had given me) - that word broke depression on him. He went home and shared it with his wife - it lifted the pressure off her. He shared it with the leaders, and got them all into a place of Faith - praying, and the whole atmosphere started to shift around their leadership. All it took was one word

from God, one word of scripture. That's what comfort looks like - call the person near to God!

I've had three words for him - each one has put strength into him. So you have something, to put strength and encouragement into someone. You can do it. You can do it, you've just got to be willing to. Share how God has helped you. The comfort is not just for you - it's for someone else as well.

4) Reassure the person, that you'll stand with them. At the end of the day, loneliness and isolation is the biggest pain barrier that we face.

This situation related to staff redundancies is extremely painful to me, but I've come through the biggest part of it now. There was a couple in this church helped me, Dot and Lyn. I want to honour them, because of what they did - but I was really going through deep emotional turmoil over it all. I just had to pop into church for something, but Dot spotted me, and she intentionally with Lyn made their way to me. They did exactly what I've outlined for you, on how you comfort people.

First they came, and they were quite sensitive. They came with love and care, and hugged me; helped me feel connected, when I didn't feel connected. They gave me room to share also what I felt. They actually made leading questions, that helped me share what I was feeling, and they shared what had happened for them as well. Then Dot brought a vision that God had showed her in her distress. She said: I cried to the Lord because I was so troubled, and she said God gave me a vision. She said I saw this, and I believe this is for you - and she could not have known the significance of that vision, was so tied to another time in my life, when I was in distress, and God came and comforted me. It was the exact same vision. She couldn't have known that. It was just God gave her an answer, for her pain at that time; but when she brought it, it became such a strength in my soul, lifted me back up again.

They reassured me of their commitment to stand together with me. All the ingredients that were there with David and Jonathan; there with Jesus and how He comforts people, like His disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus came near, He connected with them, He opened up their heart. Then He began to share the word of God; and then He made commitment through covenant, the cutting of the bread, the bread and the wine, to be with them. That's what comfort looks like. It's not just all emotional; it's not just all about hugging. In fact, that can be helpful, or it can be harmful.

It's about actually drawing near, so someone feels they're not alone in their difficulty. Someone is with them, to strengthen them, and walk with them through it. Biblical comfort - it is wonderful.

It's sometimes called Exhortation.

Prophecy is to bring the presence of God to people. When you minister prophecy to comfort people, you don't have nice words: oh never mind, God's with you, it'll all work out okay and don't worry. It's not like that. Actually, when you comfort someone, you minister in such a way with reality, that God's presence comes. They

feel: God is near me. That's what brings the exhortation - I'm not alone, I'm with God, who is near me.

Closing Prayer

I want to just give an opportunity for any person, who's never known in their personal life, the presence of God to come and help you, touch you, comfort you, strengthen you.

You know we're born into this world, literally on our own - separated from God because of sin; but Jesus came - got with us, to solve that problem. God's solution is amazing: Jesus died on a cross, gave up His life, that we could be forgiven of our sins - the block removed, and a heart connection made with God. It just requires only one thing from you: the decision to recognise your need, and receive Jesus Christ.

Mankind's fundamental problem is being disconnected from God. The basic solution, is reconnect with God - and that's what Jesus came to do. He does it all the time, and He keeps on doing it.

If you're in a place of distress and difficulty, a place of trial - it could be in finances, marriage, family, personal life, difficulties - things that won't go away for you... God wants to strengthen you, help you.

Summary Notes

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1. Introduction

- Key Verse: 2 Cor. 1:3-4 "...The Father of Mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves are comforted of God."
- Every one of us experience seasons of pressure, difficulty, pain – no one is exempt.
- A key issue that arises is isolation and with it loss of perspective.
- God is willing to enter our world and comfort us – last week: Comfort of the Scriptures Rom.15:4.
- One important purpose – “that we may be able to comfort those in trouble”.

