

SESSION 4

A CHANNEL OF COMFORT



*Where do you turn
when you need comfort?*

QUESTION #1

#BSFLbrokenvessels

I can be a channel of God's comfort to others.

THE PASSAGE

2 Corinthians 1:2-7

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

After a hard day, we know certain things will help us relax, like ...

- ▶ ... a hot bath.
- ▶ ... soft music.
- ▶ ... ice cream.

Some things just bring us comfort.

I was never a good source of comfort. When someone faced sickness or death, I'd offer sympathy because that's what you're supposed to do. I might even offer a prayer, but seldom would I visit them or attend the funeral. What good would it do for me to be there with nothing to offer? I'd be more of a nuisance than help.

Then my niece died.

After my niece passed away without warning, something changed inside of me. Now, when someone is sick, instead of just praying *for* them, I pray *with* them. I try to help in any way I can, even if that means just sitting with them in the hospital or funeral home. I have learned just what a comfort my presence can be to others.

The apostle Paul showed us the comforting role we can play in the lives of others. We can make a difference better than any comfort food.

2 Corinthians 1:2-3

2 Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Paul followed the Greco-Roman practice of beginning his letter with a greeting, but he used two words that made this greeting unique: *grace* and *peace*.

1. **Grace.** The common Jewish prayer combined mercy and peace, but Paul used grace instead of mercy. Mercy is certainly encompassed by God's grace, and grace is the foundation for all we have in Christ. Grace expresses what Christ did for us in giving us salvation.
2. **Peace.** Paul wrote to the Corinthians in Greek, but as a Jew, he was surely familiar with the Hebrew word for peace: *shalom*. Shalom was the common greeting, expressing a wish for health, completeness, and wholeness in a person's life, both physically and spiritually. Paul intended an even deeper meaning for the word: the effect of God's work in our lives through Christ. We have completeness and wholeness in Christ.

Thus, Paul offered more than just a cordial greeting. By greeting the Corinthians with grace and peace, Paul was letting them know he was praying for the church in Corinth. He was saying that God's grace covers all of life. Of course, God is still merciful, but Paul used this new greeting to remind the church that:

1. God's grace will redeem their hurt and pain; and
2. God's peace will fill them with His comfort.

That's a prayer we could all use.

May God transform us and open our eyes so we can see His grace over our lives. May we experience His grace as it covers all our sin,

all our hurt, and all our scars. May we experience the grace that comes through the saving death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, may God fill us with His peace. May we experience peace in the fullest sense of the word—peace in our minds, hearts, and relationships; at work and at home; and peace with our past, present, and future. Through His grace and His peace, may we sense the closeness of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's grace is an amazing gift we neither deserve nor fully comprehend. When we experience pain and loss, God showers His grace and mercy upon us. He redeems us and restores us in His timing through His grace. God's grace not only restores our hurts, but it also comforts because God is the "Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." God is the Source of comfort.

How does God bring His comfort to us? God can use even the smallest of things to speak comfort into our lives.

DIGGING DEEPER



PEACE

The Hebrew word *shalom* and its derivatives have been said to represent "one of the most prominent theological concepts in the OT." (The word group occurs about 180 times in the OT.) It was not a negative or passive concept but involved wholeness and completeness. The related verb could mean to "repay" or "fulfill a vow" and so referred to completing or repairing a relationship. A related adjective could be used to describe something as "uninjured, safe, complete, peaceable." Peace could refer to harmony between friends or allies, triumph in war, success in

one's endeavors, good health, and security. The Hebrew equivalent of the English greeting "How are you?" is "Do you have 'peace'?" (cp. Gen. 29:6; 2 Sam. 18:29; 2 Kings 4:26; Esther 2:11).

The term translated "peace" in the NT is *eirene*. It occurs in every NT book except 1 John (most frequently in Luke, 14 times; followed by Rom. 10). Outside the Bible the Greek word was likely to mean just the opposite of war, but its use to translate *shalom* in the Septuagint may have been what broadened its usage.

"Peace," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. eds. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1261-62

- ▶ If you're heartbroken over a relationship and experience a curious sense of comfort and peace from the warmth of the sun as you're out for a morning walk, thank God for His comfort.
- ▶ If you're grieving the loss of a loved one, and something you see reminds you of them and you laugh for the first time in weeks, thank God for that comforting memory.

A major way God speaks comfort to us is through His Word.

“Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me” (Ps. 119:49-50).

As we shall see in the next verses, God has another way He brings His comfort to others.

How specifically does God comfort you in your troubles?

QUESTION #2

2 Corinthians 1:4-5

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

KEY WORD

consolation (v. 5)—Occurring 10 times in verses 3-7 as *consolation* or forms of the word *comfort*, the Greek term means to stand alongside someone encouraging the person as he or she undergoes severe trials.

Jesus never promised His people they would be immune from trouble. He said just the opposite: “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). Thankfully, that’s not all Jesus said.

- ▶ “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).
- ▶ “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Suffering and hardship may be our current reality, but so is His presence. He will be with us in whatever we’re facing. When we go through affliction and hardship—not if, but when—God promises that He will comfort us. He “comforteth us in all our tribulation.”

