

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



A Cry for Comfort

KEY PASSAGE: Isaiah 40:1-2; 2 Corinthians 1:1-8 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE:** Psalms 62:1; 63:6-8; 119:50
Isaiah 40:8, 11-13, 21-23, 29-31 | John 14:16, 26 | Romans 8:28 | 1 Corinthians 10:13 | Ephesians 1:13

SUMMARY

Many people today are crying out for comfort but don't know where to find it or how to receive it.

The difficulties and sufferings of life have left them confused, depressed, or disillusioned. Instead of turning to God, who is the only source of true and lasting comfort, they may have given up on Him. Desiring relief from pain and hardship is only natural, but the bigger issue is learning how to benefit from the experience by turning to the Lord and receiving His encouragement.

SERMON POINTS

In Isaiah 40, the Lord comforts His people by reminding them of His promises, attributes, and love.

- Although situations constantly change, the Word of God stands forever (v. 8).
- Like a shepherd, the Lord tends, gathers, carries, and gently leads His people (v. 11).
- The greatness of God's power and knowledge are displayed in His creation (vv. 12-13).
- He is sovereign over all the events on earth (vv. 21-23).
- He gives strength to those who are weary (vv. 29-31).

Although the apostle Paul endured great hardship and pain, he also experienced God's amazing comfort in the midst of his suffering. In the short passage of 2 Corinthians 1:1-7, he uses the word comfort 10 times and describes the Lord as "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction" (vv. 3-4).

What is comfort?

The New Testament word means to encourage or come alongside. When Jesus was nearing the end of His earthly ministry, He promised to send another Comforter who would be like Him (John 14:16, 26). At the moment of our salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us and walk alongside us through life's challenges. He's always there when we need Him to lighten our load, quiet our fears, lift our spirits, ease our pain, or invigorate us when we don't think we can take another step. He has all the power of almighty God because He is the third member of the Trinity. Every aspect of our lives is included in the Spirit's ministry. Although we may not feel His presence, He's always there teaching, guiding, leading, strengthening, and encouraging us.

The Holy Spirit seals believers.

The evidence of our salvation is displayed by the sealing of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). When we trust Jesus as our Savior, God marks us as His children by putting His unbreakable seal on us. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell and work within us, enabling us to become fruitful and accomplish whatever the Lord has in mind. We may not be able to change our difficult situations, but the Holy Spirit's presence and power in our lives remains constant. He knows exactly what God wants to produce in us and what we need in order to persevere and learn from it.

What is the source of our comfort?

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is the Comforter. He not only has the power to change our circumstances, but He can also give us the strength to endure them. He's put a limit on what He allows us to suffer and

promises that He will not let us be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). Furthermore, He's promised to work out everything for our good if we love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). Since He's omniscient, He knows exactly what we need to become the person He wants us to be. And when we are hurting, He gives us God's genuine, lasting comfort.

We may not have a choice regarding the difficulties that come into our lives, but can decide how to respond. Nothing can touch us apart from God's permission, and we know that His reasons for allowing suffering are good. His goal is to produce godliness in us, increase our faith in Him, and make us useful for His kingdom. When we trust Him and depend on the Spirit's power to go through the fire, we'll come out polished, reflecting the image of Christ.

How does God comfort us?

No matter what form our suffering takes, the wisest response is to immediately turn to God's Word. But that is often the last thing we want to do when we're overwhelmed with difficulties. Too often we'd rather seek out our friends, but their knowledge and ability to comfort are limited. In contrast, eternal truth, knowledge, and wisdom are found in the Scriptures. Psalm 119:50 says, "This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me." When we begin our days by reading the Word, we'll be spiritually energized for whatever circumstances we may face. But if we neglect the Bible, our troubles will hit us like a crushing weight.

How can we find comforting Scripture verses?

- **Read the Bible daily.** The best way to prepare for trouble is to make Scripture reading a regular part of each day. As we become more familiar with God's Word, we'll know where to look when we need comfort and encouragement.
- **Ask God for help.** In those times when we don't know where to turn, we can ask the Holy Spirit to guide us to a passage that will speak to our need. Since He's the author, He knows exactly what

promises will encourage us and what instructions will help us. We can ask Him to show us the next step and reveal what He wants to accomplish in our lives. The Lord delights in speaking personally to us through His Word when we come to Him as His children seeking guidance and comfort.

■ **Choose or memorize some favorite verses.**

When we have the Word of God hidden in our hearts, we are armed with the Lord's promises and directions for walking through difficult or painful circumstances.

- **Read biographical passages about people in the Bible.** Examples like Jesus, Paul, or many of the Old Testament saints can encourage us when we are going through similar trials. Seeing what God did in their lives and how they victoriously walked through their trials gives us the faith to trust the Lord in our difficulties.

RESPONSE

- Where do you typically go to receive comfort when you're hurting? Have these sources of comfort ever let you down?
- How does the knowledge of God's character, power, wisdom, and promises encourage you in times of trouble or suffering? Can you readily trust Him even when He doesn't remove the pain or hardship? Why or why not?
- Are you preparing yourself beforehand by reading God's Word every day? If not, what can you do to make it a priority?
- Have you memorized a few verses that will readily come to mind in times of trouble? What are some of your favorite ones?

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