2. The Comfort Question

- Can you recall as a child being comforted during a time of emotional distress? i.e. someone connected with you, listened to you and understood your feelings and reassured you?
- If the answer is 'No' – how did you handle pain?
 - a) Isolate and comfort self?
 - B) React with anger, blame?
- Comfort =NT3870= to call near.

To come alongside you when you are in pain and distress and provide reassurance and hope. God's response is always a relational response to reassure and bring hope.

3. Things You Should NOT Say

- 1 Sam. 23:16 “Jonathan, Saul’s son arose and went to David in the wood and strengthened his hand in God.”
- Many Christians try to help others in distress and end up increasing their pain.
- Sincerity is not enough – we must know how to exhort – how to comfort.
- Common things people say and do:
 - (i) Don’t worry – soon pass! (ix) You need more faith
 - (ii) Don’t worry – get over it! (x) Praise the Lord anyway!
 - (iii) Not that bad really! (xi) We all have days like that!
 - (iv) That’s nothing compared to my problem!
 - (v) Joke and make light of it! (xii) You shouldn’t feel that way!
 - (vi) Must be due to sin! (xiii) God is dealing with you!
 - (vii) You are right you have been treated badly!
 - (viii) Invade the person’s space. (xiv) Excessive talking.
- None of these things help – they actually increase pain and isolation.

- Note what Jonathan did to comfort David (vs16-17) and strengthen him.
 - (i) He connected intentionally (v16)
 - (ii) He addressed his emotions (v17) – He understood what David was feeling
 - (iii) He directed him to the promise (word) of God (v17)
 - (iv) He reassured him of his support (v17).

4. Key Ingredients of Comfort

- 2 Cor. 1:4 “...that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort we ourselves are comforted of God.”
- We are not called to rescue people or cure their problems but to care and comfort.
- Every believer can do this!

- (i) Intentional Connection
 - Comfort = to call near, to come alongside because you care.
 - Initiate a connection with the person you wish to comfort.
 - Don’t wait for people to come to you – initiate connection with them.
 - e.g. Lk.24:15 “Jesus himself drew near and went with them.”
 - Jesus made connection where they were and joined them on their journey.
 - e.g. Mk.1:41 “Jesus moved with compassion put forth his hand and touched him.”
 - Be sensitive not intrusive.

- (ii) Listen from Your Heart
 - Prov.18:13 “He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.”
 - (a) Ask questions that draw out both the facts and the feelings behind them.
 - Good questions that leave room for open response can open the heart.
 - Gen.3:9 “Where are you?” this is a relational question.
 - Where are you in your life? Relationships? Marriage? Finances?
 - God asked a set of questions and listened carefully to Adam’s answers.

 - (b) Draw out the Feelings and Emotions
 - Lk.24:17 “What are you sad about?”
 - Help people identify and express what they feel – soul words.
 - Emotions can distort how people think – draw out what they are feeling.

- It helps clean the souls when a person speaks aloud what they are feeling.
- It's OK to feel that way! Validate feelings – that's all they are – feelings.
- Reflect back to people what you hear them saying and the feelings emerge.

(c) Guide them to put their trust in God and His Word

- Is. 50:4
- Share how God has helped you during a difficult season/experience.
- The comfort God gave you is not just for you it is for others.
- Acts 11:23 "... he exhorted (comfort) them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord."

(d) Reassure them of Your Support

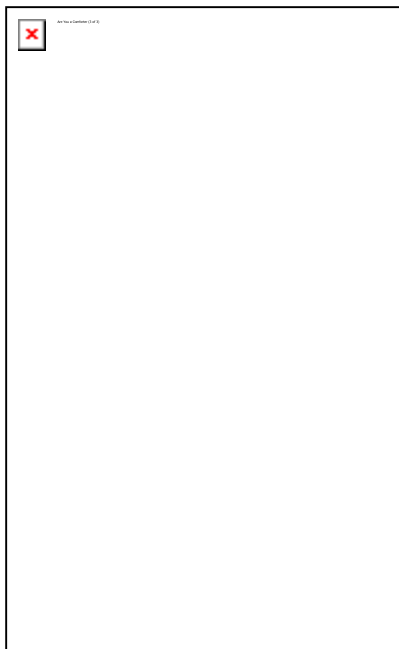
- We cannot carry others but we can stand with them and help break their feelings of isolation.
- Each person makes their own decisions about how they will respond.

