



The  
GOD  
of All Comfort

A Guide to God's Healing  
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## Chapter 1: The God of *All* Comfort

We live during a time of great uncertainty. Indications of unrest and discord are everywhere – from the international level to our personal lives. The earth groans under the stress of pollution. It is a time marked with earthquakes, hurricanes, extinctions, wars between nations, pandemics, greed, litigations, privacy invasions, identity theft, drought and famine, addictions, depression, broken families, rebellion, and narcissism. Rather than the Garden of Eden intended for God’s children, we’re faced with the negative affect of pollution on our physical health. Technology wars against our mental, emotional, and interpersonal health. We’re faced with stress-induced illnesses in many forms. How do we cope? Where can we turn for comfort during these troubling times?

On the night before Jesus’ departure from the disciples, he taught that He would be sending the Comforter, the Holy Spirit – they would not be alone.

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you ([John 14:16-20](#)).

Jesus provided further comfort with these words: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The Bible tell us that God is the source of *all* comfort. Do you believe that, *really*? Or are you like so many of the rest of us – quick to recognize a truth, but slow to apply it? Do you

struggle with *ongoing* faith and trust in the Almighty? In other words, do you have faith – for the moment – only to find your faith waver and eventually transform into full-blown anxiety and worry? The good news is that finding comfort in the Almighty – for the long-term – *is* possible. The Bible provides insight to help us maintain trust in God, no matter the circumstance. What Jesus was to the disciples in the flesh, He is to us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Godhead is three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – One God. The Holy Spirit is our paraclete. Paraclete is defined as helper, or one who is called upon to help. The Holy Spirit comes alongside us, as with an attorney during a trial when needing defense, or during an unjust situation. The Holy Spirit walks alongside us as we face temptations, unjust situations, wounds, and loss. Even better, for those who confess their sins and receive Jesus as their Savior, our attorney – the Holy Spirit – dwells among us and is *in* us.<sup>1</sup>

Several years ago a close loved one faced trial and ultimate sentencing. It was at that moment I understood the importance of a paraclete. The attorney was strength during a time of weakness, wisdom and direction during perplexity and confusion, and truth and peace during times of trouble. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit. In his parting words Jesus told the disciples He would not leave them fatherless, but would send the Holy Spirit: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever” (John 14:16). The bottom line is this: The gift of the Holy Spirit is the same ever-present help for us today as for the disciples over 2000 years ago. What Jesus was to them in the flesh, He is to us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. He comes alongside us to comfort, guide, and shelter us during times of trouble; convict of sin; and offer sweet companionship. All who have placed their faith in Jesus

Christ can learn to listen with sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit – to seek His comfort, direction, and peace in our daily lives regardless of the storm.

### Chapter One Study Guide

I. Read and Consider:

“In this life, there will be trouble...” **John 16:33.**

“We wrestle not against flesh and blood...” **Ephesians 6:12.**

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble”  
**Psalm 46:1-3; 10-11.**

“If you love Me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth...” **John 14:15-17, 23 – 27.**

II. Activity: God’s Complete and Ever-Present Comfort

Read four psalms that review God’s comforting benefits - Psalm 103, 146, 91, and 23. Next to each verse, write the type of comfort God provides. If working in a small group, divide the Psalms between individuals or teams. (Answer Key in back.)

**Psalm 103: 1 – 18.**

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 1-3a, 12)
- B. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 3b)
- C. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 4a)
- D. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 4b)
- E. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 5)
- F. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 6)
- G. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 7)
- H. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 8-11, 13-17a)
- I. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 17b-18)

**Psalm 146:3 – 10**

- J. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 3-6)
- K. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 6b)
- L. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 7a)
- M. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 7b, 9b))
- N. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 7b)



- O. \_\_\_\_\_ (8a)
- P. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 8b)
- Q. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 8b)
- R. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 9)
- S. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 9b-10)

**Psalm 91: 1-16**

- T. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 1 – 3, 14)
- U. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 4-10)
- V. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 11-14)
- W. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 15a)
- X. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 15b)
- Y. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 15b)
- Z. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 16)

**Psalm 23**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 1 -2, 3b)
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 3a, 4a)
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 4b)
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 5a; 6)
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 5b)

III. Questions:

- A. When you look at the qualities above, what impression do you have about God?
  
- B. Paul wrote in his letter to the believers at Corinth: God the source of *all* comfort. Can you claim it, and believe it? Can you share a time when you cried out to God for comfort, He ran to you, comforted you, provided for you, and/or sheltered you from the storm?

“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, so that we can **comfort** those in any trouble with the **comfort** we ourselves receive from **God**. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our **comfort** abounds through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

- C. Analyze: What do the comforting benefits have in common?
  
- D. Evaluate the four texts: What is the condition for the enactment of comfort?
  
- E. How does one receive the Holy Spirit in order to experience the ongoing comfort of Christ (1 John 1:9; Romans 10:9, 10; John 3:16)?

### **Chapter One Study Guide Answer Key**

#### **Psalm 103: 1 – 18.**

- A. Forgives (vs. 1-3a, 12)
- B. Heals (vs. 3b)
- C. Redeems (vs. 4a)
- D. Crowns (vs. 4b)
- E. Satisfies and renews (vs. 5)
- F. Executes righteousness (vs. 6)
- G. Teaches (vs. 7)
- H. Offers mercy and compassion (vs. 8-11, 13-17a)
- I. Keeps his covenant (vs. 17b-18)

#### **Psalm 146:3 – 10**

- J. Helps (vs. 3-6)
- K. Upholds truth forever (vs. 6b)
- L. Executes justice (vs. 7a)\*
- M. Provides (vs. 7b, 9b))
- N. Frees (vs. 7b)
- O. Enlightens (8a)
- P. Lifts shame and burdens (vs. 8b)
- Q. Loves (vs. 8b)
- R. Watches (vs. 9)
- S. Relieves (vs. 9b-10)

#### **Psalm 91: 1-16**

- T. Delivers (vs. 1 – 3, 14)
- U. Covers and protects (vs. 4-10)
- V. Keeps (vs. 11-14)
- W. Answers and responds (vs. 15a)
- X. Abides (vs. 15b)
- Y. Honors (vs. 15b)
- Z. Shows: makes known his salvation (vs. 16)

### Psalm 23

- 6. Leads (vs. 1 -2, 3b)
- 7. Restores (vs. 3a, 4a)
- 8. Comforts (vs. 4b)
- 9. Prepares (vs. 5a; 6)
- 10. Anoints (vs. 5b)

IIIC. God *actively* comforts his people: All are verbs. Comfort refers to ongoing blessings.

IIId. Comfort is a condition for faithfulness – resting in Him and obedience to God’s commands.

