

RECEIVING THE COMFORT OF CHRIST (Ps.91:1-3; 2 Cor.1:3-4)

1. SUFFERING FOR CHRIST'S SAKE

- A. Every believer will suffer to some degree for Jesus' sake. This may come in the form of direct opposition to the gospel from people and evil spirits (2 Thess.3:2) or it may come as the result of our obedience to God which leads us into seasons of difficulty for the sake of correction and the maturity of our love (Song.4:16).
- B. There is a difference in these two forms of suffering. The enemy never has our best interest in mind. His plans are never redemptive (Jn.10:10) and we are to resist this form of abuse (1 Pt.5:8-9). We are not to agree with him seeking to ravage our lives.
- C. When God's leadership brings suffering [hardships], He is not persecuting us. God does not persecute His people any more than a good shepherd would persecute his sheep. God's discipline [training in righteousness] can involve severe hardships but always with the intent to correct, mature and heal (Hos.13-22; 1 Pt.4:19; Heb.12:5-7).

2. TROUBLE AS SUFFERING

- A. Jesus taught His disciples that they would experience a unique set of difficulties because of their loyalty to Him (Jn.16:33). Trouble and difficulty are common to all men simply because we live in a fallen world but when we take on the yoke of Christ, we are agreeing to bear the stigma attached to Christ's name (Ps.69:9; 1 Pt.4:14).
- B. Often, believers don't consider that their troubles are a form of suffering. Many Christians imagine that because others suffer to greater degrees that their sufferings are insignificant to God. This is not true. God is familiar with our pain and hardships (Ps.56:8) and they are dear to Him. If we do not acknowledge our pain, we will struggle to accept His comfort.
- C. *"For a number of languages 'trouble and suffering' may be expressed as 'that which causes pain.'"*¹

¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 242). New York: United Bible Societies.

3. SUFFERING AS A PART OF INTIMACY WITH GOD (Phil.3:10-11)

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.” -John.17:3

- A. God became a man and suffered many things so that He might become like us and able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb.4:14-5:5). God Himself took on indescribable suffering so that He might become familiar with our pain. The letter to the Hebrews tells us that *“Every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.”* -Heb.5:1-2. God linked His compassion to Jesus’ suffering. He not only endured great trial to free us from the penalty of sin, He did so that we might experience the riches of His kindness toward us (Eph.2:7). Sin stood in the way. It was the obstacle -God’s goodness was the goal.
- B. In like manner, we enter into His pain so that we might understand the depths of His love and commitment to the human race. The Song of Solomon paints a beautiful word picture displaying this very reality.

“Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits.” -Song.4:6

1. The north wind speaks of the seasons of adversity that are necessary to produce a fruitful harvest in a garden. Too severe and the plants will die, not enough adversity and the plants can suffer unnecessary loss. Long, cold winters in the north-eastern part of the United States allow time for the soil to be replenished and a plant to nourish and strengthen its root system. Crying out for these necessary north-wind seasons takes great courage and confidence in God’s ability to protect, strengthen and deliver us in due time. We learn to accept and appreciate difficulty as we grow spiritually in the same way that Jesus did (Heb.5:8-9).
- C. The idea that the sufferings of Christ will touch our lives is a staple in the New Testament. The apostles were living epistles who both wrote and spoke of this reality. Not only is suffering necessary in certain seasons in order to promote the gospel message but it is also an important component in developing our love for God.

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” -Phil.3:10-11

- D. This mature apostolic cry in Paul's heart stemmed from God's desire within Him that he have a more complete understanding of His Son Jesus. The power of Christ's resurrection speaks of all that has been purchased on our behalf because of the work of the cross. This includes our resurrection from the dead, the indwelling Spirit, our eternal salvation, resurrected body, the promise of healing, restoration, joy and every facet of God's favor poured forth into our lives. But Paul also yearned to know and drink the cup that Christ drank during His time on earth (Mt.20:22). This cup of communion was the cup of suffering that Jesus drank and experienced in His obedience to the Father (Lk.24:7; Heb.12:2)

4. SUFFERING AS A PART OF OUR MATURITY

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."