Are You a Comforter (3 of 3)

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Barnabus - The Son of Comfort - is a tremendous role model of a Comforter/Encourager. Study the key qualities in his life that gave him this ministry. All of us can be encourager's and builders of people. See what comfort looks like in the life of this great Apostle.



Review

We're on a theme of scripture: Comfort in Times of Trouble. One of the things I have learned in ministry - I love the times of great blessing, times when you're on the mountain tops, times when things are well. There's also other times, times of distress, times of difficulty, times of pressure. Everyone faces those, and in those times, what you do, qualifies you to be enlarged in your next season. I firmly believe in that. I believe, as I walk through difficult times, that God is watching my response, and watching your response. At a time of pressure and difficulty and distress, we can make decisions that shift us in our capacity to the Lord.

2 Corinthians 1:3 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation”.

And here's the redeeming factor: “comforts us” - God helps us.

When we're in pressure, when we're in time of difficulty, there are some things happen.

1) We tend to lose God's perspective. When you get your eyes focussed on difficulties and problems, you often lose the sight of what God is doing. I believe firmly, in the midst of every difficulty, when you face your difficulty, lift up and say: God, what are You doing, and how should I respond?

2) We tend to get disconnected, isolated; and 3) we usually try and find destructive ways of resolving pain that we feel.

The Bible tells us: God is tender and compassionate, and He extends in a very real way, comfort to us. He has a purpose - that you will be qualified to comfort others in all of their trouble. So whatever your situation - some are in a place that's great and positive, and they're seeing blessing and great things; others are at the extreme other end of the scale - in turmoil and emotional stress. It doesn't matter where we are, what God wants to do is put something into us, that we can then transmit, and pass on to someone else.

We looked at what comfort is. We realised it's not just putting an arm around someone, and making them feel better; or helping heal the emotions.

God is a God of comfort, and 'comfort' means literally this: He calls us near to Him. He comes near to us.

Our perspective can be shifted in the midst of the difficulty. That's why David said, in Psalm 23: "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I refuse to be afraid, because God is with me".

Main Message

Every believer is called to comfort, or to exhort, or stir others. Hebrews 3:13 - "Let us exhort one another."

Acts 4:34 - It's about a person in the Bible; and sometimes when you think of people in the Bible who are important, you come up with names like David, Moses, Paul, and some of the apostles. But this man is mentioned more than 10 times in the New Testament - more than every other apostle except Paul and Peter - mentioned in a whole number of ways. I want you to see why the Holy Ghost takes time to actually draw attention to this man, because there's something God wants us to learn from this.

Acts 4:34 – "There was no one among them who lacked; for all who possessed land and houses sold them; and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostle's feet - and they distributed to each, as everyone had need".

Acts 4:36 – "Joses or Joseph, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated: Son of Encouragement, or: Son of Comfort, Son of Exhortation) having land, sold it and brought the money, and laid it at the apostle's feet. But a certain man named Ananias and Sapphira, his wife sold and kept back part of the money."

This guy Barnabas was nicknamed. Usually the nicknames that people give you are usually derogatory, and you spend years trying to get over it, and are quite sensitive about that issue afterwards.

But the apostles saw in this man Joseph, something that said: "we want to call you by this name, because this is the kind of person you are". So they gave him a nickname, and he becomes known throughout the Bible by this nickname. His real name was Joses or Joseph; but they said: we're not going to call you Joseph anymore, because we see something is in your life, and something manifests through you, that is so remarkable, we want to identify you by that. So they said: we're going to call you Barnabas.

