

Topic	Comforting Others as God Comforts Us
Reference	2 Corinthians 1:3-11
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Have you ever had a time in your life where you felt so hard pressed, you felt alone and it was just outside crashing in, inside pushing out and your mind just wants to burst. If you are a human like me, beyond this mask that we put on when we come to church, the smiles we put in front of everyone, a lot of us carry personal pains. Now, you may feel you are very alone if you are in one of those categories but let me just share with you the words of Paul.

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. 2 Cor 1:8-9

In case we think that this is a one-off thing, look at chapter 7. This is another experience of Paul.

For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. 2 Cor 7:5

So, if Paul himself felt depressed, went through a difficult time, I want to start off by comforting you, if the great apostle felt that you are not alone. Today's message goes to two groups of people, in particular if you are struggling. That's the principle group I am are talking to. Now if you are feeling very blessed, you are in a very blessed space right now, your life is going good, your marriage is fine, you are not lonely, you got money in the bank, your health is great, there is a message for you too. Because if you are comfortable, God wants you to comfort others.

The text is quite straightforward to read. We find two words in our text today that are brought up. Verse 4, **all our troubles** and verse 8, **about the troubles**. So immediately you can tell there are two sections. Now one way of reading it is this way. Verses 3 to 7 is the theory, verses 8 to 11 is the application on in the more biblical way, 3 to 7 is the theology, verses 8 to 11 is the experience of it. So we are reading these two texts side by side and the way to move forward, is every time Paul picks up another word, like 'comfort' and 'suffering', we will see

how they work in experience and theology. How does the word 'hope' happens in theology, how does the word hope happens in experience? Then we will be able to get the practical reality from a teaching of God. So there are two sections here.

- God the source of our comfort.
- Suffering that comforts.
- Comforting others as a body ministry.

GOD THE SOURCE OF OUR COMFORT:

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

The text is telling you that we all comfort each other. You have a child and you comfort your child. You have someone whom you love, you comfort him or her. You see at colleague at work, you go and put your hands around him, we all instinctively comfort people, but is how you comforting someone the way God wants you to comfort. Kids are quite interesting, when they fall down they cry and look around. If nobody is around, they will pause and walks to where his parents are and then he starts crying again. Then everybody goes around him. Suffering has power. The way you comfort sometimes may not necessary be the way God wants you to do it. So God tells you, he is a source of it and he lays it by saying, all comfort basically comes from Christ. He centers it on Christ. Now there is a very well-known saying, 'the apple doesn't fall very far from the tree'. It means if God is a God of comfort that is in His character, what does it say about His children, the children of God should demonstrate that character. So, all of us should demonstrate compassion not enough, because we are all very capable of demonstrating compassion, but compassion that demonstrates God as the source.

How do we explain this?

For example, God comforts us and because He comforts us, we comfort others. When we comfort others, they glorify God. That's the biblical position. The default position for a lot of us is we comfort others by chopping God out of the picture. Once you do that, the others will glorify us. Sometimes this happens in many churches. There was this sister who really wanted to help the family that went through a tragedy and offered a lot of money, offered this, offered that and the family just basically said, no, I am not interested. She got very hurt and

she told me, I tried so much to comfort them and they rebuffed me. We all have that. The question we got to ask ourselves is why are we feeling rebuffed? Because innate in our nature is this, if we come to church and we settle in and we try to help being nice, comfort, be kind and people reject us, we don't get this words to us. Thank you Arnold, you are such a nice guy. Thanks Arnold, without you, I would not have made it. To be honest with ourselves, we all want to hear those words. But if you are in Christ you are supposed to take that words and pull it back to God.

How do we see this demonstrated?

We see it in Christ, who walked on the earth, healed many, freed so many from bondages and when he died on the cross, not one person was there, completely abandoned. That's the model we look at, why because Paul ties it to Christ. We see that in verse 5

⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

When you talk about share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, the main suffering of Christ is the death on the cross.

Why are we comforted through Christ?

