

The God of All Comfort

by Lehman Strauss

The God of all comfort is the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the Savior who comforts us in all our tribulation and provides strength and comfort in times of trouble.

Scripture: Psalm 103:13, Isaiah 66:13, John 14:16, Romans 8:34, Romans 15:4, 2 Corinthians 1:3, Ephesians 2:4, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Suffering And Comfort", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Lehman Strauss preaches about the believer's journey to know God better through suffering, emphasizing the comfort found in the Savior, the Spirit, and the Scriptures during trials. He shares his personal experience of finding solace in God's Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit while caring for his wife after her stroke. Strauss highlights the importance of faith in receiving God's comfort and the transformative power of Scripture in times of affliction.

Transcript

The believer in Christ is expected to get to know God better as he walks the pilgrim pathway. But there are things that he can learn only through suffering. One of those things is that He is the God of all comfort.

I had known throughout my ministry, of course, that God comforts His own. I had taught about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, our paraclete, who was sent by Christ to help us. And I had seen that the reading of the Bible brings solace to sorrowing hearts and peace to those in great turmoil.

But now my wife and I are experiencing God's comfort for ourselves. In the months since Elsie's stroke, we have known daily the comfort of the Savior, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the precious Word of God. May you too learn for yourself, in your day of trial, that the Lord is truly the God of all comfort.

The faith of the Christian should grow stronger in times of trial and trouble. Trials have a way of digging up the soil of our hearts and turning up weeds. That is good for us, for it is not in the sunshine but in the storm that we discover the depth of our need. Someone has said, "Great soldiers are not made in the barracks nor on the parade ground, but on the battlefield where the going is tough."

Trials provide opportunities for us to get to know God better. In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul assured the Christians that he was praying for them on a regular basis. Included in the list of things for which he prayed was the request that they might be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). Paul

knew that one of the secrets to a full and blessed life is getting to know God better.

The primary source of the knowledge of God is His Word. The book of Proverbs says, "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. . . . Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:1, 5). As every student of the Bible knows, God does reveal Himself in His Word.

We may discover God in other areas of life as well. Psalm 46 begins with the following words: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." As we approach the end of the psalm, God is speaking and He says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (v. 10). Times of trouble are very often times of silence. At least we are sure that days filled with suffering and sorrow give us the opportunity to be silent. These can be precious moments of quiet reflection when God speaks to us. If we do not set aside some time each day to be silent before God, then He has His own way of setting us aside. If we take advantage of these periods of quiet solitude, we too can increase in the knowledge of God. Yes, dear friends, our time of trouble can be for each of us a time of getting to know God better.

In the lengthy but lovely 119th Psalm, David gave his personal testimony of something he learned about God when he was afflicted. In this one psalm, the word afflicted occurs four times (vv. 67, 71, 75, 107), and the word affliction three times (vv. 50, 92, 153). In each of those seven verses, the psalmist spoke of himself and the affliction he suffered, but not once did he complain or find fault with God. Here is a suggested outline as I look at these verses in the order in which they appear:

Divine Provision in Affliction (v. 50)

Divine Prevention in Affliction (v. 67)

Divine Purpose in Affliction (v. 71)

Divine Providence in Affliction (v. 75)

Divine Protection in Affliction (v. 92)

Definite Prayer in Affliction (vv. 107, 153)

This is neither the time nor the occasion to expound on all of these six points, so let me briefly draw your attention to just two of them. In verse 71, the psalmist said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." He considered God's school of affliction to be a learning place. There he learned, among other lessons, that God has a purpose in sending affliction to His children. In his first use of the noun affliction, the psalmist said, "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word quickened me" (v. 50). As he sat silently before God in his affliction, he learned by personal experience that God is the God of all comfort.

Comfort in affliction and adversity. That is the theme of this meditation. Three months after Elsie was afflicted with her stroke, neither her brain nor her body was functioning normally. The stroke has left her with brain impairment, and with paralysis on the left side of her body. She also has other problems: impaired vision, change in the pitch of her voice, and excessive fatigue are just a few of the side effects.

After spending seventy-seven consecutive days with Elsie in the hospital room, I knew full well that we were facing the severest trial in our fifty-one years of marriage. For forty-five of those years, I had been

preaching and teaching the Word of God to others. Never once did I doubt the truths I was called of God to declare, but I must confess that I had never experienced much of what I preached and taught. But now God was giving me an opportunity to prove His Word to be gloriously and wondrously true.

One of the key passages in 2 Corinthians is greatly needed today. As a matter of fact, there never has been a time when it was not needed. It is at once both timely and timeless. Let us look together at this brief portion of two verses:

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

When Paul spoke of the God of all comfort, he was speaking of a knowledge of God that he himself had experienced. Undoubtedly he included himself in the plural word "us" in verse 4. I take this as his personal testimony that in all of his troubles and tribulations, he was comforted by God. That comfort did not merely enable him to endure his trials but also to receive special blessings from them. Paul's knowledge of God as the God of all comfort is therefore not a mere intellectual and academic one; it is a blessed and rewarding experience. He knows what he is talking about. He suffered such severe tribulation in Asia that he even despaired of his life (1:8-9).