The name Barnabas means literally bar=son; nabas = prophecy. Prophecy is for encouragement and building and exhortation; but then in case you thought he was just a prophetic person, they actually interpret it. They say: which means by interpretation, Son of Consolation, or Son of Comfort.

Now this word 'comfort' is the exact word Jesus used when He described the Holy Spirit, when Jesus was leaving.

John 14:18 – "I go; but I will not leave you orphaned (or alone, or abandoned), but I will send to you another comforter".

Comforter - that's the word 'to call near', 'to exhort', 'to stir'. It's the name given for the Holy Spirit; so when you call out upon the Holy Spirit, you're calling upon the comforter - the one who calls us near; and the one who comes near to us to help us, to strengthen us in times of difficulty.

They name a guy after the Holy Spirit. They didn't call him the Holy Spirit - that would be dishonouring to the Holy Spirit. What they did was, they used the very name that describes the work of the Holy Spirit - here's the comforter. This guy is the Son of the Comforter. This one shows what the Holy Ghost looks like, when He's working to bring to help to people who are in distress. That's why this guy's so important.

He was an incredibly influential person in the New Testament, far more than you realise; and when you look into his life, and you actually look at Barnabas, you see this is what it means to be a comforter of people. A definition is just hard to get it, but when you look at this person - his name is literally 'Son of the Comforter'. This man we see shows us exactly what the work of God is like - what it looks like to flow in comfort - what it looks like. It's not just putting your arm around people, it's far more than that; so let me just give you a few things about the guy that just are helpful.

1) They bring out Generosity. They contrast him. Lots of people gave, there were hundreds and hundreds of people gave; but on that day they said: this guy has got a great gift of generosity around him, and they contrast him with Ananias and Sapphira, who kept back part, but wanted to look good.

They're saying: the first quality in him - authentic generosity. He just was absolutely generous. You know every one of us can be as generous as we choose to be, but he

had an authentic generosity. There was no trying to present himself as being something, trying to make out he's something; he was absolutely authentic.

He cared about people, he had a real love for people - he was a people person. He just loved people, and he cared about them. If you want to be an encourager, one of the things that will become part of your life (or you can build into your life), is generosity towards people - not financial generosity.

A person who's financially generous will be generous in other ways in their life - generous with their words, with their time, generous in all kinds of other ways.

If you want to be a great encourager, a great exhorter of people: generosity is one of the first things to build into your life - to become a generous person. I thank God I've got so many generous people here.

2) Acts 11:24 – “He was a good man, filled with the Holy Ghost, and with Faith”.

Being generous with people - you go out of your way to make them welcome in your world. You don't just turn up and church, and just connect with a few nice ones that you know. Well done, but that's not generosity. Generosity is when you make it your point that you will actually include people in your world, beyond your normal group.

3) Filled with the Holy Ghost. He's a spirit-filled guy, he's a man of prayer, he's a man who's stayed filled with the Holy Ghost, kept his life energised and empowered in the Holy Ghost. That was what made him able to encourage people. That's why they said: “this is the Son of the Holy Ghost”.

The life of God flows in him. There's a river flowing in him. He kept himself in a strong place in prayer. You don't get filled with the Holy Ghost with bad attitudes; when you're cranky; when you're negative. You've got to get your mind and your attitudes right - and the Holy Ghost fills you, and empowers you. Get into prayer, get into the word.

He's not just filled with the Holy Ghost - he was filled with Faith. It's so easy to see difficulties and problems; it's another thing to come into it, and be a faith person. Church is called to be Faith People.

Faith people don't ignore problems, but they look to see what God is doing, and bring a word from God into that situation. He was full of faith. Some people are full of it - but it's not faith. He was full of faith.