IIIe. The Holy Spirit is received through a prayer of confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

**“If you** confess with your mouth, **“Jesus is Lord,”** and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with **your heart** that **you believe** and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9-10)

**“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).**

Invite Jesus into your heart and life through prayer today: Dear Jesus, I am sorry for my sins. Please forgive me for all the ways I have fallen short. Jesus, I believe you are God. I receive you into my heart and ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Please be my Savior and my Lord. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: First Lectures On the Psalms, Psalms 1 – 75*, Vol. 10, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1974), 201-03.



# **Chapter Two**

## **Two Anchors**



## Chapter 2: Two Anchors

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure (Hebrews 6:17)*

**Read:** Hebrews 6:13-20, 7:20-8:1

Most people I know struggle with trusting God, especially during the storms of life. If you can relate to this statement, you are not alone. Anchors remind us that there will be storms. “In this life there will be trouble” (John 16:33a). The anchor signifies hope for the sailor. Fully aware of the potential for storms in the great sea, the sailor enters the ship placing trust in the mounted anchors.

As I have come to understand, ships have at least two working anchors – port and stern – weighing anywhere from 1500 to 100,000 pounds. The purpose of the anchor is to hold the ship within a limited area depending on the length of the chain. The anchor’s fork grips the seabed, holding the ship steady. When a ship is anchored with both anchors, the ship is in “open moor” or made secure. If only steadied with one anchor, the part of the ship being held with the anchor can break off during a storm. Anchors are the most underutilized tool on the ship, yet the most valued. The anchors’ value is not completely understood until put to the test. In Christianity, standing firm and steadfast in the faith is symbolized by the anchor.

Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, **by two unchangeable things** in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. **We have this hope as an anchor for the soul**, firm and secure... (Hebrews 6:17-19a).



Hope is symbolized by an anchor. Hope is absolute certainty and confident expectation. We are to trust God with absolutely no doubt. The anchor of our soul is made steadfast with *two immutable* (unchangeable) *things* (Hebrews 6:18).

**Anchor #1: It is impossible for God to lie.**

The character of God is our sure anchor, our steadfast hope. There is one thing God cannot do - He cannot contradict His divine character. God is truth, holy, and righteous. We see a symbol of His holiness in that He dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16). "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:9a). God *cannot* lie.

**Anchor #2: God made a promise.**

We have a tendency. It is unfair, but we do it. We project onto God the qualities we have come to understand in flawed humanity. How many times have you been promised: "I'll be there," "I'll do it," and "I'll remember" only to find they were not there, the task was not completed, and they did not remember. It is unfair to project imperfect humanity onto a perfect God.

A covenant is a promise. It is an agreement between two parties, involving promises on the part of each to the other. God made five great biblical covenants:

1. Noahic: **Gen 9:13-17** With steadfast faith, Noah built an ark due to the pending flood. God promised to never destroy the world again with a universal flood, sending the rainbow as a sign of His promise.
2. Abrahamic: **Gen. 12:1-3** Abraham agreed to go to the land that God would show him, and God agreed to make Abraham a great nation. The covenant was repeated with Isaac (**Gen. 17:19**).

3. Mosaic: **Ex. 24:4-8** God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the wilderness through a series of plagues. Three months later the children of Israel encamped at the base of Mt. Sinai where they were given the 10 Commandments. Later God gave Moses all the words of the covenant for the people. God gave the covenant; the people agreed to obey. This covenant is symbolized with the stone tablets.

4: Davidic: **II Sam. 7:12-13, Mt. 1:1** David was established as the seed through which Jesus, “the Son of David,” would be born in Bethlehem. As a descendent in the line of David, Jesus had the right to rule over God’s people.

5: New Covenant: **. 8:8-13, Mt. 26:28, 1 Cor. 11:25**. The death of Christ ushered in the new covenant under which we are justified through faith. Through Christ’s atoning shed blood, we have remission of sins. The Holy Spirit is given to us as a deposit for the things to come. The covenant is now written on our hearts, rather than on tablets of stone. The covenant now rests solely on the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross – the great High Priest. The just will live by faith; God holds us firm, through the work of Christ and the seal of the Holy Spirit, until the day of redemption.<sup>2</sup>

It is through trust in a *covenant-keeping God who cannot lie* that we experience an anchor for our souls – despite our circumstances.

“Be still (do not worry) and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth” Psalm 46:10-11

“For nothing is impossible with God” Luke 1:37

“With man, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible” Matthew 19:26

### **Chapter 2 Study Questions:**

1. How can the insight of the covenant-keeping God and His perfect character (He cannot lie) affect your ability to trust God?

2. What is it that you hold onto tightly? If you surrendered this area to a covenant-keeping God who cannot lie, how would that change your ability to experience the comfort of Christ? (God asks us to cry out to Him in our despair. Tell Him about it - let Him have it!)

3. Write a prayer of trust to your covenant-keeping God. Cast your worry upon Him. "Cast all your cares on Him for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). In your written prayer include a promise from Scripture. As you meditate on his character, let God promise-you-through the storm. "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (Is. 26:3).

4. For biblical balance, study and discuss the following:

- The trial isn't good. Many trials are the work of the evil one – intended for destruction, disunity, and/or discouragement.
- God's comfort through the trial is good.
- Trust in God is the single greatest vehicle for comfort – in any circumstance.
- There is no true comfort outside of basing your faith squarely in the two anchors of Hebrews 6:17-19a: Covenant-keeping God who cannot lie.

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<sup>2</sup>YunGab Choi, "To Comfort All Who Mourn: The Theological and Hermeneutical Function of Isaiah 61-62," *Trinity Journal* (2016): 251-255.



# **Chapter Three**

## **The Word**



### Chapter 3: The Word

The Bible is also entitled The Word. Have you ever considered the reason? God speaks to us through the help of the Holy Spirit as we read and hear His inspired Word - the Bible – the living Word of God. Jesus is also referred to as the Word, the exact representation of God in human form – a symbol of God. As you read the Gospels and begin to understand the life and ministry of Christ on earth, you begin to understand God. God came to Earth at some point in history in visible form – He took on human flesh, became man, and dwelt among us (John 1:14). In other words, God communicates who He is through the written Word (the Bible) and through His Son in human form (the Word). That’s not all! God also speaks boldly, with authority and faith, through spoken Word. He called all creation into being through faith and the spoken Word: “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command... (Hebrews 11:3a). God communicates his character and truths through His spoken Word, written Word, and life of His Son – The Word.

The Greek word Logos means a word, or act of speaking, a revelation of God to His people. Logos also encompasses the revelation of God through His Son, Jesus. The most famous use of Logos: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:1, 2, 3a, 4). *Morning Has Broken*, a beautiful hymn written in 1931 by Eleonor Farjeon, depicts the first morning of creation. Creation came into being through the spoken Word (Genesis 1).



