

# Comfort-able in Christ

Her incredibly cute and tender eyes became like steel and her normally playful face scowled menacingly at me. Meanwhile, my son in law was on the phone with me and as has become our tradition, we were tossing certain unsavory observations about each other's 'gene pool' back and forth in jest. It's all in fun.

However, my little two year old grand daughter who was with me didn't understand or appreciate the quality of this subtle humor and she sensed her daddy was on the losing end of it (as usual) so she riveted her countenance upon me and barked, "You stop talking about my daddy like that!" and she just starred at me like an angry chiwawa!

Of course we stopped and I explained it all to her and we're still good friends, but I also fell more in love with her than ever for her loving defense. Her name is Comfort Joy and she surely is that. And I'm more careful now because I value so much our relationship.

You see, it's the loss of relationships which produce our mourning and grief. These are natural reactions like the bleeding when a wound has been inflicted. And this 'bleeding' is initially healthy for it cleanses the wound so to speak. Now, it may come from the death of a loved one or a divorce or a break-down in friendship – any loss of relationship will produce it to varying degrees.

But any wound left unattended is dangerous. In severe cases, and especially when the wound is internal (i.e. covered up) a person can bleed to death. Thus it is with grief and sorrow. Also, if it is exposed to the 'world's dirt and germs' it will become bitterly infected. Note, that I'm speaking figuratively.

That is, a grieving wounded soul needs attention, it needs a balm to stay the 'bleeding' and to protect the wound. When such is the case, the wound will heal. Now, it may leave a scar but scar tissue, though unsightly, is actually stronger.

## ***Comfort is the 'balm of Gilead'.***

Now, don't dismiss that as trivial – to the contrary, it's vital that we understand it. The words translated as 'comfort' in the Old Testament and New Testament combine to give a full rendition. In the Old Testament, the literal meaning is 'to sigh' implying empathy or a relating to the one being comforted. In the New Testament, it is 'to call near' or 'to call beside' with the call being an urging or even imploring – very active and emphatic.

True comfort does consist of these two qualities – empathy and action. A well-meaning comforter can lack either one. That shouldn't discourage anyone, but simply give insight to both givers and receivers.

And one day, you'll need that balm – don't deceive yourself. We all suffer from lost or damaged relationships at one time or another. If you let the wound bleed, you'll get weaker and weaker until you perish. If you wrap it in the 'world's' soiled rags, you'll be poisoned. You'll need the balm.

Psalms 23 says, "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." That is, God's power and protection are comforting. The picture is of the good shepherd who used his rod to drive off predators and lovingly discipline his wayward sheep while his staff rescued those who had fallen into a difficult or dangerous place.

Isaiah 51 says, "For the Lord will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody." That is, God's comfort is transforming – from a

wilderness to a wonder, from a pit to a paradise, from a desert to a delight – where joy and gladness abound. You see, true comfort, inspired comfort, changes us – I know that to be true and perhaps you do as well.

Jeremiah 31 says, "I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them and make them rejoice rather than sorrow." That is, the fruit of comfort is joy. Though it may, it doesn't always develop overnight as in Psalm 30:5. Often, it is the patient result of a well watered garden as in Jeremiah 31:12 – it grows. That which has died so to speak, emerges from the earth in which it was buried; it sprouts again, it grows and blossoms and then bears fruit. In this case, it's a gradual patient process.

Comfort is so important to the Lord that it is a principle characteristic of His second coming. You see, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus was in his home town synagogue. He read aloud from Isaiah the following, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18,19)

Now, as He sat down, everyone was dumb-founded and then they became irate. His bold declaration that this part of the prophecy was fulfilled right in front of their eyes was an overload of truth.

And as staggering as the announcement was – what wasn't proclaimed is also very important. You see, Jesus stopped His reading in the middle of the prophetic passage. That's because the latter part is reserved for His second coming. It reads, "...and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to comfort those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the

garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." (Isa 61:2,3)

Note that although vengeance is the 'first order of business', comfort follows closely and is then amplified by the rest of the passage. It's incredibly important. So let's look at a few more scriptures to glean some additional insight on it.

In Genesis chapter 23, we find that Sarah dies. As a result, two people are in need of comfort – Abraham her husband and Isaac her son. In the very next chapter, Abraham sends his servant to obtain a bride for his son. This story is steeped in prophetic pictures of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing a bride to Christ.

At the conclusion, we find Rebekah, the bride, seeing Isaac for the first time from afar; the servant tells her it is Isaac, the bridegroom for whom she has left her earthly home. At this, she runs to meet him and he takes her in to his mother's tent. Then the scripture records, "So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

Then, in the very next verse we see that Abraham takes another wife by the name of Keturah and eventually has six more sons by her.

## *Lesson One: New, godly relationships can bring comfort.*

In Colossians 4:10, 11, Paul is writing from prison and he mentions Mark as one of the few people who have brought him comfort. This is poignant for it was Mark who, in abandoning Paul during his first missionary journey (see Acts 13:13) sparked a huge rift between Paul and his closest supporter Barnabas (see Acts 15:37-40). Mark had once topped Paul's people-who-let-you-down list. But later Mark was found valuable to Paul's ministry and indeed even penned the gospel of Mark.

*Lesson Two: Reconciled relationships can bring comfort.*

In Thessalonica, the saints were mourning the loss of loved ones and Paul wrote the most wonderful promise of the return of Christ and the rapture. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." (1Thes 4:14) Then he finished by saying, "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

*Lesson Three: The hope of restored, everlasting heavenly relationships brings comfort.* (See also 2Thes 2:16, 17)

It is the one who has 'been there' who renders the comfort we need in our difficulties. This is precisely why our Father is the "God of all comfort" (2Cor1:3). He experienced broken relationship with mankind in Eden. He experienced broken relationship with Israel as with an unfaithful spouse. He experienced broken relationship with His one and only begotten Son, Jesus on the cross.

The Lord Jesus also knows more personally and more deeply the pain of grief than any of us. He was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." (Isa 53:3,4). Christ was deserted by family and friends – by everyone. He knows perfectly your own heart and offers the only help that heals.

So if you've suffered a broken or lost relationship with a loved one through death, through divorce, through discouragement or disappearance, the God of all comfort, wants you to know that when you seek Him, He will comfort powerfully. He will carry your sorrow; He understands it personally and will do what no one else can – fix it.

Why, even the Holy Spirit Himself is called by Jesus the **Comforter** or **Helper**. (See John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) The same term is used to describe Christ in 1Jn2:1 and even the Rabbis call the Messiah the Consoler,

the Comforter. You see, it's an attribute of all three Persons of the Godhead.

Be of good comfort – our Father in heaven can take the most painful or disastrous circumstances and amaze you with His loving care. In fact, the time will come when you will find yourself able to help others as He has helped you (2Cor 1:4,5). You'll be 'comfort-able' in Christ.

*"Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted."*