Imagine being known just for those three qualities: 1) you are generous; 2) you're filled with the Holy Ghost, and have the joy of the Lord operating and flowing in your life; 2) and you also impart faith to people.

The desperate need today in the church, is to have people impart Faith to someone else. I don't want someone to impart their depression to me, or their negativity to me, or their problems to me. I want them to be able to be grounded in the word, and connected to God, where actually they're a faith person. Faith people speak. Faith people talk in a certain kind of way.

That's what made him an exhorter - he was full of the Holy Ghost. He had a great heart for people, and when he spoke, he spoke words that lifted people's spirit, and connected them to the promises of God. That's what faith does - if we have the spirit of faith, we speak what God's word says about our life.

A week or so ago, we had a couple come forward, and we prayed and spoke God's word over their life - and within a week there was an outworking of that in their life. We have to learn the value of the word of God. The word of God is what builds your faith.

In the Old Testament, a whole generation lost their way, because when they faced problems and giants - they complained; but there were two men that said: "the giants are bread for us!" It's exactly the same spirit that is on David, in Psalm 23, when he says: "you prepare a table before me in the midst of my enemies". What he's saying is: I'm surrounded by difficulties that could overwhelm and kill me; but Lord, You provide for me something that makes me grow. That's the spirit of faith - it speaks; it imparts hope and life to people, by redirecting them to the word of God.

Imparts words of faith - I love this guy Barnabas. He's filled with faith, filled with the Holy Ghost, filled with the spirit of God. Notice at least three areas that you'll find this guy operating:

1) You'll find him operating in the church; and everywhere he goes, the church increases. How about that? Because he's got a love for people, and believes in them. Because he's a person of faith, he doesn't just see the difficulties they have, he actually sees beyond the difficulties, to see what opportunities and potential there is.

We find him mentioned in three kinds of contexts: 1) in relationship to the church, building and strengthening the church; and then going out to enlarge the church; 2) in relationship to Paul; 3) in relationship to John Mark.

Acts 9:26 – "Saul came to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, but everyone was afraid of him, and didn't believe he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and declared to them that: he had seen the Lord on the road, and how he had spoken to Him."

We've got this guy Paul, and everyone's afraid of him, because of what he's like. His reputation is one of murder and mayhem - he's killed Christians. In fact, in that congregation, there were people there hurting, because their loved ones had been taken away by Paul. They hated him, they were offended by him, they were afraid of him - but Barnabas saw past the problems, went and talked with him, and sat down with him and heard his testimony. You've got to overcome the fear.

The other thing he overcame was: worry about what people would think about him. Imagine that for Barnabas to go to this guy Paul - the murderer of all these Christians, and the persecutor of the church - that was a huge deal. But he went to him, enquired of him - and discerned (because he's a Holy Ghost man) the call of God on his life. He brings the persecutor of the church, the murderer of the church,

into the church fellowship to meet the apostles - and he helps him get reconnected into the church.

Paul had a great gift on his life, but without connection into the church, he wasn't going to fulfil it. He needed to be connected, so a great thing you see in Barnabas' life is, he overcomes fear of what people think, he overcomes the fear of losing his reputation. He goes and connects with someone who really needs help to get up on the next journey of his life. He comes alongside him, and then he brings him to come alongside the other apostles - and this is the man that was going to change everything in the world at that season.

We look at Paul, and we think: wow, what a great guy - but I wonder how many have stopped to think about Barnabas, who connected him. Barnabas connected him; and he did a lot more than that. Barnabas so believed in him, that he helped and worked alongside him. He so believed in him, that later on in Acts 13, when the Holy Ghost calls people to go out to missionary work - He called Barnabas and Saul.

Notice the order - in Acts 13:2, it's Barnabas and Saul; but in verse 7, it's Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas begins to see the great gift on his life - this shows the bigness of heart. He realised there was a greater anointing and call on Paul, than on his own life - so he allowed leadership of the team to rest and transfer onto Paul. Now that is a big person!