Morning has broken like the first morning  
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.  
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!  
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word!

God demonstrates great respect for His revealed Word - spoken, written, and in human form. A word is a symbol. It carries meaning; it has tremendous power. The Lord asks us to be careful with our words:

- “Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).
- “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise (Proverbs 10:19).
- “Do not be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few” (Ecclesiastes 5:2).
- “The tongue has the power of life and death” (Proverbs 18:21).
- “But the tongue no man can tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8)

Through the spoken word, you possess a two-edged sword: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...” (Hebrews 4:12). This is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). In Revelation 2:17 we see that a two-edged sword came out of Jesus’ mouth. In the Greek, the word for two-edged sword is *distomos* (di = two; stomos = mouth). God plants the Word in our hearts as we meditate on His truths. The two-edged sword occurs as we agree with God and proclaim His Words. When we come into agreement with God, this agreement releases His mighty power in the situation at hand.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*Sparkling Gems from the Greek*, Rick Renner, Feb 22, 2017, accessed April 10, 2020 <https://renner.org/you-have-a-two-edged-sword/>

Are you beginning to understand the power of words? This is the reason we are admonished to think on that which is true, pure, honorable, just, and of good report (Phil. 4:8). Our thoughts produce our emotions, and eventually our behavior follows suit. The mind is the battlefield: The Word (God's truth) vs. the enemy's lies.

What does agreement with God's Word have to do with comfort? Faith is dialogic. *God's comfort is enacted in response to the spoken Word.* In other words, God responds to our faith. There is an action that makes way for God's power: *Speak up!* Speak in accordance with the will of God. Speak and pray Scripture. God taught us how to do this when he walked on earth in human flesh. Jesus commanded the wind and waves to be still. He proclaimed the lame to walk and the blind to see. He spoke boldly when confronting the unclean, commanding the evil spirit to leave (Mark 1:25). When on earth, Jesus taught a hyperbole: If you have faith like that of a mustard seed (tiny!), you can move the mountain (Matthew 17:20). Jesus taught the disciples that they would do even greater things than these (John 14:12-14). This is the power of agreeing with and speaking the Word of God in faith. The comfort of God follows.

The battleground is in the spirit realm. You may believe your conflict is with a person or situation, but the Bible teaches that we do not fight against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this age (Ephesians 6:12). In other words, the spirit realm must be the focus of our prayer life – not the person or situation. The spirit realm is active but holds no ground nor authority against the spoken Word of God. Pray that the Lord will break off and silence the true enemy at work (i.e. spirit of fear, pride, rebellion, judgment) – proclaim it fearlessly and unapologetically.

At your point of need, cry out. Speak aloud with authority – claim the very Words of God. Come into Jesus' throne of grace with boldness. As a believer, Christ is in you; you are in Christ. Faith is dialogic - conversational, responsive, and relational. God's comfort is enacted as you speak back the Word of God. Use the voice of authority God gave you to unflinchingly proclaim His promises.

### Chapter 3 Study Questions:

1. What is your mountain?
2. As it pertains to the mountain you are facing, write a prayer to God with authority and boldness, claiming the promises from His Word. Pray it daily:
3. In the quietness of your spirit, ask the Lord to reveal words you have spoken (and believe) that are untrue and/or rash. Confess this as sin. Ask the Lord to break off the lies, and replace these words with His truth. Below, write down the truth God revealed to you. *What thought are you making obedient to the mind of Christ (Colossians 3:2)?*





# **Chapter Four**

## The Prayer of Lament





## Chapter 4: The Prayer of Lament

So far in this study we have learned that God is the God of *all* comfort (II Corinthians 1:3). In Chapter two we discovered the two anchors from Hebrews chapter six – covenant and character. God made an oath, and He cannot lie. For whatever you are facing – to the faithful, God *will* be faithful. In the last study we reviewed the power of the spoken Word: The comfort of God is enacted as we cry out to Him – faith is dialogic.

Today's study focuses on the prayer of lament as a vehicle for God's comfort. David, the shepherd boy who later became King of Israel, was a typology of Christ. In other words, David's suffering prophetically foreshadowed the suffering Christ. During times of suffering David wrote psalms (prayer songs) of lament.<sup>4</sup> A lament is an expression of sorrow or grief. King Saul was envious of David, just as the pharisees and King Herod were envious of Jesus. David and Jesus were both fled for safety from envious kings who intended to kill them (David from King Saul; Jesus from King Herod). During the time of hiding, David wrote psalms of lament. His words of suffering mirrored the eventual words of the Christ on the cross.

David's psalms of lament teach us how to pray during times of suffering. There are four basic elements:

- 1) Plea or petition for help
- 2) Lament: Description of the suffering

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<sup>4</sup> Aurelius, Carl Axel, "Luther on the Psalter," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 203-04; Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 13-20; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970): 17-21.

3) Statement of trust: But God...

4) Praise based on God's historic action, character, and covenant<sup>5</sup>

During the times of incredible sorrow, we are often unable to pray. Our minds are numb or anxious and distracted; there is a lump in the back of our throat – we fight back tears; our tongue is stuck to the roof of our mouths, silenced; and our bodies serve merely as an empty shell housing a broken heart. It is during times like these that we turn to the psalms of lament to provide the words we need but are unable to utter.

In chapter 2 we learned that comfort – no matter the situation - is found *in Christ*. Our hope, our comfort is rooted squarely in God's character and His promises. As we learned, there is no other god other than Yahweh who makes promises to His children *and cannot lie*. The psalms of lament teach us the same. God's comfort is enacted with a statement of trust (But God...), followed by a rehearsal of His character, promises, and historic action. Help is *expected* from God. God is confronted with his promise, previous blessings, and His Name – reputation.<sup>6</sup>

Please select and read one of the following psalms of lament for your current need. As you read the psalm, write down one sentence for each basic element. Make note of the enacted comfort of Christ as you focus on elements #3 and #4.

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<sup>5</sup> James Waltke, James Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans, 2014), xii – 3; Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 268-69.

<sup>6</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content, and Message* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1980), 53-54; Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 259-73.

- When needing help read Psalm 13
- When feeling weary from suffering read Psalm 102
- When feeling sorrowful for personal sin read Psalm 51
- When desiring the comfort of Christ read Psalm 77
- When feeling anguish of heart read Psalm 22
- When mocked or betrayed read Psalm 55<sup>7</sup>

As it is difficult to pray during times of greatest sorrow, allow the prayer of David to be your prayer using the four elements in the psalm. Paraphrase David's words to closely align with your situation. If words do not come, pray David's psalm as your own.

I am choosing the above Psalm # \_\_\_\_\_ for my current need. The following are the words of David from the psalm that also apply to my situation.

