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A Channel of Comfort



What is your favorite comfort food?

QUESTION 1

#BSFLbroken

God's work in our lives makes us channels of His comfort to others.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In the midst of a particularly difficult season of life, we know certain things will help us relax. Dinner at a favorite restaurant, catching up with friends and family, or an evening run in perfect weather can make all the difference.

Some things just bring us comfort.

I was never a good source of comfort. When someone was facing 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 want to visit them or attend the funeral. What good would it do for me to be there?

Then my niece died.

Suddenly and without warning, something changed inside of me. Now, when someone is sick, instead of just praying *for* them, I pray *with* 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.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul showed us the comforting role we can play in the lives of others.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

2 Corinthians 1:2-3 (CSB)

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.

- » **Grace.** The common Jewish prayer combined mercy and peace, but Paul used grace instead of mercy. Mercy is certainly encompassed by God's grace, but grace is the foundation for all we have in Christ. Grace expresses what Christ did for us in giving us salvation.
- » **Peace.** Paul wrote to the Corinthians in Greek, but as a Jew, he was surely familiar with the Hebrew word for peace: *shalom*. Shalom was the common greeting, expressing a wish for health, completeness, and wholeness in a person's life, both physically and spiritually. Paul intended an even deeper meaning for the word: what we experience in Christ as a result of His grace.

Thus, Paul offered more than just a cordial greeting. By greeting the Corinthians with grace and peace, Paul was letting them know he was praying for the church in Corinth. He was saying that God's grace covers all of life. Paul used this new greeting to remind the church that God's grace will redeem their hurt and pain and God's peace will fill them with His comfort.

Paul's words are for us today as well. 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 through His grace. What's fascinating is that His grace is multi-faceted. God's grace not only restores our hurts, but it also comforts because God is the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (v. 3).

How specifically does God comfort us in our troubles?

QUESTION 2

2 Corinthians 1:4-5 (CSB)

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. He said just 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" (Matthew 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 His presence. He will be with us in whatever we're facing. When we go through affliction and hardship, God promises that He will comfort us. "He comforts us in all our affliction" (v. 4).

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" (v. 4). God comforts us so that we are equipped to comfort others!

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. God's comfort can come to us 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. God even brings comfort through just the physical presence of other believers. In this world of turmoil and trouble, we walk together with the people of God.

Just as God uses others in His church to support and encourage us, and bring us comfort, He wants us to do the same for others. Even if we don't think we fully understand the hardship or grief another person is experiencing, we can offer comfort—because of Christ.

In what ways has God shown Himself to be "the God of all comfort" in your life?

QUESTION 3

What do these verses teach us about God's intention for the body of Christ?

QUESTION 4

As broken vessels and followers of Christ, we are connected to Him, who suffered and died for us. Paul made this connection in verse 5: "For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows." Paul made a similar statement in Romans 8:17, when he described us as "heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him." Since we have comfort in Christ, we can and should be a comfort to others—a broken vessel bringing comfort to other broken vessels.

2 Corinthians 1:6-7 (CSB)

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.

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





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

QUESTION 5

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.”⁸ He knew 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 wants to use these experiences you have weathered to comfort and help others who are facing similar difficulties. Your own journey through heartbreak, loss, or trials can help to encourage and comfort others who are facing those same experiences.

Suffering and comfort both 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 comfort and joy.

We do not need to hide our pain as though we’ve got our acts together. We suffer, but we also find comfort in Christ, and through His people who have endured similar struggles. We then have a great opportunity for God to use us—to be a source of His comfort—as our own journeys through afflictions and the comfort we received prepare us to bring comfort into the lives of others facing similar affliction.

"In the hands of God, adversity becomes the means through which His supernatural power is demonstrated."

CHARLES STANLEY

GRACE AND PEACE



In which of the following ways has God provided comfort to you in the past? Check all that apply.

- His Word
- Music
- Christian friends & family
- Sermons/ Books/ Podcasts
- Other: _____

***Which Scripture passage brings you the most comfort?
Rewrite it in your own words below.***

LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out the truth found in 2 Corinthians 1:2-7?

- » **Memorize 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.** Pray this passage when you are experiencing suffering and affliction. Praise God for being the source of all comfort.
- » **Be available.** Consider how your own experience with suffering can be used to encourage others. Write out your story and pray for an opportunity to share this with someone else facing a similar situation.
- » **Learn more about Christian suffering worldwide.** Check out the Voice of the Martyr's organization website, *Persecution.com*, to learn more about Christians facing persecution for their faith. Commit to pray for these believers and ask God to sustain and strengthen them.

We each face difficulties and adversity. The good news is that God Himself can use our experiences to prepare us to minister to others facing similar circumstances. **God wants to use you to share His comfort with others.**



My thoughts