Because he was resurrected on the third day. The two go hand in hand. A gospel centered church is a church that comforts. So, let's give a simple example. If someone comes to FBC and has got what we call manic depression, or the medical term is called being bipolar, would you extend a hand or let's make it simpler. How do you know in your midst those who struggle with anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem and degrees of depression? Do you say, this is not my job, let them go and find a psychiatrist who can prescribe medicine to them. The church doesn't get involved in this. The text tells us that the church is front and center. This is our responsibility. Let's get the theory right and then we go to the practical,

How do you do it?

You can say I am not equipped, I am not trained, I didn't study psychology, how should I help. So, let's break it a bit. Let's get to the fundamental root of what comforts a person and what is the comfort that we get from God. The word hope is anchored in two verses. In verse 7 it says

7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

It is a replication of verse 5 but he replaces Christ with ours. In verse 5 it is suffering of Christ, comfort of Christ. Now in verse 7, it is our suffering and our comfort. So Paul is taking the sufferings and comfort of Christ and lowering it to himself. How is that actually applied. We find that in verse 9, because of an incident. He was depressed, he tells you why, quite likely it was something that happened in Ephesus in the Book of Acts and we see this happened and here is the key verse, we might not rely on ourselves but on God.

What did God do?

He raised the dead. That's the gospel. He delivered us from such a peril and he will deliver us again. On him we set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

So we are now seeing one word that is coming in, the root from suffering to comfort is hope, but hope that your medical condition will improve, we all pray it does, it sometime doesn't. Hope that your marriage is sustained, it doesn't end bad, we pray it does, sometimes it doesn't. Hope that your business doesn't fail, hope that your family doesn't fall apart, hope that the relationship is restored, we pray for that but sometimes it doesn't. So, hope in God who raised Christ from the dead and the promises that come from that and he tells us this in another chapter.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.....⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight.

So life is not defined by my sufferings, but by my hope in the promises of God, who raised Jesus from the dead. Now that is something easy to say, not so easy to practice, because what happens when you are suffering, you wake up and you think about it, you go to bed and you think about it. Anything you do is layered by it. You go through it, it becomes so painful because the divorce is coming or you haven't got a job or things are just not going right, you go through the days going through the motions. The pain is not going away, and you hope until that is removed you can function and sometimes it is just there and there and you

define life just by your problem. I think this is something we have got to soak in and Paul is saying, my life is not defined by that. Look beyond your earthly dwelling and look to the promises of God.

When you put your hope in things which the world says wow! they don't last. So, Christ says, put it in me. You are mine. My promises will anchor you through the storms in life.

Hurting people pass through many phases to find peace. We have people in midst of us that always struggle, and it is the role of the church, the role of all of you who have received comfort to give that comfort. Because Christ received everyone, he received the prostitute, he received the adulterous, he received the lame, he received the leper, he received the foreigner. In Isaiah 41 we have the promise of, to bind the broken-hearted and that covenant is the covenant of the church. For all of us who are comforted, this is our role. When people like this come to the church, it is my role and your role to comfort them.

Who am I, that the lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name
Would care to feel my hurt?
Who am I, that the bright and morning star
Would choose to light the way
For my ever wandering heart?
Not because of who I am
But because of what you've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who you are

I am a flower quickly fading
Here today and gone tomorrow
A wave tossed in the ocean
A vapor in the wind
Still you hear me when I'm calling
Lord, you catch me when I'm falling
And you've told me who I am
I am yours

"Who am I" Counting Crowns

This morning the Lord is telling us, are you calling on me. Are you calling, do you know that you are His. How do we go through when we struggle in bad times?

When things don't go right, we say that God it isn't fair and when that thing comes to you, you don't act right and you walk out, and you do more strange things. Pain blinds you to doing what is right. So, Paul tells us this,

9 So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,

So, one word is attached to whole, obedience. You can choose to be happy or you can choose to be sad. Paul tells in Philippians to rejoice, again and again rejoice. What does Paul mean when he says, you got to rejoice. When you fight with your wife and couples all fight and if you fight the night before or the day in the morning and you get into the kind of go to work, do you feel good, no you don't. You go to office, do you feel good, no you don't and it was a very bad fight and you are having a meeting, do you feel good, no you don't. It lingers, and you go through the day by going through the motions. Now what is that simple observation telling you, that fight just spoiled your day. All of us go through it. You can remove the equation of husband and wife fighting, it could be you and a good friend who stabbed you in the back, husband and wife, father and son, etc. The spill over is this, you can't function. The text is telling us that function by obeying. So, scripture is telling you, live in obedience. So, get in the car and the scripture tells you to have an abundant life, have a victorious life, put on your music, get in the car, go to office, have a great day and enjoy your day. Why, I tell you why, because scripture commands it. When you do that things become clearer and when you get home at night, it is easier to talk to your wife.

