

**2 Corinthians 1:3-7**  
How to Comfort Others  
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11/16/2014

What's the best way to comfort someone in pain? How can we comfort those who are experiencing real hurt? Most of us aren't born with a skill set for comforting people in pain. In fact, statistics show that we're actually getting worse at comforting other people. From the year 2000 to 2010 the ability to empathize dropped 40% among college students. That means that a huge segment of our population has gotten worse at showing concern. With the rise of technology and entertainment, we're forgetting how to be kind.

There aren't many resources today for learning how to empathize with others. A google search of "How to comfort someone" produces very few results. One website listed "21 ways to comfort a friend in crisis": 1 Make contact. 2 Listen to the story. 3 Be there emotionally. 8 Bring food. 10 Let your friend cry. 16 Be patient. 19 Don't support drinking too much or other reckless behavior. 21 Check in over time.

So what's the best way to comfort others? How can we give support to those in need? Last week we wrapped up our study of the book of Job. In Job we learned that God is in control of all suffering but doesn't create evil. Job taught us that God loves us and uses even our pain for our good and his glory. Today we're continuing our study of suffering in the book of 2nd Corinthians. We're going to learn that God comforts us in suffering for a reason. God comforts us in suffering so we can comfort others with Christ. Let's turn to 2nd Corinthians 1:3-7 and read. Our passage today tells us that God comforts us in our pain.

**God comforts us in suffering. (v. 3-4a)**

Our God is a God who cares. (v. 3) Paul opens his letter by talking about the character of the God we worship. The Corinthian church is going through a difficult time. There are "super apostles" who are questioning Paul's authority. The Corinthians have not yet given an offering to the needy church in Jerusalem. And now they are struggling with how to live in relation to the outside pagan world. They are surrounded by false gods in a culture that will make them suffer if they follow Christ. Corinth is famous for it's worship of the ancient Greek gods. They worshiped Hermes, the god of boundaries, travel, trade... They honored the hero Hercules, the ascended deity of sports, athletes, and trade... They worshiped the goddess Athena and her gifts of intelligence, skill, peace, and wisdom... They worshiped Poseidon, god of the sea, rivers, floods, droughts and *The Little Mermaid*.

The gods the people of Corinth worshiped were not loving or merciful gods. They played with humans like puppets. But the God of Christianity is different. The God of Paul and the New Testament is not like those gods. The God of Christianity is the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort." Paul uses the title of "Father" twice in this verse to emphasize the nature of our God. Our God is a loving father, who is not out to get us, but a God of mercy. This God is completely different from the greek gods who abuse their power. Our God is a God who cares.

When you think of gods today, you probably don't think of Greek gods. Maybe you think of greed, the god of the DOW and its 30 corporate titans. Maybe you think of lust, the god of Hollywood and modern American beauty. Maybe you think of power, the god of abuse, control, and biceps. Maybe you think of laziness, the god of potato chips and daytime television. The God of Christianity is nothing like these gods

that want to rule our lives. Our God is the “Lord Jesus Christ” who has come to deliver us from these gods. Our God wants to show us mercy and help us experience true peace. Our God is a God who cares.

The Gods of Greece and the gods of today don’t care about us. The DOW doesn’t care if your retirement account is full or empty. But our God cares about you and the things you go through.

We all experience suffering. (v. 4b) Verse four says that our God “comforts us in all our affliction.” The “afflictions” Paul was experiencing were things like prison, persecution, and torture. Throughout his life he was chased out of cities, lashed, stoned, shipwrecked, and mistreated. Paul suffered all of these things because of his call to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul suffered things most of us will never experience, but that doesn’t discredit our hurts.

We all experience various levels of suffering and affliction in this world. When a loved one dies suddenly, that causes real hurt. When we lose our jobs, that causes real anxiety. When we go through divorce, that causes real feelings of rejection. Maybe some of you have even suffered a little like Paul. You’ve been shamed for Jesus or looked down upon for what you believe. Sometimes we suffer for God or just because we live in a broken world. But even though we go through different types of suffering, our hope is still the same. No matter what you’re going through, God provides a way of hope for all. God comforts us in our suffering. But how does God comforting us help us comfort others?

### **God comforts us in suffering so we can comfort others with Christ. (v. 4b-7)**

God comforts us in suffering so we can comfort others. (v. 4) Notice verse 4 says God comforts us so we can comfort others “in any affliction.” In “any” affliction includes just about every type of suffering I can think of. In fact, I can’t think of a way to suffer that would fall outside of “any affliction.” This means that through the power of God you can help “anyone” in pain. Now just because you believe in Jesus does not make you a licensed counselor. But Scripture does say in verse four that because God helps us, we can help others. This is possible because we have someone living in us who is really good at comforting.