1) Plea or petition for help: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) Lament, or description of the suffering: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3) Statement of trust: "But God": \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>7</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 21-40; 65-116; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), 46-55.

4) Praise based on God's historic action, character, and covenant: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. As you reflect on your circumstance, create a melody. As you sing (aloud or in your spirit), rehearse God's character, promises, and historic action throughout the day.
2. What change/s do you notice in your thought life and emotions as you focus on God's character, covenant, and historic action? Describe your current emotional, mental, and physical health in contrast to earlier.
3. While rehearsing "But God..." what change do you notice in your ability to trust?
4. Create a poetic psalm of lament using your notes on pages 18 and 19. Begin with a plea, followed by "But you, O Lord." End with a final statement of trust based on God's character, promises, and historic action. When the enemy hurls doubts and confusion, re-read your personal psalm, focusing on the fact that you serve a God who not only *can*, but he *must honor his divine character and promises* until there is victory.



# **Chapter Five**

## Times of Refreshing



## Chapter 5: Times of Refreshing

The first step in acquiring humility is to recognize one's pride. If there is one quality that we are unconscious of in ourselves, it is pride. Everyone else can see it in us, but we cannot see it in ourselves. When was the last time you heard someone complain that they deal with pride? We talk about struggling with spending too much, eating too much, or even admit they are bad-tempered. But seldom does anyone discuss their pride. For a quick self-assessment, circle your answers to the following questions:

- 1) Do you find that pleasure doesn't necessarily come from having something, but from having *more* than others? Yes No
- 2) When you receive praise, your thought life goes from "I have pleased this person" to "What a fine person I must be to have accomplished this"? Yes No
- 3) Is pride one of the qualities you disdain in others? Yes No
- 4) Does it bother you when you are snubbed, discounted, or in general, overlooked? Yes No
- 5) When someone points out your faults, do you react defensively or in anger? Yes No
- 6) When someone slights you, do you look for the next opportunity to pull them down? Yes No
- 7) Do you try to take attention, friends, roles, or titles from others because you can? Yes No
- 8) I don't struggle with conceit (yes = agree; no = disagree). Yes No
- 9) I am concerned with what people think about me (yes = agree; no = disagree) Yes No
- 10) I lift myself up by talking about others' faults Yes No

The less you believe you struggle with pride, the more you struggle with pride. An answer of "yes" to any of the above questions is an indication of pride. Pride is inherently competitive - it looks down on others. The proud wants to be the big shot. Pride is enmity

between individuals, and between an individual and God. Pride is full of self: An anti-God state of mind. The proud are joy-stealers – within themselves, and everyone else around them. They are so busy competing and comparing themselves with others, they forget to look up.<sup>8</sup> As such, pride is the source of all other sin.

### **Litany of Humility**

O Jesus! Meek and humble of heart, hear me.  
From the desire to be esteemed,  
*Deliver me, Jesus (repeat after each line)*  
From the desire to be loved,  
From the desire to be extolled,  
From the desire to be honored,  
From the desire to be praised,  
From the desire to be preferred to others,  
From the desire to be consulted,  
From the desire to be approved,  
From the fear of being humiliated,  
From the fear of being despised,  
From the fear of suffering rebuke,  
From the fear of being forgotten,  
From the fear of being ridiculed,  
From the fear of being wronged,  
From the fear of being suspected,  
That others may be loved more than I,  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it (repeat after each line)*  
That others may be esteemed more than I,  
That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease,  
That others may be chosen and I set aside,  
That others may be praised and I unnoticed,  
That others may be preferred to me in everything,  
That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should,  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it. Amen.<sup>9</sup>*

In the teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus began with: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Spiritual poverty is a



recognition of our need for God - a counterpoint to pride. Humility is a reflection on God as the giver of our gifts. We give thanks to Him for making us an instrument of His glory for the benefit of others. Just as Moses' face shone when in God's presence, our faces shine as a reflection of God's glory, not as a looking glass for ourselves. Spiritual poverty – a recognition of our need for God - is the most direct pathway to receiving comfort. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6) "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me" (Psalm 50:15).

Many consider repentance in negative terms, for the word reflects things that most try to avoid - tears, vulnerability, and humility. Not so with God. It is at the time of our brokenness that the Lord rescues, redeems, restores, and makes new. "Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:10). Fruit in keeping with repentance is times of refreshing before the presence of the Lord. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19). The psalmist describes the process as the two-fold repentance and rejoicing.

**Repent.** Admit your need for God and sorrow for sin. "I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and *heard my cry*. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand (Psalm 40:1-2). During Old Testament times, the Israelites rend their garments in mourning over their sin; today we rend our hearts.

**Rejoice.** He put a *new song* in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him" (Psalm 40:3).

In February 2017, as part of my degree program at the Institute for Worship Studies, I conducted a study on repentance and rejoicing. As part of the study, we hosted a special service during the season of Lent, providing the opportunity for all to prepare their hearts for Easter – the day of Christ’s resurrection. 75% of attendees circled “yes” to the final question, “I experienced a new level of joy, peace, or healing upon repentance.” Through humility, repentance is a gift, for it ushers in the comfort and refreshing presence of the Lord.

### **Chapter 5 Study Questions:**

1. Which of the assessment questions having to do with pride hit you “square between the eyes”? How do you see that quality operating in your life?
2. Have you ever experienced refreshing in the presence of the Lord upon humble confession of your sins? Why do we wait so long to call out and recognize our need for God?
3. What factors in this culture make the exercise of humility so difficult? What changes would occur in your circles if humility was practiced?

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<sup>8</sup>Os Guinness, *Steering Through Chaos: Vice and Virtue in the Age of Moral Confusion* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2000), 41-43, 60-68.

<sup>9</sup><http://www.ourcatholicprayers.com/litany-of-humility.html>

<sup>10</sup>John Miller, *Repentance*. (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1982), 36-38; Sproul, R. C., *What is Repentance?* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2014), 31-34.



# **Chapter Six**

## Redemptive Suffering



## Chapter 6: Redemptive Suffering

God is too complex for simple formulas. Some preachers promote an incomplete “gospel”: Give a financial donation and you will experience health and wealth. Contribute to the ministry and your disease will be cured. Give, and you will experience financial blessing. These teachers hold that God is like a bubblegum machine - give a quarter (to God), and you will receive bubble gum. They treat prayer like an ATM: Put in a piece of plastic (prayer), and you will be financially rewarded. God hears and He answers, however His answer is not always in the manner or the timing we expect – or demand. God is God; we are not. God is sovereign; we are not. As a good Father, He knows what is best for us.

