

4

A CHANNEL OF COMFORT



What's your favorite comfort food?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLbrokenvessels

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **105**

I can be a channel of God's comfort to others.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

After a hard day, we know certain things will help us relax—a hot bath, soft music, ice cream. Some things just bring us comfort.

I used to be a poor source of comfort. When someone faced sickness or death, I'd offer sympathy because that's what you're supposed to do. I might even offer a prayer, but seldom would I visit the person or attend a funeral. What good would it do for me to be there? I would have nothing to offer. I'd be more nuisance than help.

Then my niece died. It happened suddenly and without warning, and something changed inside me. Now, when I hear someone is sick, I pray *with* them instead of *for* them. I try to help in any way I can, even if that means just sitting with them in the hospital or funeral home. I have learned just what a comfort my presence can be to others.

The apostle Paul also highlighted the comforting role we can play in the lives of others. We can make a difference that's better than any comfort food.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

2 Corinthians 1:2-3

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

Paul followed the Greco-Roman practice of beginning his letter with a greeting, but he used two words that made this greeting unique: “grace” and “peace.” Don’t you like the sound of those words?

We all need the grace that comes through the saving death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God transform us and open our eyes so we can see His grace over our lives. May we experience His grace as it covers all our sin, all our hurt, and all our scars. Then, may God fill us with His peace. And may we experience that peace in the fullest sense of the word—peace in our minds, hearts, and relationships; peace at work and at home; and peace with our past, present, and future.

God’s grace is an amazing gift we neither deserve nor fully comprehend. When we experience pain and loss, God showers His grace and mercy upon us. He redeems us and restores us in His timing and through His grace. What’s fascinating is that His grace is multi-faceted. God’s grace not only restores our hurts, it also brings us comfort. As Paul wrote, God is the “Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.” He is the Source of our comfort.

How does God bring His comfort to us? One way is through His Word: “Remember your word to your servant; you have given me hope through it. This is my comfort in my affliction: Your promise has given me life” (Ps. 119:49-50).

As we’ll see in the next portion of 2 Corinthians 1, however, God has another way He brings His comfort to others—one that may not seem so comforting at first glance.

How does God comfort us in our troubles?

QUESTION #2

2 Corinthians 1:4-5

⁴ He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

Jesus never promised His people they would be immune from trouble. In fact, He promised the opposite: "You will have suffering in this world" (John 16:33). Thankfully, that's not all Jesus said.

- ▶ "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).
- ▶ "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful" (John 14:27).

Suffering and hardship may be our current reality, but so is God's presence. He will be with us in whatever we're facing. When we go through affliction and hardship—not *if*, but *when*—God promises that He will comfort us. "He comforts us in all our affliction."

It's impossible to sense and experience real comfort apart from God and His grace. True, the world wants you to feel the kind of "comfort" that comes from trusting in yourself, your riches, status, and possessions. The problem with this sort of "comfort" is that you're never satisfied because you can never get enough. And if all your possessions disappear, all your "comfort" is gone, too.

God comforts us because He loves and cares for us deeply, but it doesn't stop there. God comforts us "so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

In other words, God comforts us so that we can comfort others!

What are some ways you prefer to be comforted by others?

QUESTION #3

While God definitely supplies a sense of inner comfort and peace through His Holy Spirit, God also loves to comfort His children through His church, the body of Christ. Such comfort can come through the encouragement of a pastor as he shares from God's Word or the prayers and support of friends in a Bible study group. It's encouraging to know others are lifting you up in prayer—even more so when you hear them cry out to God on your behalf. What a gift to know that, in this world of turmoil and trouble, we walk together with the people of God.

As broken vessels and followers of Christ, we are connected to Him, who suffered and died for us. His body was broken for us. We are also connected to Christ as the One who was resurrected and, therefore, brings us joy and comfort. Paul made this connection in verse 5: "For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

Since you have comfort in Christ, you can and should be a comfort to others—a broken vessel bringing comfort to other broken vessels.



2 Corinthians 1:6-7

⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort.

When have you had the privilege of comforting someone?

QUESTION #4

"Our human compassion binds us to one another—not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learned how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future."¹ Nelson Mandela, who certainly knew about suffering, spoke these powerful words. He suffered and persevered under the racial segregation and oppression of apartheid in South Africa. Mandela was a key leader in the 50-year struggle for equal human rights.

Mandela spent 27 years in prison for his fight against apartheid, but he knew the importance of forgiveness: "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."¹ He knew, first hand, that the suffering he had endured could ultimately be used to help others turn the corner and experience hope for the future.

God wants to do the same with you. He wants to use the challenges you face and the difficulties you have endured in your past to comfort others. What problems have you faced in your life? Through what hardships have you struggled? What has broken you? God is able to use those experiences as a vessel of comfort and help others who are facing similar difficulties.

Both suffering and comfort are shared experiences for all believers in Christ. As Paul wrote in verse 7: "And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort." If someone in the church family is suffering with the pain of cancer, it affects the whole body. In the same way, as that individual is comforted when the cancer goes into remission, the whole church body is also comforted—and they all rejoice together. Only when we learn how to share in one another's sufferings can we truly grasp what it means to share in one another's joy.

As the church, we don't need to hide our pain; we don't need to pretend we've always got our act together. Such pretense doesn't help anyone, least of all ourselves. Of course we suffer, but we also find comfort in Christ, and we give and receive comfort through Christ's people who have endured similar struggles. This is both the privilege and responsibility of living as members in good standing of God's incredible kingdom.

How can these verses influence the way we serve one another?

QUESTION #5

SAY THANKS

Use the following template to thank someone who comforted you during a difficult time. If possible, rewrite the finished letter by hand and mail it to the person in question.

Dear _____ ,

I'm writing to thank you for your kindness to me during a difficult time. I was having trouble because _____

_____ .

I can remember feeling _____

_____ .

You were so kind to me when you _____

_____ .

That was helpful because _____

_____ .

Again, thank you for allowing God to comfort me through your kindness. I will not forget it.

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can!"

—JOHN WESLEY

LIVE IT OUT

God wants to use you to share His comfort with others. Consider these suggestions for moving in that direction this week:

- ▶ **Memorize James 1:2-4.** Pray through this passage the next time you experience suffering and affliction.
- ▶ **Pray.** Pray for the persecuted church in the world. Ask God to protect His bride, the church—ask Him to sustain her and strengthen her. Ask God to show you how you can share in the sufferings of the persecuted so that you can also share in their comfort.
- ▶ **Stay in touch.** The next time a friend, family member, neighbor, coworker, or loved one is sick or hurting, call them. Begin to pray *with* those who are struggling, instead of just praying *for* them. Listen to them and love them.



The comfort of Christ and the comfort of others are better than any comfort food. Even better than ice cream. Will you take advantage of this amazing gift?

My thoughts

Share with others how
you will live out this study:
#BSFLbrokenvessels

1. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/erikaandersen/2013/08/21/15-inspiring-quotes-from-nelson-mandela-on-leadership-change-and-life/>