If we go back to verse three, we catch a glimpse of the Trinity. The Trinity is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons. We see “God the Father” and “the Lord Jesus Christ” but where’s the Holy Spirit? I think when verse 3 says “God of all comfort” it’s subtly referencing the Holy Spirit. The original Greek word for “comfort” here is “paraklesis.” Paraklesis refers to the general encouragement and comfort anyone can give. In John 14:16 Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the “parakletos.” Parakletos refers to the “helper, intercessor, or advocate.” In 2nd Corinthians 1:3 we have “paraklesis” and in John 14:16 we have “parakletos.”

John 14:16 says, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, (or “comforter”) to be with you forever.” (ESV)

If you know Jesus, the parakletos lives inside of you. The God who created you, loves you, and knows just how to comfort you, dwells in you. When you’re going through a tough time, and for some reason have peace, that’s the Spirit. When you lose a loved one or tragedy strikes, and you have peace, that’s the Spirit. When the world disappoints and you just want to worship God, that’s the Spirit. The Spirit is like a divine coach or personal trainer living in you who helps you help others. The Holy Spirit even now is equipping you to comfort those in pain. God comforts us in suffering so we can comfort others.

For those of you who love sports, I'm going to use a baseball movie for an illustration. And for those of you who get hurt playing sports, I'm going to use my life for an illustration. Sometime in the late 90s my parents rented a VHS copy of the movie Angels in the Outfield. The story is about a young boy who loves the worst baseball team in the division, the CA Angels. One day he prays this team will win and at the next game a bunch of angels show up. And with the help of these angels, which only the boy can see, the team starts to win. Suddenly the team hits the ball harder, runs faster, and jumps higher.

In one scene Danny Glover, the coach, and Joseph Gordon-Levitt, the boy, argue about a player. The boy tells the coach he saw an angel with one of the injured players. The coach says his arm is gone and there's no way he's going to play. To which the boy replies, "If the angel pitches with him, he'll be awesome." Sure enough, the coach puts the injured pitcher in, and he throws a shutout. If the Holy Spirit comforts with you, you'll be awesome. That doesn't guarantee you won't make mistakes or say the wrong thing. But if you're seeking the Holy Spirit's leading, you're off to a great start. God comforts us in suffering so we can comfort others.

Now for the rest of you who don't like sports, I'd like to share how God has comforted me. In my family, one brother liked guns, one liked music, one liked carving, and I liked the doctor's. Growing up it felt like I was at the doctor's office way more than needed. When I was a kid, I had childhood asthma that I took an inhaler for. In my teen years, I went twice a week to the doctor's to get allergy shots for several years. I was allergic to things like mold, trees, cats, dogs, and pretty much the air in general. In my early twenties I discovered that my shoulders would randomly pop out of joint. On a work trip, I approached a man in my hotel parking lot to get him to pop my shoulder in. After he pushed my shoulder back in, he asked for my copay. Just about every fall and spring I get a cold, the flu, or a virus. I'm not complaining, but sometimes it feels a little overwhelming. And I've wondered why God has me go to the doctor's office so often. But recently I've realized going to the doctor's office may make me a better pastor. I hope it helps me understand all of you and your health challenges. God gives us all types of suffering so we can understand what others are going through. The next time you're at the doctor's office, thank God. Thank God that he's equipping you to minister to those who are also suffering. God comforts us in suffering so we can comfort others.

We comfort others with the suffering and comfort we've received in Christ (v. 5) Verse 5 says "we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings..." What does it mean to "share" in Christ's sufferings? To share in Christ's sufferings is to identify yourself with Jesus and his cross. It's as if you see yourself nailed to the tree right up there with him. You recognize you're so sinful you have to die spiritually with Jesus. And if Jesus had to die for your sins, than you're no better than anyone else. If I'm not better than anyone else, than I'm not going to judge others self righteously. I'm not going to say, "You're suffering because you did this and this and this..." When we identify with Jesus on the cross, it gives us humility and it gives us patience. Jesus went out of his way to care for us, so we can go out of our way for others. Verse 5 also says, "so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too." What does it mean to "share in the comforts of Christ? To share in the comforts of Christ is to identify yourself with Jesus' resurrection. We identify with Jesus' resurrection when we believe he conquered the grave. There's nothing more scary than sickness or tragedy that leads to death. If you trust in Jesus, death doesn't have to scare you. One day you will die, and it will be okay, because you'll rise again. I've been to lots of funerals, and most of them are very sad. The ones that speak of our hope in the resurrection, are always happier. We comfort others with the suffering and comfort we've received in Christ.