That is what an encourager looks like. They're not worried about position; or what people think. They're not worried too much about the things that people are saying about someone else. They go to them, and help them get connected and fulfil their call, discover and find their way forward.

I think this is one of the most amazing things - that Barnabas stepped out of the leadership role, and from that point on: it's Paul and Barnabas. That's the act of someone who acts like the Holy Ghost. He was willing to connect to people, encourage them and lift them up, bring them into relationship, and then empower them to go forward and fulfil their ministry.

You read a little later about John Mark, who was a young disciple. He was one of the apostles - the gospel of Mark. Mark was with Paul and Barnabas, and then the Bible says: the going got real tough, and Mark quit! There was a huge issue over this Mark quitting.

Acts 15:37.- "Barnabas was determined to take with them John, called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take him with them, because he had departed from them in Pamphylia, had not gone with them to the work; and the contention was so sharp, they parted from one another. And Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus."

Barnabas saw the potential in Mark - he recognised there was good in him. Mark had actually quit the job - had gone there, and then quit. We don't know why he quit. Maybe he was just homesick, wanted to go home - he was quite a young guy. He could have quit because he was upset that the leadership transition had taken place - that Paul was in charge (who was a pretty tough man and a driver), rather than

Barnabas. Or it could have been that he just was afraid, that the work ahead was hard; but in the end he left - and obviously they didn't approve of him leaving.

Later on he got reconnected again, and wanted to go back with them, but Paul said: no way, this is a quitter. Barnabas said: yes way, because I see he could step back up and recover. He got two men of God in argument over one another - one saying: no, I don't have quitters in my team; and the other saying: listen, he's got potential. If we believe in him, and work with him, we can get him back up on board and get him going. He can get through this.

There was a huge contention over this issue, and later on you'll find if you read the story, what happened is, Barnabas took Mark under his wing, under his arm, he disciplined him, he worked with him, he got him back up on his feet; and later Paul writes and he said: "can you send Mark to me, he's profitable for me and for the ministry".

Barnabas epitomises what exhortation, or comfort, from a Bible perspective, looks like. It's a person filled with the Holy Ghost, who's got faith in their heart to believe God can do great things in people, and in his own life. It's a person who's got a generous heart; and it's a person who loves people, and includes them.

When Paul wanted to exclude him, he included him and gathered him up, and got him engaged in ministry. That is the work of the church, that's everyone's work. When Mark failed, Barnabas put his arms around, came alongside him, and said: Mark, I know you quit on us, but you know what? I still believe in you. Come on, you can get over this. I forgive you. Let's get you going again, and got him back going.

That is the work of encouragement. When people fail, to come around them, help them back up on their feet, get them re-engaged in the work of God

Hebrews 3:13 "Exhort one another daily" - become a Barnabas.

Closing Prayer

Father, we just thank You for Your word to us. Thank You Lord, that You encourage us, and lift us. We pray for the spirit of encouragement to come upon every person in this church.

I want to ask you just a couple of questions:

Are you full of the Holy Ghost? What's stopping you?

Are you full of faith? What's blocking it?

Are you generous? What's hindering you?

Do you include people, or do you exclude them?

Do you not worry about what people think, but you go to people anyway, and find a way to connect them?

Are you a person who can see past people's failures, and believe the best and pull them up to function?

You are a Son of Encouragement!

Father, I just pray that that ministry of encouragement would flow through every believer here today, in Jesus' mighty name, in Jesus' mighty name. Why don't you determine in your heart, that this week, you're going to start to become an encourager of people? That is your ministry - it's the ministry of every believer, to be an encourager and builder of people. Let's do it.

Let's do it together, let's look for the opportunities. Like Jonathan did, he went to David, connected with him in his difficulty and pain, spoke the word, and lifted his faith, and then stood with him while he recovered. This is the work of the comforter. This is what comfort looks like, and it's something we can all do.