It is impossible to sense and experience real comfort apart from God and His grace. After all, do you really think the enemy wants you to experience genuine comfort filled with God’s grace and peace? Of course not! All the enemy wants you to feel is the “comfort” that comes from trusting in yourself, your riches, status, or possessions. The problem with this sort of “comfort” is that you are never satisfied because you can never get enough, and if all your possessions disappear, all your “comfort” is gone. The enemy wants to give you this temporal sense of “comfort” and peace, whereas God promises an eternal comfort and peace through His grace.

God comforts us because He loves and cares for us deeply, but it doesn’t stop there. God comforts us “that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” God comforts us so that we can comfort others!

What are some ways you prefer to be comforted by others?

QUESTION #3

While God definitely supplies a sense of inner comfort and peace through His Holy Spirit, God also loves to comfort His children through His church, the body of Christ. God's comfort can come to us through the encouragement of a pastor as he shares from God's Word or the prayers and support of friends in a Bible study group. It's encouraging to know others are lifting you up in prayer—even more so when you hear them cry out to God on your behalf. God even brings comfort through just the physical presence of other believers. What a gift it is to know that, in this world of turmoil and trouble, we walk together with the people of God.

Just as God uses others in His church to support and encourage us, and bring us comfort, He wants us to do the same for them. Even if we don't think we fully understand the hardship or grief another person is experiencing, we can offer comfort—because of Christ.

As broken vessels and followers of Christ, we are connected to Him, who suffered and died for us. His body was broken for us. We are also connected to Christ, as the One was resurrected and, therefore, brings us joy and comfort. Paul made this connection in verse 5: “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” Paul made a similar statement in Romans 8:17, when he described us as “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”

Since you have comfort in Christ, you can and should be a comfort to others—a broken vessel bringing comfort to other broken vessels.

When have you had the privilege of comforting someone?

QUESTION #4

2 Corinthians 1:6-7

6 And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

7 And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

“Our human compassion binds us to one another—not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.”¹ Nelson Mandela, who certainly knew about suffering, spoke these powerful words. He suffered and persevered under the racial segregation and white supremacy of apartheid in South Africa. Mandela was a key leader in the 50-year struggle for equal human rights.

Mandela spent 27 years in prison for his fight against apartheid, but he knew the importance of forgiveness: “As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.”² He knew, first hand, that the suffering he had endured could be used to help others turn the corner and experience hope for the future.

God wants to do the same with you. He wants to use the challenges you face and the difficulties you have endured in your past to comfort others. What problems have you faced in your life? God wants to use these experiences you have weathered to comfort and help others who are facing similar difficulties. For example, your own journey through heartbreak and loss can help to encourage and comfort others who are grieving.

Suffering and comfort both are shared experiences for all believers in Christ. As Paul wrote in verse 7: “And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.” If someone in the church family is suffering with the pain of cancer, it affects the whole body. In the same way, as that individual is comforted when the cancer goes into

remission, the whole church body is also comforted—and they all rejoice together. When we learn to share in one another's sufferings we grasp what it means to share in one another's comfort and joy.

We do not need to hide our pain as if we've got our act together. We suffer, but we also find comfort in Christ, and through His people who have endured similar struggles. We then have a great opportunity for God to use us as our own journeys prepare us to comfort others facing similar affliction.

How can these verses influence the way we serve one another?

QUESTION #5

EXPERIENCING COMFORT

In 2 Corinthians 2:3, Paul described God as the source of all comfort. Complete the acrostic below to describe how you have experienced God's comfort in your life:

C

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M.....

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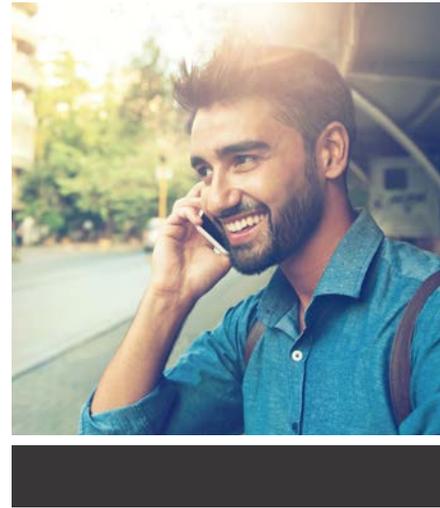
Pray and thank God for the ways you have experienced His comfort.

LIVE IT OUT

God wants to use you to share His comfort with others. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Memorize James 1:2-4.** Pray this passage when you are experiencing suffering and affliction. Praise God and consider it a great joy the next time you experience hardship.
- ▶ **Pray.** Pray for the persecuted church in the world. Ask God to protect His bride, the church, to sustain and strengthen her. Ask Him to show you how you can share in the sufferings of the persecuted so that you can also share in their comfort.
- ▶ **Stay in touch.** The next time a friend, family member, neighbor, coworker, or loved one is sick or hurting, call him or her. Begin to pray with those who are struggling, instead of just praying for them. Listen to them and love them.

The comfort of Christ and the comfort of others are better than any comfort food. Even better than ice cream or pizza. Will you take advantage of this amazing gift?



END NOTES

1 Erika Anderson, "15 Inspiring Quotes from Nelson Mandela on Leadership, Change, and Life," *Forbes* [online] 21 August 2013 [cited 7 October 2016] Available from the Internet: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/erikaanderson/2013/08/21/15-inspiring-quotes-from-nelson-mandela-on-leadership-change-and-life/>.
2 Ibid.

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLbrokenvessels**