

**“My Comfort = Your Comfort”**  
**2 Corinthians 1:3-11**  
**8/16/09**

**God comforts us in all our troubles enough to share with everyone else in theirs.**

“Why did this happen? Why did God allow this suffering?” How should I be feeling? What do I do?”

There come times in our lives when things change that push us and our understanding and emotional and spiritual stability. It’s when the answers we seek are no longer found on wall street, in the shopping malls, in Jerry Springer, or in our self-help books.

Maybe you have had those feelings before, or are right now—maybe when a loved one has died, or lost your job, or have seen the horror of war, or when illness has reeked havoc on your body.

And so somewhere, somehow, we search for comfort.

**2 Corinthians 1:3-11**

*“Praise be to God who comforts us in all our troubles.”*

Comfort: Encouragement, consolation.

And did you hear it? “To patiently endure our suffering.” Not just immediately lift us out. That’s where we can struggle a little with this sometimes. Of course we don’t enjoy adversity. It’s not a fun thing. So we want it over.

But:

**God gives us what we need to endure.**

Comfort. It sounds like a weak word almost, like offering you a pillow and a cup of tea. But God’s comfort is far more than just a pat on the back.

When I was 17 years old and a senior in high school, I had at that point gained a brother. No, not from my parents, but a best friend, Matt. We became very close, spending basically all our time together—we biked, skied, ran track, were in youth group, Youth for Christ, band, drove his 1970 Chevell as fast as we could—I think we hit 135mph once. You name it. There was a trust and bond there that I had not experienced before.

There came a point when Matt had been dealing with manic depression, and so I heard all of his darkness as he shared with me what that was doing to him. We talked a lot about our faith and where God was in all that. Usually at a loss for any great answers, but somehow there was comfort in sharing that together. He knew he could count on me, and I knew that somehow in some way God was present.

January 11, 1988 changed all that. It was cold. I got up to get a shower for school early in the morning. When I was finished and walked back to my room, there were my parents at the dining room table, still in their night clothes, my mom weeping.

My heart pounded a little. I thought, “Grandma died.” I asked what was going on, but my dad just looked at me. He led me into my room and assured me that I wouldn’t be going to school today. I continued to ask what was happening. Finally, looking me in the eye my dad said, “Matt killed himself last night.”

Many of you know what kind of pain those moments bring. It's pretty hard to put into words. Reality as I knew it was gone. My whole body, mind, and spirit lurched to grab a hold of something solid as part of me was ripped away.

Immediately my dad grabbed me and pulled me in. He had a winter coat on that was soft on the outside, and I will always remember that feeling of being wrapped in his arms as tight as he could so I could simply weep. No words. Just strength.

Comfort. I didn't have to ask. I didn't have to move. My dad simply was there, and grabbed tight. Did it take away my pain? No. But it helped me endure the moment. I was not alone.

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles."*

It is difficult to describe comfort. God's comfort. That's a beginning image.

### **Peterson 2 Corinthians 1**

#### **God comes alongside us.**

You don't have to ask. You don't have to move. Our Heavenly Father is simply here, ready to grab you tight.

One of the worst fears we have as human beings is to be alone, truly alone. I like my solitude. I can spend a couple days alone and be fine. That is an entirely different thing from truly being alone in life.

And if there is one message for us this morning, it is that:

#### **You are not alone.**

No one truly ever is. It may feel like it. I have many times seen the desperate looks in the faces of those hurting, telling me they wished it were true that they're not alone.

And it is true. It's just that our circumstances, our emotions, all the complexities of our lives up to that moment can get in our way of seeing that.

Listen to Paul again from Peterson's translation: *"We don't want you in the dark, friends, about how hard it was when all this came down on us in Asia province. It was so bad we didn't think we were going to make it. We felt like we'd been sent to death row, that it was all over for us."*

That's pretty bad. Sometimes it feels like it's all over. Game over, man. But I am here because God is never over. He comes alongside us.

Romans 8:26 tells us that, *"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."*

When you are at total loss, there God is to comfort, encourage us through.

Paul finishes his thought, *"As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally—not a bad idea since He's the God who raises the dead!"*

Isaiah 66:13: *"As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you."*

Now, one thing you can do in your time of adversity is be honest with God.

#### **Open your heart to God's heart.**

One day Jesus was entering a town and saw a group carrying away a man who had died. He was the only son of a widow, and she was in tremendous grief. When Jesus saw the mother in grief *"His heart went out to her."*

God is not some aloof, impersonal being. But knows your pain and grieves with you. Tell Him what you feel.

**Psalm 77:1-15**

We can trust God and pour our heart out to Him. Tell God how much this situation stinks. God can handle it. It's not disrespectful, but honest. That's what a real relationship is about.

"Has His promise failed for all time?" the psalmist asks.

You know Job? You can read about his story in the Old Testament, right before the Psalms. The Scriptures tell us that, "*Job was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.*" But then, all at once, everything he had—his family, his health, and all his riches—were taken from him. He was suffering badly and had no idea why. Job 3 says, "*After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said, 'May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it...May those who curse days curse that day.'*"

This actually goes on for 26 verses. That's pretty open with your feelings I would say. Brutal honesty perhaps.

God can handle it. Actually, God's heart aches with us. That's what He showed us in Jesus. He came to us in our sinful, hurtful world and experienced it in all its absolute horror.

Jesus wept when His friend Lazarus died. He had compassion on the crowds—literally meaning a gut wrenching ache for the people.

Open your heart to Him who's heart aches for you.

And:

**Open your heart to others.**

2 Corinthians 1:4: "*We can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*"

From the beginning God said we are not to be alone. We need others in our lives. Our faith community is a shining example of that, of the comfort we receive from one another. And even in our adversity:

**We are comforted when we comfort others.**

As it says here in Peterson's translation, "*Before you know it, God brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.*"

Just be with someone. Come alongside someone as God comes alongside you.

Author and pastor Matt Woodley shared a story about his friend Theresa. Theresa was experiencing what St. John of the Cross calls a dark night of the soul—a period of spiritual loneliness and despair. Over the course of describing her story, listen to how Woodley discovered that what seemed most helpless in his ministry was actually the most helpful:

"After marrying the man of her dreams, [Theresa] dropped into the abyss of a deep depression. Everything went dark in her mind and body. She even started writing her obituary. Three years ago I would have had plenty of answers and solutions for her. I would have been so clever and powerful. But now I could only sit with her in her pain. We prayed. I didn't know what to do, didn't have any answers, so I said, 'Theresa, I have no idea what to say, so could we just read

the Psalms?' Then I read Psalm 77, an agonizing psalm of lament, and I went home. I left feeling utterly powerless, and I sure didn't think that I made her feel better.

"The next week another leader of our church visited Theresa. She was still suffering intensely, but when the leader asked if he could pray for her, Theresa said, 'Yes, but before you pray, please read Psalm 77. I've been clinging to it all week. It's my lifeline to God.' Apparently when we read Psalm 77 in utter powerlessness, God showed up in her life with power."

Woodley adds: "At times the best, most powerful and most useful way to love someone is to get to the end of myself. I admit that I can't fix or change you. My words and my advice won't heal your brokenness. But I can be with you, and we can go together to the Father."

*IVP Books, "Are You There, God? An Interview with The Folly of Prayer Author Matt Woodley"*

Together we can go to the Father. Together—you, me, and God—we can see our way through anything. You are never alone. God is the God of the past, present, and future. He's there waiting, ready. He's here now. Amen.