The mind is what we call a monkey mind. In any given time in a day, 101 things it jams your brain. I got deadlines at work, I got financial worries, so and so called me for this and inside you scream and the last thing you needs to be loaded with a problem and in all of that we don't hear the whispers from God, I am calling you and we cannot see past the storm.

SUFFERING THAT COMFORTS:

What is interesting by the way Paul structures the verses is that. Whenever he brings out sufferings, he will bring out comfort. Whenever he talks about comfort, he will bring it to suffering. The verses tie the two together. It is a cause and effect structure. A lot of us want the comfort, we don't want sufferings, but the New Testament embraces suffering. This is something that we all don't like to hear, but he embraces it. Now this is how the text works,

6 If we are distressed, 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 we suffer.

Paul is talking about the cross, because at the cross the suffering of the cross, Christ took away my sins and if it comforted, it is for your comfort three days later he rose again from the dead, he was victorious over suffering and sin. Paul is telling you that all your anxiety, all your pain, all your insecurities, all your bitterness, all your thing you carry now, right now, right here, God is saying, you take that and you nail it on the cross. That is what he is telling you now, you nail it on the cross, because Christ took all of that. What then does it do? Does it remove the pain? No, it produces endurance and the Greek rendering of the word produce means energy. It is like energy just lap from Paul to the church and that's why in verse 7 he wraps it up.

Some people will say, I can't be involved in the ministry of comfort, because I don't know what to say. I am afraid what I do would offend someone. Notice, Paul doesn't talk about either of this in comforting those who suffer, what is he telling you. He is telling you to do something, every single one in this hall can do and it is this, patient endurance.

I asked one of our sister who is suffering with cancer, stage IV. How do you go through it? She tells me, I put my hope in the promises of God. I go wow! And suddenly all my issues don't seem so big. Suddenly, I feel very small. Suddenly, I feel not very worthy, but then I am energized. I tell myself, if my sister can do it than I can also.

In your suffering people see you and people know you are going through a tough time, people know you are struggling with depression, people know you are having anxiety, they know that your marriage is falling apart and while you feel stigmatize but it be encouraged brother and sister, the way you endure that does more evangelism than anyone out there preaching the word of God, because by that they know the power of God, because you point it to Christ. So suffering and comfort does this. By your suffering, you point people to Christ, because that is what Paul was doing. He was suffering, and he shared it with the church and the church is comforted because he put his hope in a God that raised the dead.

Don't Glorify Your Suffering

A lot of people tell you about their previous life. Someone comes and tell you, I was a drug addict, I was a gangster and the whole 45 minutes was about

gangsterism. In the last 10 minutes, the Lord rescued me. Where is the center, the person or God? The person. God was the vehicle to share his street credentials. You know, I made it man, but look at the way Paul explains it. He describes the incident first not in detail, he doesn't tell you all the horrible things, we don't even know what exactly happened in Asia, some people think it was because of a riot in Ephesus, we see this in Book of Acts, but we don't know. Notice, he keeps it vague. Why, because he wants to tell you this main point. We might not rely on ourselves but on God. So sometimes especially, because man is centered on self, you like to brag about how our sufferings are, because we want to bring attention to ourselves.

COMFORTING OTHERS AS A BODY MINISTRY

This is the key text, I want us to look at. How do you comfort others besides your example of how you endure suffering, the simplest thing is prayer. As you help us by your prayers and here is the apostle Paul being held by prayer. The great apostle Paul was helped by prayer. Why do you think Paul write this? He wrote this to tell me and you, if you are suffering you need prayer.

