

## Introduction

- A. God never said it would be easy.
  - 1. This road we travel through life has ups and downs, even for followers of Jesus. The choice to be a Christian does not make us immune from troubles. Some of you know that well; you're living it right now.
    - a. Some of you are suffering from a void left in your heart by the loss of someone who was precious to you.
    - b. Some of you are afflicted with concern for your health, not knowing what the next day may bring for you.
    - c. Some of you are living with intense disappointment because your children have stopped serving God.
    - d. A lot of people are fretting over finances right now, uncertain about their jobs and not sure how they will get the bills paid if they should find themselves out of work.
  - 2. God never promises that we would be insulated from all the troubles of life.
- B. But God did promise that, whatever life might throw our way, He would provide comfort for us during our difficult hours (**II Corinthians 1:3-4a**).
  - 1. But exactly how does God do this? In my hour of trouble or sorrow, how does God comfort me?
  - 2. I fear that people do not always know the answer to that question. As a result, in our hour of need we miss the powerful consolation God is eager to extend to us.
  - 3. If your heart is troubled this morning, God wants to comfort you. Let's talk for a while about how He plans to do that.

## His Presence

- A. We are comforted with the knowledge that God is always with us, that we are always in His presence.
  - 1. This does not mean that we will be able to see Him with our eyes or that He will softly whisper things in our ears.
  - 2. The scriptures explain how we are in His presence.
    - a. **Psalm 34:15-18**. The Psalmist tells us that His eyes see us. God is always watching out for me. His ears are open to my cry. He is always listening when I call out to Him. He's never too busy or distracted to hear me. He is near to the broken hearted.
    - b. **Matthew 28:20**. Jesus promised His disciples that He would be with them. They would not be left alone to accomplish the great mission He had given them, and neither are we. He would be with them always – all the time, not just occasionally.
    - c. **Hebrews 13:5**. Disciples can be content because we live with the promise that God will never desert us or forsake us.
  - 3. Disciples of Jesus are never alone. We live with God's watchful eye looking out for us and His ears waiting to attend when we cry out to Him. We are always in His presence.
- B. How do we know this is true?
  - 1. We just said that we cannot see God; He will not whisper in our ear. How do we know He's really there?
  - 2. It's because of what is in this book. While you may have expected me to say that, don't minimize the power of that statement. There is overwhelming evidence to which we can appeal to demonstrate that this book comes from God. When we open and read it, we can know with certainty we are reading the words of God. Consequently, when the Bible says God is with His people, we are always in His presence, we can know with certainty that it is so!
  - 3. On a daily basis as we go through our struggles, we can find comfort in the fact that God sees everything that is going on and listens when I talk it over with Him.

## His Providence

- A. God is not simply aware of what is happening with me, He's working in my life to help me with my troubles.
  - 1. The Lord does not simply hear the cry of the righteous; He delivers them out of their troubles (**Psalm 34:17-18**).
  - 2. The Hebrew writer said that the Lord is our Helper (**Hebrews 13:6**).
- B. I will confess that I'm not sure I can explain how God helps us.
  - 1. For example, when we pray for God to help the sick recover, what exactly does He do for them? He does not perform a miracle on the body, but what does He do? The Bible simply does not reveal how God works behind the scenes to help us. We just know that He does.
  - 2. Paul had experienced God's providential care (**II Timothy 3:10-11**). God was watching over Paul and protecting him as he preached the gospel. This did not necessarily involve a miracle. For example, in Iconium God through His providence exposed a plot to stone Paul so that He was able to escape (**Acts 14:5-7**). I don't know how it came about that this plot was exposed. But I do know that it was part of God's providential work to protect His preachers so that they could continue their work.
  - 3. We may not know all the different ways that God works behind the scenes of our lives to care for us. We simply know that He does. This providential care should be a source of great comfort to us.

## His Power

- A. But this comfort only grows as we consider that God is not just another friend who cares about us and wants to help us. He is the all-powerful Creator of the universe.
  - 1. As our Creator and Friend, He is not just willing, but He is able to deal with any challenge or trouble we are facing. What problem do you have that is too big for God?