-Rom.8:29

"though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

-Heb.5:8

- D. Paul mentions that not all suffering takes the form of physical abuse or death -such as what many believers currently experience all over the world (Heb.12:4). We are told that the sufferings which Jesus experienced in His life on the earth will also touch our lives in certain seasons.
- E. Jesus suffered more than just physical abuse at the hands of Jewish and Roman authorities at the end of His life. He suffered the stigma of his mother's perceived infidelity (Jn.8:41), rejection of close friends and family members (Jn.7:3-5; Lk.4:16,28), He was intimately familiar with grief and loneliness (Is.53:3) and knew what it was like to have nothing (Mt.8:20), to be misunderstood, used and unfairly targeted.
- F. Suffering includes experiencing pain and loss. This is never pleasant, though it is common to everyone. Our natural instincts are to avoid suffering but in certain seasons God's leadership brings us into the valley of sufferings (Ps.23:4). When David speaks about his time in the valley of the shadow of death he also speaks about the rod and the staff of His shepherd. This valley in David's life was a place that he frequented because, like a sheep, he followed in the footsteps of his shepherd. David experienced many difficulties because of God's commitment to be established in him and through him.
- G. Paul writes to the Corinthians that he and his ministry team suffered as a result of their obedience to the Lord in order that they would be able to administer comfort to them when they suffer (2 Cor.2:3-4,6,7). Paul was able to receive such a precious

revelation of Christ the Comforter only when he suffered. As he entered into the same sufferings as Jesus did, Jesus lavished on him the same comforts that the Father had poured out upon Him when He suffered. “Now”, Jesus said, “It’s your turn. Comfort your brothers and sisters in the same way.” Paul grew in wisdom and maturity as a leader from seasons like these. He learned not only what to say and do, but how to say and do them.

5. **OUR COMFORT** (1 Pt.4:12) God describes Himself as “*the God of all comfort who comforts us in all of our troubles*” (2 Cor.1:3; Rom.15:5).

A. God comforts us by His nearness. He reminds us of every good thing that we have inherited in Him (1 Cor.14:3) and the surety that we will receive these things fully in the age to come if we do not give up and draw back from Him.

1. The expressions of God’s comfort are manifold. God has given us the scriptures as a means of declaring to us the absolute certainty that He will not fail. The Old and New Testaments are filled with prophetic promises that speak of both the certainty of God’s character and the incredible beauty that awaits believers in the age to come.

“...searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” -1 Pt.1:11

2. The future and full revelation of God’s glory in us includes the reality that we will be adorned with unique expressions of God’s beauty, power and majesty as part of our eternal rewards. God’s glory will be displayed openly (Mt.6:4,6) on His people as statements of His favor, our faithfulness and His affections for us (Dan.12:3; Mt.13:3).

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” -Rom.8:18

3. Interestingly, God comforts us with the assurance that one day human oppressors will be punished. Though it is the will of God that all men would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim.2:4), many will reject the gospel and rage against God and His people (Ps.2:1-3). God remembers the shed blood and great suffering of the saints throughout history and though He is patient in this age with those who agree with wickedness He has determined a time for retribution.

“...since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven...” -2 Thess.1:6-7

4. God comforts us by setting us in communities where we relate to one another in love, humility and generosity. God has given a measure of His Spirit to each believer for the benefit of those around them. Joy, generous giving, encouragement, a listening ear, deep friendships, and help in time of need are just a few of the many comforts that come our way when we are rightly connected to others in the body of Christ.

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.” -1 Cor.12:4-6

5. God supplies the experience of His presence to comfort us. Many times, in seasons of trial it seems as if the Lord is distant. Though the Bible assures us that He has not, nor will He ever, leave us, sometimes the sense of His presence dims. The Song of Solomon details a particular instance in the narrative where Solomon’s (who prophetically portrays Jesus) immediate presence is removed, and the heart of His young bride is overcome with longing for Him. She searches for the one she loves as she engages in the obstacles that once kept her fully from Him. She embraces these difficulties, and pressing in, she is united together with Him where He is (Song.5:1-6, 6:1-5a). When God lifts the sense of His presence it is most often to create a context for us to work our spiritual muscles and exert sincere effort to find Him. One day God’s manifest presence will be our normal experience. In this age though we learn to cherish those moments when He seems so near to us.

“The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” -Ps.34:18-19