

# Comfort In Hardship #1

I believe there are two basic human needs that every individual has — forgiveness and comfort. I also believe that only God can completely meet both of those needs. We all sin (Romans 3:23), and so we all need God's grace. We all suffer, and so we all need the peace that only God can provide (Philippians 4:6-7).

Every Christian needs encouragement at various times throughout this life. We suffer due to family problems, health concerns, natural disasters, spiritual weakness, emotional trials, problems at work, and even difficulties in the church. This is nothing new, for there were problems in the church even during biblical times. In the church of Christ at Corinth alone, we read of division, immorality, lawsuits between brethren, incorrect worship practices, abuse of miraculous gifts, lack of love for one another, and misunderstandings concerning the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in the last day. Corinth, like most every congregation of God's people, was filled with hurting people. This is why God inspired Paul to give them a lot of encouragement (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). They needed to grow stronger and remain stronger and more faithful, and encouragement would do that.

There are people around you who are hurting. We live in a broken, fallen world; thus, no life is free from hardship (Job 5:7). However, what we see in life is not determined by our own vantage point, but rather how we view life. Sometimes the hardships of life beat us down, and it is during those times that we need to be encouraged (2 Corinthians 1:5; John 16:33; 1 Peter 4:12-13).

Why rejoice when fiery trials come upon us, Peter? Because with those hardships come opportunities to receive God's comfort. Yes, I know that we think that we can do it all ourselves, that we have convinced ourselves that we are invincible, that we think we are self-reliant, that we think that if we obtain enough wealth and possessions we do not have to depend on God, that if we can educate ourselves enough we can determine our own morals, laws, and guidelines so we have no need of the Bible, that if we can be busy enough with programs, plans, and activities, we will have no need of the church, but God knows differently (John 15:5; 2 Corinthians 1:9). Hardships have a way of bringing us to our knees and reminding us of our great need for God's comfort (Hebrews 12:7-11). So instead of running away from God during the hard times, let's run TO Him (Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 5:7).

The Bible teaches us that we can find comfort in hardship. Finding comfort ... in hardship. How can that be possible?

For one, we can find comfort in hardship because hardship equips us to bring comfort to others. All of us who have gone through hard times know how comforting it is when someone else comes up to us and says, "I understand how you feel, because I've been through the very same situation you are going through right now." Christians, when a brother or sister in Christ comforts you in this way, what are they doing? God says that

they are using the comfort which He Himself has given them in order to comfort you (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Until we have experienced pain, we really cannot sympathize with hurting people — not in the way we can after our own pain. One who has lost a child, a parent, a sibling, or a close friend can better understand people who are going through a similar situation. A person who is suffering with cancer can better understand when others deal with this dreadful disease.

When we go through tough times, we are enabled to identify with someone else who has a similar experience. Why do you think support groups are so popular? No one understands the agony of divorce like somebody who has been divorced. No one understands the pain and humiliation of having a family member in prison like someone else who has a family member in prison. When people get together who have common experiences, they can encourage and comfort each other.

The Bible says that God is “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). Mercies is sometimes translated compassion. Did you notice how Paul distinguishes between mercy/compassion and comfort in this verse? There’s a difference between the two. Compassion has more to do with understanding, while comfort has more to do with putting that understanding into action to help others. No wonder “comfort” in the Greek literally means “to come alongside.” That’s what people who comfort do. They come alongside. The comforter listens, encourages, and assists (James 2:15-16). They will work to make the situation better. They will take the initiative to make the visit, pick up the phone, prepare the meal, or tap the sufferer on the shoulder and say, “I understand what you’re going through; I’ve been there” (2 Corinthians 1:6-7).

So we can find comfort in hardship from others, the ones who have experienced the same or similar sufferings. So when we experience hardships, let us do our best to rejoice, knowing that now we are better equipped to be a more comforting blessing to more people.

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