In no way can my small trial be compared with the severity of Paul's many encounters with suffering. But I have prayed that the Holy Spirit will use this meditation as a testimony to the effectiveness of those Scriptures in our lives since Elsie had her stroke. The God of all comfort has been sustaining and strengthening us day by day. He has relieved the painful pressures so that we are able to bear them without losing heart.

The word comfort comes from the Greek word *paraklesis*. It appears ten times in verses 3 through 7, and is translated "comfort" six times and "consolation" four times. It combines the idea of solace with soothing.

Paraklesis is made up of *para* meaning "beside," and *kaleo*, meaning "to call." The Christian who is suffering needs a special kind of comfort that only God can give. As our loving Comforter, He stands by our side to minister the soothing balm we need.

Linked with the description of God as the God of all comfort is the statement that He is the Father of mercies. Mercy is the outward manifestation of compassion for others in their affliction. Mercy had its origin with God, who is called its Father. All acts of pity and compassion proceed from Him. God has a tender feeling of compassion for us when we are in distress. Our trials, however slight or severe, have His attention. David expressed it as follows: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:13-14). When we are being tested by adversity and affliction, compassion flows to us from His great loving heart. We never need to fear that His supply of mercy will run out, because He is "rich in mercy" (Ephesians 2:4).

God showed his mercy by providing for our eternal salvation, for it was "according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). In another epistle, Paul wrote, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). One of the "all things" is His comfort.

"All things . . . all comfort." The word all in the Greek is a strong word. It means "every kind, every variety, the whole of, or the totality of the thing referred to."¹

God's comfort is unique. It is infinite, inexhaustible, immutable, and indestructible. Our afflictions are temporary and transient; God's comfort is "everlasting" (2 Thessalonians 2:16). It is available at all times."

No Christian is left to face sickness and sorrow alone. God said to His children in Israel, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). The Israelites needed to be reminded of God's love and pity for them when He redeemed them from Egyptian bondage. Isaiah also wrote, "In all their affliction he [God] was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bore them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:9).

Some Christians are prone to forget how real and precious God's love and comfort were when they received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. Friend, your heavenly Father does care, and He does comfort. Turn to Him and give Him the privilege of ministering to your need. You are His child, and He is there when you hurt.

Let us now take a look at some of the divinely provided means of comfort, ways by which God's comfort comes to us.

First there is the comfort of the Savior. When our Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, He was the Comforter to His disciples. He was alongside to sustain them when they were drifting on the storm-tossed sea. He was alongside to supply for them when there was a shortage of food. He was alongside to strengthen them when they suffered persecution at the hands of their enemies. He was alongside to solace them in their sorrows. He was the divine paraclete.

The Greek word paraclete is translated "advocate" in 1 John 2:1. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The word advocate is the same Greek word translated "comforter."

You see, our Lord's death did not bring to an end His ministry of comfort for His own. He arose from death and the grave, and He ascended to heaven, where He is now at the Father's right hand on our behalf. He is there to represent us, even when we sin. Not that He asks for leniency, nor that He approves of our sin. But He is there as the One who fulfilled every demand of the law by His sinless life and substitutionary death on our behalf. What a blessed Comforter is our Lord Jesus Christ!

The apostle Paul spoke about the present ministry of Christ for His own in his epistle to the Romans. "Who is he that condemneth? Is it Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:34). Paul knew much about "the sufferings of this present time" (Romans 8:18). Never once did he deny that Christians would face adversity and affliction. But he did assure us that the Christian who is called to suffer has a Comforter in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

By His death Christ removed the guilt and penalty of our sin; by His resurrection from death He gives eternal life to every person who trusts Him for salvation; in His ascension and exaltation to the Father He intercedes for us. He does now "appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24), where "he ever liveth to make intercession for [us]" (Hebrews 7:25). He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15), not merely theoretically but practically. When He was here on earth, Jesus knew what it

was to be hungry and thirsty. He suffered physically. He wept because of the sins and sorrows of others.

Our great High Priest understands, and He ministers in our behalf right now. At this very moment He is praying for us. When we suffer, He understands. In our trials we are blessed by the comfort of our Savior. This great fact is a source of comfort for Elsie and me.

Second, there is the comfort of the Spirit. Before our Lord died on the cross, He said to His disciples, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth. . . . I will not leave you comfortless" (John 14:16-18). Here we have our Lord's promise that after His departure He would send the Holy Spirit to carry on the ministry of comfort.

It is recorded of the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria that they "were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). This is written testimony of the fulfillment of Christ's promise that another Comforter would come to minister to His church. Those suffering and persecuted Christians were strengthened by "the comfort of the Holy Spirit."

Like the Savior's comfort, the Spirit's comfort is for believers. It is only for those who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. You see, when a sinner trusts Christ, the Holy Spirit enters his body to take up permanent residence. All truly saved persons, without exception, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20). This is a pertinent and precious truth, particularly when one is experiencing suffering or sorrow.