Pray for healing. Go before the throne of grace with boldness. We are taught to ask, and to ask with perseverance and faith. God is a faithful, healing, loving God. I have been healed many times throughout my lifetime in response to prayer. Being outside of time, God always heals the faithful. Healing is a certainty in and throughout all eternity for the one who has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not a certainty in this lifetime. Like the biblical examples of the man born blind (John 9:1-41) and the Apostle Paul’s physical infirmity (2 Corinthians 12:6-7), God often has a redemptive purpose in our suffering.

Although it seems to defy reason, suffering is a pathway to God’s comfort. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). One cannot experience comfort without trials and grief. It is interesting that the Good Shepherd of the twenty-third psalm carries a rod and a staff. Shepherds use the rod for correction and as a guide for wayward sheep, keeping them in safe pasture. The rod is also used for protection, warding off potential

predators. What comfort is there in an earthly father who does not establish limits and boundaries for his children? The same is true for our Heavenly Father. “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4b). God allows us to experience deep valleys for our good – to improve us and to reprove us. Like the Apostle Paul, we are to rejoice in our sufferings, for adversity produces virtue – when we are weak, then we are made strong.<sup>11</sup> “That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (II Corinthians 2:10). In the midst of the suffering we develop trust in God who not only understands our suffering but prays with us.

God does not necessarily remove the suffering but provides comfort and endurance through the trial. There is comfort in the God of *all* comfort. There is comfort in the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, whose office it is to be an abiding presence – we are not alone. As the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit came and made his dwelling *in us* – there is no separation between God and those who have placed faith in Christ. The abiding, indwelling Holy Spirit is a covenantal peace. There is comfort in the pardoning grace of Jesus, the Son, who understood our sufferings and carried our sins and diseases upon himself on the cross. There is comfort in the promises of the Gospel, the Scriptures of truth which are written for our consolation. There is comfort found in the body of Christ who comes alongside to bear our burdens. And there is comfort in knowing that those who have placed their faith in Jesus will someday enjoy communion with God, the angels, and saints for all eternity. Comfort is the result of the

confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of God for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39).<sup>12</sup>

Afflictions are the vehicle for releasing God's presence in the life of the Church. The ability to experience God's comfort and to comfort others is through the participation in the life of Christ through his Spirit. Suffering – and experiencing God's comfort through it – is part of the redemptive ministry of Christ. The Christian life is a paradoxical combination of affliction and comfort. The purpose of the trial is so that we may comfort others. As referenced in the passage below, there is a concern for "us" in the Apostle Paul's writings. The suffering we experience is not our own. Just as Christ's suffering overflows to us, so, through Christ, our comfort overflows to others. Christ's suffering was redemptive; the Apostle Paul's suffering was redemptive. So, too, our sufferings are redemptive - flowing from us to comfort others with the comfort we have received from God.<sup>13</sup>

Praise be to the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. <sup>5</sup>For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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 (11 Corinthians 1:3-7).

What of suffering as it relates to comfort? What about the cry of the sufferer who feels unjustly burdened? The real answer to comfort lies in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only one who took on our infirmities, suffering for our sakes in all forms. Jesus is our only hope in suffering,

for in him, and through Him, God is with us. Jesus is our only hope for complete fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. In the midst of our suffering we develop trust in God because of the work of Christ who not only understood our suffering but prays with us.<sup>13</sup> We join with David as we pray, “Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4b).

### **Chapter 6 Study Questions:**

1. Like a good parent, God understand that we must grow in our ability to exercise faith like a “weaned child” (Psalm 131:21). Unlike a newborn, a weaned child has developed trust that the parent will meet their needs.

What is something you asked God for, but did not receive at the time of the request?

In hindsight, was the request good for you at that point in your life?

What did you learn from God’s discipline of withholding what you wanted but did not need at the time?

2. Do you approach your prayer life as that of a “weaned child” – with trust in the Almighty? How would you like to grow in this area?
3. What are some ways in which God has used your area/s of suffering to bless others? What positive impact has your suffering had on others in your sphere of influence?







# **Chapter Seven**

## Deliverance



## Chapter 7: Deliverance

How does one find *lasting* peace – the type of peace that Timothy referenced in the verse, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7). How does one experience the peace that rises above troubled times and difficult circumstances? At the time of this writing COVID-19 has waged war on our planet. Over two hundred countries have confirmed cases. To date there are 74,481 reported deaths in the United States and 264,189 deaths world-wide as a result of this evil pandemic. On that rare outing when I shop for necessities, I carefully observe interactions. Leaving a margin between myself and others, store employees and patrons rarely speak or make eye contact. There is a heightened level of suspicion – a concern that any one of us could be carriers of the virus. I sense the spirit of fear.

When the Apostle Paul admonished Christians to get suited for spiritual warfare, he wrote “*above all* take up the shield of faith from which you will be able to quench the fiery darts of the evil one (Ephesians 6:16). I believe our truest long-term enemy is not the coronavirus. The real enemy is the unseen spirit of fear. If allowed to take hold, the spirit of fear will manifest itself in isolation and disconnection between people, phobias in various forms, control of others, superstitions, suspicions, and dread about the future. Yet, God is the God of *all* comfort. There is an answer.

What is normal to our experience may in fact not be healthy or normal at all – it is merely familiar. For many years one of the first emotions I experienced in the morning upon

waking was dread. Dread of the long list that awaited me. Dread of the decisions that I would be required to make in various leadership roles. Dread of the uncertainty of the day ahead. Several months ago, I decided to tackle this emotion head-on. I got on my knees, confessed partnering with the sin of worry, acknowledged my need for God, and *commanded* the spirit of fear to leave by the authority given to me as a child of the Heavenly Father – through faith in the Name of Jesus, by the shed blood of Jesus, and through the authority of Jesus. Following the command, I asked the Lord to send peace through the gift of the Holy Spirit to take its place.

I have not experienced the spirit of fear or the emotion of dread since that day. Several weeks after that prayer the coronavirus took hold. Despite the closing of the family business for over a month I experienced a “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). My mother passed to be with Jesus since the time of the prayer. Even so, I experienced a supernatural peace. I am more relaxed – anxious striving has ceased. I do what the Lord asks me to do and when He asks me to do it. When weary, I cease my labors. I cannot remember a time in my life when I have experienced such *lasting* peace.

Like me, do you desire the comfort of God? God desires to comfort His children, but he waits until we are ready. He meets us at the point when we recognize our need for Him and are willing to do battle against the enemy. “This kind can only come out with prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21). There is an unseen spirit realm that wars against this world – seeking to destroy and kill (1 Peter 5:8). Those who have placed personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have been given the tools for victory in faith to claim the presence and virtues of Christ:

1. **The blood of Jesus** “They triumphed over him (the enemy) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...” (Revelation 12:11a)
2. **The Name of Jesus** “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!”  
At that moment the spirit left her” (Acts 16:18b)
3. **The Authority of Jesus (Word)** “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart  
” (Hebrews 4:12). “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...” (John 1:1).

