

Thy Very Heart: My Heart Healed by His

~II Corinthians 1~

Week three of series, "His Comforting Heart," February 14, 2021,
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--The purpose of this series--

We are putting our tired, cold, and weary hearts before God's great heart, asking God for healing and renewal.

Remember that our faith is far more than a set of ideas. It has an **affective center** where our hearts come in contact with God's glorious heart.

Our approach for the rest of the series will be to put our hearts before the flowing stream of truth and love coming from God's heart by turning to **Scripture**. Then we plead and **pray** that the **Spirit** would supernaturally make the truths we encounter take root inside of us.

--What we saw last week in Matthew 11--

Jesus' heart is **gentle** and **lowly**, and therefore we can run to him.

--Opening thoughts on the comfort God provides--

2 Cor. 3. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and **God of all comfort**.*

It is God's deep disposition to be compassionate. *Comfort* comes when God moves his compassion toward us to assuage fears and instill confidence.

As we grow older, we never stop needing comfort. It is only our reasons for requiring comfort that change (e.g., loneliness, depression, stress, etc.).

2 Cor. 1 is the most concentrated passage in the Bible on comfort.

Is Paul's discussion of comfort superficial or vacuous? No. Just look at how many times he mentions affliction and suffering in this passage. Paul has been through serious hardship.

--Paul speaks from experience--

v. 4. ...*who comforts us in **all our affliction***.

Though he writes “us,” Paul is referring to himself. And consider what he’s been through: cold, nakedness, beatings with whips, rods, and stones, imprisonments, hunger, and shipwrecks. All these *external* terrors.

But he also experienced profound *internal* terrors. Mainly, he worried for his churches—he experienced “daily anxiety” for them (2 Cor. 11:28).

For example, Paul had to deal with the complex affliction of the Corinthian church listening to false teachers instead of the gospel. They closed their hearts to Paul (2 Cor. 6:12).

“The dark powers had,” N. T. Wright explains, “ways of striking back at someone who dared to encroach on their territory with the...message of the One [True] God.”

He lived on the edge of this battleground with spiritual forces. It took its toll, to the point where Paul “despaired of life itself” (v. 8).

So, we ought to want to ‘pull up a chair’ to Paul and hear what he has to say about the comfort God provides. How is it that Paul could experience these sufferings and still praise the “God of all comfort”?

--Paul seeks comfort from the **presence** of God--

Many things comfort us, and they are not all bad things (family, hobbies, achievements, hope, etc.) In fact, they are often gifts from God. But Paul is not referring to these things. He’s talking about *ultimate* comfort.

We also hold onto false comforts and false platitudes. For instance, we sometimes hear people say: “God will never give you more than you can handle.” But this is not true. Look at v. 8. Paul was “utterly burdened *beyond*” his strength.

God may very well give you *more* than you can handle. During such times the lesser forms of comfort will not be enough.

v. 9. *[W]e felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on **God who raises the dead***.

There is a point in Paul's sorrow where everything else is stripped away and he stares into the black abyss and clings to Christ.

The Greek word for *comfort* has two parts. The prefix means around or near. The verb-part means "to call someone to yourself."

So, the word for comfort describes 'the presence of the heart of God drawing near' to Paul.

The Israelites had two important images for God to describe the comfort he provides—a shepherd (see **Ps. 23**) and a mother (see **Isa. 66:13**).

The shepherd carries his sheep; the mother holds and consoles her child. Neither use intricate explanations to comfort. The comfort is in their mere presence and loving nurturing.

--Comfort is often mediated through a brother or sister in Christ--

v. 4. *...so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

Who did God use to bring comfort to Paul? *"But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus."* (**2 Cor. 7:6**).

The background of the story is this: Paul wrote a stern letter to the Corinthians about their wayward hearts, and Titus delivered the letter to Corinth on behalf of Paul. Paul worried about how the Corinthians would receive his words, and he worried for the safety of Titus.

But then Titus brought Paul a good report. The Corinthians treated Titus kindly. They listened to Paul's admonishes.

In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer writes,

The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparably joy and strength to the believer.... The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile, sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. Visitor and visited in loneliness recognize in each other the Christ who is present in the body; they receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord, in reverence, humility, and joy.

The presence of God is manifested through brothers and sisters in Christ. *Not* through non-Christian friends, who can bring real encouragement, but

who cannot share with you the faith of God. Brothers and sisters in Christ bare the aroma of Christ because the Spirit of God dwells within them.

Our church is not merely to be a place where we receive comfort, but where such comfort creates and deepens a culture of comfort.

--Implications--

We need to take our presence (through which God brings comfort) seriously. What does it convey to others?

(1) You are not alone.

Your presence shows to those struggling that other people have lived upon God through hardships and survived. It says, *"I am a living witness to the sanity of your faith."*

(2) Affliction is not meaningless.

The double-edge of suffering is not just that it's hard, but that it's also pointless. Your presence shows the struggling that hardships are purposeful and build in us an internal medicine cabinet. Paul says it's producing in us patience and endurance (see **Rom. 5:3**).

(3) Sorrow is not final.

Your presence shows that suffering will not have the final word. Paul says, "it is for your comfort and for your salvation" (**2. Cor. 1:6**). The Christian brother or sister reminds the sufferer that this is not how the story ends. It ends in glorious salvation.

--When time allows--

[Wright's biography of Paul](#). And [a fair review](#). "Perhaps the most winsome feature of the book" writes the reviewer, "is the way Wright paints Paul as a *person*: a real individual with ups and downs."

[Bonhoeffer's Life Together](#). And [here is a helpful review](#). And consider this suggestion from the reviewer: "It is a book to be read slowly and prayerfully, [and] in the company of other believers."

Be on the lookout for an email **survey** from church staff asking about the state of your heart.