When J. Sidlow Baxter's wife died, he was living in California. I was in Florida at that time, so I telephoned him to express my sympathy and to offer any assistance that might be needed. When he answered my call, it was obvious he was in deep sorrow. But I shall never forget what he said: "Lehman, I am very lonely, but I am not alone. I am being comforted." I knew what he meant. He had walked daily in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, so in his sorrow he experienced the Spirit's comfort.

A woman had taken a trip to the Holy Land and was relating her experience. She said, "Never in my life have I felt so near to God. I plan to make the trip again. It will be worth the money I spend to be so near to God again."

Well, thank God I need not wait for a trip to Israel to experience God's nearness. These are days when Elsie and I need comfort. Right now I am painfully conscious of my own weakness and inadequacy. But I am also aware of the Holy Spirit's presence in me, along with His bountiful provision. As I write, we are being comforted. One of Paul's prayers for the Christians at Ephesus is being answered now in our behalf: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3: 16).

I am not suggesting that the way is easy. In my best moments I am aware of dangerous and devilish intrusions into my mind. The Christian life is a conflict. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:17). If we give way to the sinful nature in us, we grieve the Holy Spirit and miss His comfort. But when we are controlled by Him, He is a strong Comforter in our infirmities and afflictions.

Third, there is the comfort of the Scriptures. The apostle Paul wrote, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). How much do we really know in our personal experience about the comfort of the

Scriptures?

Quite honestly, until our recent trial, I had never been put to the test in my own personal life. I saw how God's Word comforted others in their trials and sorrows as I read it to sick, suffering, and bereaved Christians. I could vouch for the truth and accuracy of Hebrews 4:12, which says, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." I knew that Word had quickened and saved me in 1927, and I had witnessed its power to comfort others.

But now I am the person passing through the fiery trial. Now I am in need of comfort. I recalled the times I expounded Hebrews 4:12, emphasizing the importance of the word "quick" or "alive." I explained that the Greek verb azo, a present participle, means that God's Word is continuously alive and active. The Bible is not a dead letter; it is not passive nor passe. It is continuously at work, producing and preserving spiritual life.

Then too, the Word of God is powerful. The Greek word translated "powerful" is energeis, from which we get our English word energy. It is powerful enough to reach the innermost recesses of each of us, down deep where we really hurt. Paul could have had all this in mind when he spoke of "the comfort of the scriptures."

One reason the Scriptures were written was to comfort God's children in times of sickness, suffering, and sorrow. The learning we glean from the Bible is for the everyday experiences of life, and comfort is one of the needs the Scriptures supply. The very fact that Paul quoted from the Old Testament tells us that he depended upon the Scriptures for consolation and encouragement. Comfort is one of the blessings God gives to us through His Word.

An important factor is that we must receive the Word of God in faith. God's truth must be appropriated with implicit trust, and with no mental reservations whatsoever. Paul expressed this idea clearly in his first epistle to the Thessalonians when he wrote, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The mere reading of some portion of Scripture or listening to someone expound it is not sufficient in itself. The Word must be applied. James said, "But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

The Bible has been our guidebook throughout the years of our marriage. We believed it, taught it to our children, and sought to obey its precepts. We knew it worked. But now we are facing a severe personal trial. It has afforded us an excellent opportunity to prove the Bible's effectiveness in the hour of affliction and adversity. Elsie was helpless, unable to read. So it was left to me to find comfort in the Scriptures and then to share it with her. In my heart has come a deeper hunger for God's Word. In fact, my desire to listen to God speak to me is greater than my desire to pray. When I pray, I speak to God. When I read God's Word, He speaks to me, and I need to know what He has to say in the dark hour.

While Elsie was in the hospital, each morning I would thank Him for blessings and mercies, which I mentioned one by one. Then, after a request for guidance, I would go immediately to the Word. After I read and meditated quietly, I selected a verse, typed it on a 3 by 5 card, and began my drive to the hospital. On the way down I memorized the verse. Throughout the day I read it to Elsie at intervals, and before leaving her at night we would recite it together. This became our daily practice, and it continues to

be the main source of strength and comfort to us.

Here are a few of the verses God used to sustain and comfort us: Deuteronomy 33:27; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 23; 27:1; 34:19; 37:1-7, 25; 42:5, 11; 46:1; 48:14; 55:22; 84:11; 103: 10-14; 119:50, 75; Isaiah 26:3; 41:10; Lamentations 3:22-23, 32; Romans 8:28-32; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Ephesians 3:16; Philippians 4:4, 6,7; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 5:18; Hebrews 12:6; 1 Peter 5:7.

As I write these lines, it is almost two years since our trial began. The Word of God is our stronghold. God remains faithful, and His grace continues to be sufficient. We are confident that He who began His good work in us will carry it on to completion, until our Lord Jesus Christ returns (Philippians 1:6). In that day "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

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