For those who experience the mental torment of an unclean spirit – whether it be fear, pride, anger, envy, or any other - the “peace that passes all understanding” is possible. One must command the evil presence to leave through the authority that is ours in Christ Jesus.

The mind is the battlefield. Emotions are merely a fruit of the root – the root being our thoughts or belief system. Biblical writers, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have admonished – even commanded! – not to worry. “Be anxious *for nothing*, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). “Thou wilt keep him in *perfect peace*, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusts in thee” (Isaiah 26:3). The writer to the church at Philippi encouraged the believers to set their minds on that which is good, pure, excellent, praiseworthy, and true -

think on these things (Philippians 4:8). In fact, we are told to rejoice in the Lord *always* (Philippians 4:4). To rejoice in the Lord *always* leaves no entry point, foothold, or agreement with the evil one through his lies, creating unrest in our minds. It is through worry – an agreement with the enemy’s lies – that we open our minds to the oppressive and tormenting unclean spirit realm. God’s comfort and peace is a result of setting our minds on His character and truths, leaving no room for the evil one to take residence.

In nearly all books from Matthew through Revelation there is a verse having to do with God’s peace and an admonition not to worry. Loved one, think on these things:

**Matthew 6:34** “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble **of its own.**”

**Mark 5:36** “Jesus told him, ‘**Do not be afraid**; just believe.’”

**Luke 12:22-26** “**Do not worry** about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, **why do you worry** about the rest?”

**John 14:27** “**Peace** is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. **Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.**”

**Acts 9:31** “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria **had peace** and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the **comfort of the Holy Spirit**, they were multiplied.”

**Romans 8:38-39** “And I am convinced that **nothing can ever separate us from God’s love**. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, **neither our fears for today nor our worries** about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.”

**II Corinthians 1:3-7** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and **God of all comfort**, who **comforts** us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to **comfort** those who are in any trouble, with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comforted by God**. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our **consolation** also abounds through Christ.”

**Galatians 5:22** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **peace**, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

**Ephesians 2:14** “For He Himself is **our peace**...”

**Philippians 4:6-7** “**Do not be anxious** about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And **the peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

**Colossians 3:15** “And let the **peace of God rule in your hearts**, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

**I Thessalonians 5:11** “Therefore **comfort each other** and edify one another, just as you are also doing.”

**II Thessalonians 3:16a** “Now may the **Lord of peace** Himself **give you peace** always in every way.”

**II Timothy 1:7** “**For God has not given us a spirit of fear**, but of power and love and of a sound mind.”

**Hebrews 13:5 – 6** “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; **I will not fear.** What can man do to me?”

**1 Peter 5:6-7** “Humble yourselves, then, under God’s mighty hand, so that he will lift you up in His good time. **Leave all your worries with him** because he cares for you.”

**1 John 4:18a** “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...”

**Revelation 1:17** “Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘**Do not be afraid.** I am the First and the Last.’”

God has given us additional passages of comfort from the book of Psalms:

**Psalms 56:3** “**When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.**”

**Psalms 94:19** “When anxiety was great within me, **your consolation brought joy** to my soul.”

**Psalms 23:4** “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, **I will fear no evil**, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they **comfort me.**”

**Psalms 27:1** “The Lord is my light and my salvation—**whom shall I fear?** The Lord is the stronghold of my life—**of whom shall I be afraid?**”



**Psalm 55:22** “Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.”

**Psalm 46:1** “God is our refuge and strength, an **ever-present help in trouble.**”

**Psalm 118:6-7** “The Lord is with me; **I will not be afraid.** What can man do to me? The Lord is with me; he is my helper.”

**Psalm 34:7** “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and **he delivers them.**”

**Psalm 34:4** “I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me. **He freed me from all my fears.**”

**Psalm 91:1-16** “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”...He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. **You will not fear the terror of night,** nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you...**For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways...**“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; **I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him** and honor him...”

And more beautiful verses of comfort from the Old Testament:

**Isaiah 43:1** “But now, this is what the Lord says...**Fear not,** for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”

**Isaiah 41:10** “**Do not fear, for I am with you;** do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

**Joshua 1:9** “Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified;** do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

**Deuteronomy 3:22** “**Do not be afraid** of them; the Lord your God himself will fight for you.”

**Zephaniah 3:17** “The Lord your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, **He will be quiet you in His love,** He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

**Deuteronomy 31:6** “**Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified** because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

God's comfort and peace is not as the world gives. God's peace is through the gift of the Holy Spirit – the Comforter - given to believers in Jesus Christ at the point of faith. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin - anxious thoughts and agreeing with the evil one's lies. The Holy Spirit enables us to have faith and pray with boldness for the peace and victory that is ours in Christ Jesus.

### Study Guide Questions

1. What feedback have you received from close friends and/or family – those who know you *best* - regarding an area for growth in your life? More simply, what is the *one word* those who know you *best* use when describing a character flaw?
2. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Revisit your response to question #1. Does the feedback you have received regarding an area for growth fall in line with the fruit of the Holy Spirit?  
(Circle)      Yes                  No

Or, does this character quality more closely align with pride, envy, greed, anger or fear? If so, which one, and why?

Pray that your pride will not blind you to the work God intends to do in your life. In humility, ask for the Holy Spirit to convict you of personal sin.

3. How does this character quality affect your relationships at home, work, church, or other settings? (Pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten you to the healing he desires to do in your life.)

4. A believer in Jesus Christ cannot be possessed by an unclean spirit. A believer may be oppressed by the unclean when creating an entry point – such as our minds. If your life produces the fruit of **fear, anger, greed, pride, control, or envy**, pray:

Lord, I recognize that I have participated with the sin of (as listed above) \_\_\_\_\_ . I take responsibility for participating with and serving the sin of \_\_\_\_\_ . I confess the sin of \_\_\_\_\_ in my family line. Father, in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth I repent to you and ask you to forgive me for allowing this sin of \_\_\_\_\_ to manifest through me.

By faith I now receive your forgiveness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, I take authority over the unclean spirit of \_\_\_\_\_ and break your power in my life. You no longer have any power, right, or authority in my life, and I cast you out. Holy Spirit, I invite you into my heart to heal this area. I ask that you cast down anything that exalts itself above the knowledge of you. I fall out of agreement with the evil one and in agreement with the mind of Christ. Please fill this place with the fruits of your Holy Spirit (select any that are the counterpoint): **love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control**. Thank you for the healing through Christ Jesus. In Jesus' Name, Amen.



# Chapter Eight

Perplexed but  
Not in Despair



## Chapter 8: Perplexed but Not in Despair

There is no comfort without trust. There is no comfort without hope. Comfort lies squarely in the ability to trust God. Faith is built through trials. Through suffering we progress – from faith to faith - in our spiritual pilgrimage. Through tribulations we grow in our ability to rest in Jesus, the anchor of our souls. The apostle Paul wrote: “Not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:4-6). Faith is built as our eyes focus on the Person rather than the plan.