Amen, why don't you pray for the person next to you and bless them. If you don't feel comfortable praying that's fine, let someone pray for you.

Summary Notes

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1. Introduction

- Key Verse: 2 Cor. 1:3-4 "...The Father of Mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves are comforted of God."
- Every person experiences times or seasons of pressure, pain, difficulty – it is part of life.
- In face of personal pain it is easy to:
 - (i) Lose God's perspective
 - (ii) Isolate
 - (iii) Look for ways to comfort ourselves that are destructive
- Comfort =NT3874= to call near, to come alongside and strengthen.
- Example of Jonathan: 1 Sam. 23:16-18. Key ingredients in Comfort.
 - 1) Initiate contact/connection
 - 2) Identify the emotional pain
 - 3) Direct to the Word and Person of God
 - 4) Reassure of personal support

2. Barnabas – The Son of Comfort

- Acts 4:34-37 "And Joseph who also was named Barnabas by the Apostles/which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite from the country of Cyprus having land sold it..."
- Acts 11:24 "For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord."
- Barnabas' name is mentioned 30 times in the Bible – more often than most of the Apostles.

- Tradition is that he was one of the 70 sent out by Jesus in Lk.10:1
- He was given a 'nickname' = described the kind of person that he was.

Barnabas = NT921 = Son of Prophecy

= Son of Comfort NT3874= Parakletos – to come alongside

Jesus used this same word to describe the Holy Spirit – Comforter. Jn14:16

He so manifested this aspect of the Holy Spirit he was given this name.

“Son of the Comforter” – identified by name as revealing what God is like.

- Key Qualities

- i) Generosity – he had a heart for people in need and was generous in helping.
- ii) Filled with Holy Ghost – he was not just a nice person, he was highly spirit empowered.
- iii) Filled with Faith – He had deep personal trust in God and His Word – spoke faith.

3. Barnabas Encouraged Paul

- Acts 9:26-27 “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples but they were all afraid of him and did not believe he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the Apostles.”

- He overcame prejudice and fear of Paul
- He initiated connection with Paul and put his own reputation at risk.
- He recognised potential and the call of God on Paul.
- He facilitated connection and spoke on his behalf.
- Acts11:23-26 Then Barnabas departed Tarsus to seek Saul.

- He exhorted the church and built their faith.
- He saw how Paul’s giftings could strengthen the church.
- He sought out Saul and reactivated his giftings.
- He included him in his team, discipling new believers.

Acts13:2 “separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

- Barnabas was the team leader – vs2:vs7
- He saw the greater gift on Paul and deferred leadership to him vs13,15:2
- He was secure in his own calling and committed to bringing others forward.

4. Barnabas Encouraged Mark

Acts 15:37-39 “Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.”

- Mark had formerly been part of his team. (Acts12:25)
- Mark had ‘departed’ from them. Depart =NT868= withdraw, desert.
- Unclear why he left? - homesick

- reaction to leadership change

- Fear of hardship ahead

- Barnabas encouraged Mark:

He recognised the potential in him

He forgave him for previous failure

He spoke up on Marks behalf

He stood with Mark and took him under his wing

He imparted faith and enabled Mark to be restored to ministry with Paul

- 2 Tim.4:11 “Get Mark and bring him with you for he is useful to me for ministry.”

5. Are you a Comforter?

1 Cor. 14:31 “For you all can prophesy.”

1 Cor. 14:3 “He who prophesies speaks to edification, and exhortation and comfort to men.”

- All of us can be encouragers.
- Heb. 3:13 “Exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”
- Initiate connection with people intentionally?
- Enter their world through questions, listening and genuine interest?
- Accept them and look for the potential in them not problems?
- Strengthen their faith – confidence in God and His Word?
- Help them fulfil the call of God on their life?
- Be there for them – walk with them.

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