



The Father of all Comfort by Pam Worsey

Hear these wonderful words of Jesus, “Blessed, (or happy), are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” As we reel under the crushing blows of bereavement and pain that this life inflicts, it’s hard to believe those words isn’t it, and yet they are spoken by the Son of God, and He is ‘the Truth’. But how can we begin to translate those words into our experience? How can we be ‘happy’, which is even harder to believe than ‘blessed’ - in our pain’?

In the Jerusalem Bible, we read, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a gentle Father and the God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our sorrows, so that we can offer others in their sorrows, the consolation that we have received from God ourselves” (1 Cor.1:3-4) Isn’t this the answer? How often, when crying out to God for His comfort, do we stop at, “Bless me, comfort me,” whereas we should be continuing our prayer with..... “so that from this experience I can learn from You, how to pass on Your comfort to others who are in need”.

Now I am not suggesting that we push ourselves out to comfort others during the acute stages of grief and suffering. At this time God sends loving people to minister His comfort to us, and pours His Love and comfort into us as we seek His Face; although it is amazing how He will sometimes use us in the midst of our weakness to be an unconscious blessing to others. We all have a need for a time of grieving and to deny this is to store up trouble for the future when the suppressed pain will be bound to surface in some form.

However, as we seek God’s comfort for ourselves, we can always do so with the awareness that everything God allows to happen in our lives, He can use for good; for ourselves and others, thus helping us to become better, not bitter, through our pain. If those words are difficult for someone reading this please believe me when I say I do understand, for I would not dare to write so were it not written following training in the school of experience. I have been privileged to walk the path of suffering through most of my life, the most recent experience being the sudden death of my son just 3 years ago.

So, how do we begin to receive God’s blessings and comfort for ourselves so that we can then pass these on to others? There are of course many ways and only God knows our individual needs. As Christians, we shall obviously be turning to our Church for support, both through the services and the people, and no doubt we shall be spending more time in prayer and Bible study, for it is in the times of desperate need that we seek God most. How that must grieve His Love, but how patiently understanding He is with His fickle children.

When we are overcome with the painful blows that this life can inflict, heart bleeding and torn with an anguish that we don’t feel another could ever know or understand, and a pain so intense it rivals physical pain, where do we go? What can we do? Prayer maybe seems to just hit the ceiling, even though we are spending almost every hour of the day and night crying out to God, and we sometimes look, it seems in vain, for comfort from God’s Word. “Where is God in all this?”, the broken heart sometimes cries, “why doesn’t He answer?” Well, we all

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ARM WALES MAGAZINE FATHER OF ALL COMFORT

know the story of Lazarus' fatal sickness, and the despair of his sisters Martha and Mary when Jesus did not appear to respond to their call for Him to come and heal their brother. So here surely is one of our first lessons; our cry for help is always heard. An apparent denial by the Lord is only that, apparent, for He who is perfection, is working all things for our best good and His Glory. It may need our patience until we meet Him face to face to get the answers to apparently unanswered prayers, but meanwhile, to quote Mother Basilea Schlink, "Lord, I don't understand You, but I trust You" is a prayer which must surely delight His Heart. If even that seems too hard a thing to pray, a willingness to do so on our part is enough, for He will then surely supply the grace.

We are told, "Come near to God, and He will come near to you." (James 4:8), this is God's word, it is a promise. It does not depend on our feelings, but on our unchangeable, loving, trustworthy promise-keeping God. He is calling us even in these times of anguish and pain, to draw near, perhaps only able to cry out from the depths of our being with one word - 'HELP' - but that one word, cried out in faith, summons all Heaven to our aid. Again faith may need to be exercised to believe this, because nothing appears to change; but isn't this all part of our maturing as Christians, because it is a well known fact that we all grow more spiritually through the times of trial than in times of ease. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers (and sisters) whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything ". (James 1:2-4)

As we act out our faith and as we take those first faltering steps, we experience the flooding of Divine Grace. Enabling us to obey the next command "to give thanks in all circumstances", (1 Thess.5:18). Hebrews 13:15 is of tremendous comfort here, as God acknowledges our frailty and that praise is sometimes a sacrifice but it is 'through Jesus' that we can do this. Interestingly the following verse seems to confirm the theme of these thoughts "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased". How wonderful, even in the midst of our anguish, we can do something which will please God.

In this attitude of adoration and thanksgiving, we are far more likely to hear God speaking His words of comfort and love to us. The Psalms are full of God's comfort and love (e.g. Psalm 50:15), and also the down-to-earth cries of the soul in anguish, these words can be a source of tremendous help, enabling us to verbalise our pain and be real with God. Psalm 71:20-21, is full of words of comfort and promise to be received and appropriated, and covers many of the differing types of experience which cause us pain and grief. Isaiah 66:13 is surely a wonderful word for us all. We also have our Lord's words of comfort in the New Testament, e.g. Jn.14:1 and Jn.16:13. As we seek God in His Word for ourselves, asking the Holy Spirit to speak just to us, He will indeed do that, and we will be amazed at the deepening intimacy which will result in our relationship with the Lord so revealing one of His purposes for us in our sufferings.

As we are drawing to a close with these thoughts on receiving God's comfort for ourselves in order to be able to pass it on to others, more words from the Sermon on the Mount, are relevant. Jesus tells us in Matt 7:7 & 8 to "ask and it will be given you" and "... for

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everyone who asks receives". It is so important at these times, when our thinking is frequently muddled and chaotic, to remember that God is still our wonderful Father, our 'Abba' or 'Dad' as Jesus taught, and He just wants us to ask Him for what we need like little children. So if we need comfort, ask for it, also for endurance, perseverance, grace and the ability to obey. It is no use our moaning about the lack of these and other things if we have not asked God for them, because as James tells us in Ch 4 2b "You do not have because you do not ask God".

Finally, when things are at their blackest, sometimes the only thing to do is to prayerfully grit one's teeth and then go out and do something for someone else in need. If one is tied to the house or bed-bound, this is still possible, because there are always people needing our prayers one news bulletin on the television is enough to give many subjects for prayer. As we then forget ourselves in the loving service of others, God's comfort will flow in, because didn't Jesus Himself say, "...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me", and He will always reward His faithful children.

As we allow the Holy Spirit to teach us how to receive God's comfort and become equipped to pass this on to others, we may be sure that when He knows we are ready, He will send into our lives those who are longing to experience the comfort of God. Then we in our turn receive greater comfort still - the comfort of knowing that we are doing our Father's will.

"I, even I, am He Who comforts you" (Isaiah 51: 12a.)