The magnificent sequoia along the California coast – the largest trees on earth - are unable to germinate without fire. It is through heat and pressure that the seedlings emerge. To produce sequoia trees, one must allow forest fires. Diamonds are a result of high temperature and pressure approximately one hundred miles beneath the earth’s crust. Gold, too, is refined in the fire. So too it is often through fiery trials in our lives that the sovereign God brings his plan of redemption – over, against, and through suffering.

Those who love us most are often the very ones who encourage us to give up during periods of great suffering. Job’s wife counseled him to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). Upon Jesus’ teaching that he must suffer, die, and be raised on the third day, Jesus rebuked Peter for saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” (Matthew 16:23). In referencing

the man born blind, the pharisees asked Jesus who had sinned: his parents, or the blind man. Pertaining to the theology of suffering, humanity swings to extremes of thought. On one extreme is the belief that all suffering is the result of personal sin. Conversely, the other extreme is to deny God's sovereignty - "name it and claim it" - making demands of God in self-righteousness and idolatry. During periods of trial, either-or thinking makes for miserable comforters.

All suffering is a result of the Fall. When we suffer the natural consequence of our own sin, we do not question the cause of the suffering. During periods of suffering for sin that is not our own, we find ourselves questioning and seldom have the answer to the question: Why. What the redeemed sufferer *does* understand is that God has called them to suffer.

The cause of joy in suffering lies in the *meaning* of the suffering. The apostle Paul wrote: "Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you and I fill up my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24). Suffering allows us to fulfill our destiny as witnesses for Christ. Witness in the Greek is *martus*, or martyr. We are witnesses to the perfect Suffering Servant.<sup>14</sup> Christ's suffering was redemptive, so too God uses our suffering for redemptive purposes – to improve us, reprove us, and/or to bring the Father glory. Suffering with Him, we are also raised with Him (Romans 6:8; II Corinthians 1:5).

During suffering for sin that is not our own we are perplexed but not in despair (II Corinthians 4:8b). Our hope is in what we do not see – the Presence of Christ (Romans 8:25).

With the divine assignment to suffer we know we will be given divine assistance and the promise of His Divine presence.<sup>15</sup> Seated next to the Father in the throne room of Heaven, Jesus continually intercedes for the faithful (Hebrews 7:25). The Bible tells us that Jesus saves *to the uttermost* as he eternally lives to pray for us. The Holy Spirit functions as an intermediary between God and humanity: “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Hebrews 8:26). We may not have the answer to *why*. Why is not necessary when one understands *Who*. Through tests and trials, the redeemed sufferer has developed the ability to trust that he or she can accept good from God as well as adversity. “Thou he slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 2:8-10).

Our only hope in suffering, our only hope for comfort, lies in the Person of Jesus Christ: Not the plan, not the outcome, nor what is seen. We trust God’s perfect, sovereign, wise, and good character.<sup>16</sup> When we know His voice and follow Him (John 10:14), we know enough.

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<sup>14</sup>R C Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), 39.

<sup>15</sup> Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering*, 53.



## Study Questions

1. Our suffering is purposeful and redemptive. The apostle Paul wrote, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12b). As a Christian, we labor in our sufferings *with hope*. David wrote, "I would have lost hope unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13).

It is precisely the presence of Christ in the life of the believer that allows them to stand under times of pressure. As the Apostle Paul wrote, we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed (II Corinthians 4:8).

In your life, what current fiery trial produces hope in you as a partaker with Christ in his suffering?

2. It is no shame to call on Christ in times of trouble. Nor is it a vice to rely on Him during times of pain. From the examples of Jesus, the earliest followers, and the martyrs throughout the history of the church we are reminded that it is not strange to suffer. Paul wrote, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Do you suffer for Christ? If so, how?

Do you carry His name: Are you His witness (martyr or martyr)?                      Yes      No

If yes: Where and how are you a witness for Christ?

If no: What fear or concern keeps you from sharing the hope that is within you?

Prayer for healing and deliverance from the spirit of fear:

“Lord, please break off the spirit of fear off my life. I confess fear as sin – a lack of trust in the Almighty. Please forgive me for the idolatry of man – the desire to please man, be accepted and conform. I claim the promise, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deut. 31:6). Praying the Word, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me” (Hebrews 11:6). Please fill me with courage and joy through the Holy Spirit. Teach me to live in your presence, taking hold of every opportunity to share the hope that is within me. I know that victory is ours in Christ Jesus. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

3. Begin to pray for 1 – 2 individuals in your sphere of influence. Pray everyday for the salvation of their souls and for the opportunity to plant a seed - to share the hope that is within you. Pray that your suffering will be redemptive – that God will be glorified through your suffering - through your suffering and witness they will ultimately be drawn to Him.

I will pray every day for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.



# **Chapter Nine**

The Father Runs!



## Chapter 9

### The Father Runs!

**Read:** Luke 15:11-31, Psalm 42-43

In Middle Eastern first century culture Jewish men did *not* run. Running was unthinkable for it required picking up a long tunic, risking the shameful exposure of bare legs. Yet this is the picture Jesus painted of the Heavenly Father's response to us when we cry out to Him. The Father *ran*.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you..." But the father said, "Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:20b - 21, 24).

In Jewish culture there is a ceremony known as *kezazah*. The ceremony involves villagers breaking a clay pot upon a Jew losing their inheritance to a Gentile. The shards of clay symbolize being cut off from their people. Reading this account through the lens of first century Jewish culture, we pick up on the importance of the Father's watchful care. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him... (Luke 15:20b)". Watching from afar, the Father was able to intervene on behalf of His repentant son, impeding the villager's humiliating taunts and ridicule. Running to his son, the Father took his son's shame on himself, just as Christ bore our sins on the cross. There would be no *kezazah*.

There is no fear in returning to the Father: No sin is too great. By demanding half the inheritance while his Father was well – and a *younger son* at that - the son was saying to his

Father “I wish you were dead.”<sup>17</sup> Through wild living the prodigal lost his inheritance. Eventually he got a job caring for pigs – an untouchable, unclean animal in Jewish culture. Without food to eat and despised by his people, he was on the lowest rung – he hit bottom. Yet with a single repentant step, the Father ran.