2. When God told Abraham that his wife would bear a son, even Sarah laughed (**Genesis 18:12-14**). Do you remember His reply? Is anything too difficult for Me (**v. 14**)? He made the world; He created everything. He could certainly enable Sarah to have a son.
  3. This power comforts us when we put our trust in Him (**Psalms 118:5-9**). Why is it better to trust God rather than men? Men can't always fix the problem, but God always can! This is why we are confident and comforted in our hour of trouble (**v. 6**).
- B. Sometimes we fret because we make our problems bigger than they really are.
1. We look at them only from our perspective – what we can do by our wisdom or power.
    - a. I don't know how we will ever fix the problems in our marriage.
    - b. I am miserable at my job and have no idea what to do about it.
    - c. My spouse is not a Christian and I just cannot get them to study with me.
    - d. This congregation is not reaching the lost and just don't know how we will ever get moving on this.
  2. We need a new perspective. These are not battles to be fought alone, but with our greatest ally. We need to seek the help of God with the confidence that He is willing and ABLE to help us overcome (**Philippians 4:6-7**). When we see ourselves tackling our challenges with God on our side, it gives us a whole new perspective. It gives optimism and confidence. It gives us comfort.

### His People

- A. As we dig deeper into the details of this question, we discover something else. God comforts His people WITH HIS PEOPLE (**II Corinthians 1:3-4**). Think about it: you and I are tools that God uses to provide others with peace of mind and support during their moments of sorrow or struggle.
1. We see this in the New Testament (**Ephesians 6:21-22**; **II Timothy 1:15-17**; **Philemon 1:7**).
  2. On a more personal level, I think a lot of us have experienced it, though we may not have considered that God was at work.
    - a. The little crowd who sat with you in the waiting room when your child had surgery
    - b. The friend who helped you go through your mother's things after she passed away
    - c. The brothers and sisters who stood in line to comfort you after you confessed some spiritual failure
    - d. The older disciple who assured you at a moment of uncertainty that you were doing the right things with your kids
  3. In fact, sometimes God even uses the tragedies in our life to equip us to comfort others (**II Corinthians 1:4**). I'm not saying God causes the tragedy, but He can use it for good. If you've lost a child, had a spouse abandon you or buried a parent, you have special capacity to comfort those who suffer similar tragedies.
- B. Let's draw two exhortations from this tool of God's comfort.
1. First, I need to let God use me in this way (**Galatians 6:2**). I need to be available, I need to be willing to use my life experiences and the wisdom I've gain along the way to comfort others. It's one of the ways God works.
  2. Second, I need to allow people to offer comfort in times of sorrow and struggle. It's one of the ways that God fulfills His promise to be to us the God of all comfort. When I shut out my brethren, I'm robbing myself of one of the tools God uses to provide this comfort.
  3. I need to open myself to the consolation offered by His people.

### His Promises

- A. He used this method to comfort the Thessalonians (**I Thessalonians 4:13**).
1. Evidently some of them were grieving the loss of loved ones who had passed away, perhaps even fearing they might be forgotten or miss out when the Lord returned.
  2. How would the Holy Spirit comfort these troubled souls? He does so with a promise (**vs. 14-17**). Those who had died would not be forgotten, but they will be raised when the Lord comes. This is God's word on the matter (**v. 15**); it is absolutely guaranteed. But notice what they were to do with this promise (**v. 18**). It was God's promise that gave them comfort during their hour of grief.
  3. What promise has God made that can give you comfort during your hour of grief and struggle? I Corinthians 10:13, John 14:1-3, Philippians 4:11-13, Psalm 119:105, Psalm 34:15, Hebrews 13:5b
- B. Often the comfort God wants us to have is supplied by the words of this book (**Psalms 119:107**). But to find that comfort, I have to pick up the book.
1. How sad that some never find the comfort God intends for them because they wring their hands in frustration rather than wrapping their hands around this book.
  2. Let me be plain: in our hours of grief and sorrow, we need to get back to the book and rehearse again those wonderful promises that give us hope. It's one of the ways that God comforts His people.

### Conclusion: We serve the God of all comfort.

God does not leave us alone in our hours of struggle and grief, but using a vast array of methods He offers to console us. But it is up to us to reach out and take the caring hand that He has extended. If you're wallowing in sin's mire, God is extending His hand. If you're one of His children who has left Him, He's extending His hand to bring you home. If you've never decided to be His servant, He's extending His hand. Will you take it?

- David A. Banning