My kitchen sink backed up recently and I tried a bottle of “Dual-Force Drano” to unclog it. Did you know... “2 powerful liquids combine to clear clogs guaranteed! Or it’s free.” The bottle has a divider on the inside that keeps the two liquids separate. But when you pour them out, they mix, and that’s when the magic happens. The two liquids combine into a mighty clog-fighting chemical reaction. When those around us are sad or depressed, there’s a clog in their lives. Happiness and joy just can’t make it through to them in their darkness. If we try to help them with just suffering or just comfort, we won’t reach them. If we have only our sufferings, we don’t offer any hope. And if we only know comfort, we can’t relate. We need both our sufferings and the comfort we’ve experienced in Christ to help. When we can share suffering and comfort, that’s when the magic happens. It matters when we can honestly say “I hurt with you and I love you.” We have a God who says the same thing to us. “Child, I hurt with with you and I love you.” We comfort others with the comfort we’ve received in Christ. How do we know this comfort will do those who suffer any good? How do we know the comfort of Christ will last?

Christ comforts us with the hope of salvation. (v. 6) Verses 6 says, “If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort AND salvation...” The “and” between “comfort AND salvation” is a “copulative conjunction.” The “copulative conjunction” is “used to bind two words together in a close relationship.”<sup>1</sup> For “copulative” just think of a “buddy cop movie” like Lethal Weapon or Rush Hour. Those movies are all about two cops who stick together through thick and thin. Paul is saying that “comfort” and “salvation” stick together through thick and thin. If you want to experience true salvation, you’ll naturally experience true comfort. And if all you want is true comfort, you need true salvation.

Maybe some of you have been looking for comfort in all the wrong places. You’ve looked for comfort in your relationships or your marriage. But your spouse or significant other keeps disappointing you. You’ve looked for comfort in your job and success. But your plans never seem to work out the right way. You’ve looked for comfort in food or fitness. And you can never quite reach where you want to be. Stop looking for comfort in the world. Look for comfort in Jesus Christ. Christ comforts us with the hope of salvation. So what’s the big idea? What’s the main point of this message?

God comforts us in suffering so we can comfort others with Christ. (v. 7) In verse 7 Paul says “Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.” Paul’s hope is “unshaken” because he knows true followers of Christ last. Paul was a messenger of unshakable hope. Do you want to be a messenger of unshakable hope? Do you want to comfort others with a hope that’s real? Maybe your answer is yes, but you’re not really sure how to do that. You know you shouldn’t run in and club a hurting friend with Jesus. But at the same time I’ve been talking a lot about Jesus today. Here’s a few principles from today’s message that can help you comfort others:

- First, know that our God is a God who cares.
- Second, recognize we all suffer differently.
- Third, trust the Holy Spirit will work through you.
- Fourth, remember the suffering you’ve gone through.
- Fifth, focus on the suffering of Jesus on the cross.
- Sixth, focus on our hope in the resurrection.
- Seventh, remember comfort and salvation are a pair.

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<sup>1</sup> Logos Bible Software: LSGNTG by Lukaszewski

This list is more about being than doing. It's about your character and God shaping you into the person he wants you to become. God comforts us in suffering so we can comfort others with Christ.

My pastoral mentor through the 4Cs, Pastor David Midwood, died at the beginning of October. About a month ago I went to the visitation hours for his family. The line to talk with his wife Louise and three daughters was an hour long. It wrapped through the fellowship hall, through the sanctuary, and to the front doors of the church. When I finally got around to Louise I was wondering what I was going to say to her too. What could I say that would bring her any comfort in her time of sadness?

I had written David a letter when he was dying and wrote a [tribute online](#). But now I had no idea what I could actually say to her in person. I gave her a hug and choked out something like, "We love you. Please let us know if there's anything we can do." But you know what she did? She grabbed my arms and said, "Thank you for your kind words. You know David loved you, don't you? He loved you!" I just nodded my head, hugged her again, and tried to get away before I cried. I wasn't the only one Louise and her daughters encouraged. They comforted hundreds of people for four long hours. The Holy Spirit enabled them to comfort us in the midst of their own loss. I don't know about you, but I want to experience God like that. God comforts us in suffering so we can comfort others with Christ.