David, the psalmist, paints a picture of God as a watchful shepherd. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4b). The staff is a hook – a candy-cane shaped and cut from sapling. Shepherds used the hook to wrap around the chest of a lamb or neck of wayward sheep, gently guiding them to safe pastures.<sup>18</sup> Jesus taught that the Father leaves the ninety-nine sheep in open pasture in search of the one repentant lamb. When he finds the lost sheep, he joyfully places it on his shoulders and carries it home. This is a picture of the extent to which God goes for those who turn to Him. In the parables God is described as a loving Father who watches, searches *until he finds*, carries, embraces, runs, and celebrates our return home. He is the Lord who forgives and restores all who cry out to Him (Matthew 15:3-7).

I experience great comfort in knowing that my Heavenly Father watches and runs to me at my point of need. In His infinite wisdom, God knows how and when to respond. As newborns in the faith, we cry for a response from God day and night. A spiritual infant demands immediacy and constant reassurance. As we gain spiritual maturity, we come to understand that God is *always* present and *always* listening: A response of “wait” or “no” is for our good. We learn to pray in accordance with God’s will. We come to understand that His plans for our lives are trustworthy, right, and good. With spiritual maturity we develop the

ability to rest in Him as a weaned child (Psalm 131:2).<sup>19</sup>

Twenty years ago, feeling isolated and overburdened in ministry leadership, I knelt in front of the couch in my office and wept, crying out to the Lord in the middle of the night. The next day, early in the morning, a friend called me with a tone of purposeful intent: “Heidi, what’s wrong? The Lord woke me up at such-and-such time to pray for you.” She went on to describe what the Lord showed her in the middle of the night. God saw and heard my cry in the middle of the night. He ran to me. Others may not understand, but I know. I knew the prayers I offered up to God in the middle of the night. And I knew that He ran to me. Oh, the depth of the matchless, limitless love of God.

The psalmist wrote, “My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you... All your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life” (Psalm 42:6a, 8). When we cry out with a song of lament in the night, God does not necessarily remove our suffering or distress. The waves and breakers of the waterfall represent hardship and difficult circumstances. As the heavy waters crashed over him, the Psalmist found comfort in the midst of distress.<sup>20</sup> In the cry of the night God did not remove the source of my suffering, but through His abiding presence He gave me the strength to endure.

“Deep calls unto deep in the roar of your waterfalls” (Psalm 42:7). Have you ever heard the echo of a waterfall in the canyon? With each wave of suffering, the Psalmist offered praise for the character of God just as the thundering waters echo in the canyon. As waves and breakers washed over him, the Psalmist calmed his soul – over and over - with the truths

of God's character. As wave upon wave of rushing water flowed over him, the Psalmist continued to praise God.<sup>21</sup> God uses water – our salty tears and the waves of suffering – to cleanse and to comfort.<sup>22</sup> Through lament our pain is spoken, our voice is heard. When our heart wavers, when the evil one whispers lies, the anecdote for our soul is the declaration and rehearsal of God's character:<sup>23</sup> *"But God!"* We must do as the Psalmist: "Why so downcast, O my soul?...Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God" (Psalm 42:11b).

"In *everything* give thanks..." (1 Thessalonians 5:18a). This is a command – there is no getting around it. Thanksgiving involves praise to the Giver of the gifts. Some gifts taste like bitter medicine prescribed by our Physician for lessons our souls need to learn - not because the circumstances are good, but because He is good.<sup>24</sup>

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. ...But I will sacrifice unto you with a voice of thanksgiving. What I vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord" (Jonah 2:1- 3,9).

"Let the storms of life break over our heads. Let the enemy Satan come in like a flood. Let the waves of sorrow, suffering, temptation, and testing be unleashed upon us. Our souls will be kept on an even keel and in perfect peace when the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts."<sup>25</sup>

God runs to us. He runs through the voice of a friend, awakened in the night, to offer comfort in the morning. He runs to us through His comforting abiding presence – the Holy Spirit. And He runs to us as we rehearse His covenantal, unchangeable character. The Father runs.

## Chapter 9 Questions for Personal or Group Study

1. Write about a time when you experienced the comforting presence of the Father when you cried out with a song of lament in the night?

Did this experience affect your faith? If so, how?

2. The prophet Habakkuk wrote:

“Though the fig tree fails to blossom, and no fruit be on the vine. Thou the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls: Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

What thundering echo of crashing waves – “deep calls unto deep” - are you currently experiencing in your life?

3. The Psalmist wrote, “My tears have been my food day and night” (Psalm 42:3). How have the streams of salty tears or waves of suffering been a source of cleansing or comfort in your life?



How has God used these waters to prune dead branches and produce godly fruit: To improve or reprove your character?

4. The Apostle Paul knew suffering: shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, accusations, hunger, and martyrdom. Yet he wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord *always*, and again I say rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). Do you believe the discipline and practice of thanksgiving and the rehearsal of God's character through praise ushers in the comfort of God? If so, how?

Why do you believe God commands us to praise Him and offer thanksgiving in all circumstances?

5. How and when will you make the command of praise (Philippians 4:4) and thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 6:18) a daily and ongoing discipline in your life?

How do you believe this will affect your outlook and attitude in relation to suffering?

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/six-amazing-things-you-might-not-know-about-the-prodigal-son/102788.htm>, accessed 5/28/20.

<sup>18</sup> Adrian Rogers, *The Lord is My Shepherd* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 48-49.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.heresthejoy.com/2014/08/how-can-i-have-a-soul-like-a-weaned-child/> accessed 5/28/20.

<sup>20</sup> John Goldingay. *Psalms 42-89: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 28.

<sup>21</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: Kidner Classic Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1973), 183-85; Logan C. Jones, "The Psalms of Lament and the Transformation of Sorrow," *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 61, nos. 1 – 2 (Spring-Summer 2007): 47, 53-54.

<sup>22</sup> Dee Brestin, *The God of All Comfort* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 98.

<sup>23</sup> Brestin, *The God of All Comfort*, 85.

<sup>24</sup> Hannah Whitall Smith, *God of All Comfort* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2006), 185, 188-90.

<sup>25</sup> Billy Graham, *Our God of Comfort and Hope* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 71.

# Meet the Author, Heidi Truitt

Heidi Truitt graduated from Bethel College, St. Paul, MN (B.A.), Iowa State University (M.S.) and most recently The Institute for Worship Studies in 2020.

Her work history includes public school teaching/counseling; private counseling; private piano instructing; church ministry directing; and owning/directing

The Harmony House. Heidi currently owns and operates The Harmony House (Acworth, GA) and serves as the director of New Song, a worship/outreach ministry.







# The God of All Comfort

"We live during a time of great uncertainty. Indications of unrest and discord are everywhere — from the international level to our personal lives. The earth groans under the stress of pollution. How do we cope? Where can we turn for comfort during these troubling times?" – Pastor Heidi Truitt

The author thoroughly addresses why we face strife, and how it can be resolved through following Jesus.

This is a must-have guide for Christians, pastors, and those in suffering to discover the God of All Comfort.

**“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33**