In Asian societies we suffer in silence and this compounds. The other way Paul does is that

5 For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. 2 Corinthians 7:5-7 (NIV)

So the church comforted Titus, Titus comforted Paul and how was Paul comforted by the church, simply by their concern, their deep sorrow and their longing.

What is the difference between sympathy and empathy?

Sympathy means when I see a beggar, I am sorry for you, I give you money. Empathy is walking alongside you and saying, I will bleed with you, I will walk with you, I will be by your side. Paul is calling us to show empathy. That's the call of the church. So, in one way, it is like blood supply. You have to permit every part of FBC, every ministry, if not we are going to subcontract this out to the counseling department.

There are a lot of people in the church who we forget to comfort, and we are all guilty of that. There is one particular group which is the most hidden and it is a

group that needs comforting the most, but this group is the one most of us are guilty of not comforting and it is critical to the lifeline of church. This group is church leaders. How do we see that? Because who is in pain in this article, it is Paul. Here is the great apostle Paul, the titan of the New Testament, writing in two chapters, two words, 'I hurt' or to go a bit further. I hurt, will you help me. Who comes to the rescue? A therapist, a psychologist, a very godly man, no! A church which is known to be very corrupt. The Corinth church isn't a model church. Of all churches, the Corinth church, mired in sin, comforts the great apostle Paul. We see the irony there. So, don't we sit here and say, I cannot do it. Now let me give you one example of this.

Pastor Andrew Stoecklein committed suicide earlier this year. He was a young handsome man with three kids and a beautiful wife. Three days after he passed away, his wife writes this,

"To My Andrew,

It's only been 3 days. Nothing can take away the suffocating pain I feel now you are gone. I miss every part of you, I see you everywhere. I replay the events of that fateful day over and over again in my mind wishing I could have done things differently. Wishing I could have held your hand one more time and prayed over you and told you how much I love you, how much I believe in you, and how God's got this too.

You were right all along, I truly didn't understand the depths of your depression and anxiety. I didn't understand how real and how relentless the spiritual attacks were. The pain, the fear, and the turmoil you must have been dealing with every single day is unimaginable. The enemy knew what an amazing man you were. The enemy knew God had huge plans for your life. The enemy saw how God was using your gifts, abilities, and unique teaching style to reach thousands of lives for Him. The enemy hated it and he pursued you incessantly. Taunting you and torturing you in ways that you were unable to express to anyone.

To a pastor who preached, you can go from a mess to a masterpiece, this is his legacy and the final words of the letter

I am so sorry you were so scared,

I am so sorry you felt so alone,

I am so sorry you felt misunderstood,

I am so sorry you felt betrayed and deeply hurt by the words and actions of others,

I am so sorry you were fighting a dark spiritual war virtually alone,

I am so sorry you were unable to fully get the help and support you needed

If pastors can commit suicide, what more it says about us. Asians bottle it inside. If we think Americans got it bad, Asians got it 10 times worse, because we like to be stoic about it. We put on smiles but beneath that the family is crumbling. The wife suffer, the children suffer and leaders are particularly susceptible because that is where the attack comes and when it come to a church, they feel they need to always come out and put on a front to pray for people, help people, take care of people but behind closed doors, you don't know what they go through. So there is one word I want to teach all of us, especially leaders and I am not just talking about elders, I am talking about life group leaders, ministry leaders. This is a word that we very-very seldom practice in Asia. It is called being vulnerable. It is called having the courage to say, **I hurt. Can you help me?**

Did you know with 100 people in your church on Sunday morning, 25% of them will suffer from a diagnosable mental illness this year.

There are people in our midst who are suffering from traumatized, bipolar and may be suffering from mental illnesses. They don't need you to be their therapist. They need us to be their family. Will you do that?

In Asia, we have stigmatized counseling, that means if I see you go for counseling, you are saying that there is something wrong with me. Paul is saying all of us need to hear. We need to get our wounds healed and it requires everyone. God is trying to push our hardness and let a little bit of light in and when the little bit of light comes in, grace comes in and then there is hope.