

Seeking Face-Time

It was dark outside on the deck as I saw him huddled in the far corner. His gut-level weeping was like a knife in my heart. I approached slowly and knelt down beside him laying my arm on his shoulder. In a moment, his tears were falling on my chest as he buried his face.

Behind it all was a terrible tale of bewildering betrayal and abandonment that had ravaged an innocent, loving heart. In the cold night air, he seemed so incredibly alone and devastated. A week earlier, he had despaired of life and came very close to ending it. You see, his wife had been cheating on him for years, treating him with disdain and mind numbing abuse and then one day simply left him with their two children. Now, with a deathly sense of finality, having had his latest request for reconciliation trashed, he understood just how dark her heart was, how it really was over. In addition, it wasn't that long ago that his little brother, who he was so close to, had died.

He had always been tender, as a child and as a man, filled with the

sincere desire to live a godly life. Now, he was utterly broken.

Comfort? What does comfort look like in times like these? For it's at the bottom of these deep canyons of anguish that we're vulnerable to feel abandoned by God as well. You can question the very beliefs that have guided your life and devotion. It's the heart-cry that's present in death, in divorce, and in the often rapid-fire succession of destructive dilemmas that seem to rain down on us and can crush a tender soul. Bitterness, anger, hurt can flood in and be vented out in all directions.

Comfort? We want answers, explanations, freedom from the pain and comfort seems like a vapor, an empty theory.

Her eyes were filled with loss and pain as she looked into mine. Her precious daughter had died and though her faith was deep and solid, she, like so many of us, cried out inwardly for comfort and assurance. Many had consoled, many had cried with her and her dear husband. Now, as she gazed into my soul, she gently smiled and said, "You know. I know you know." She did the same with my wife.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 2 Cor 1:3,4

We need to believe God's Word regardless of how we feel. It's simply true. But what does this comforting by God look like; how does it work out?

Basically, there's a face to face encounter that's necessary. Just as my dear friend looked into my eyes knowing that we shared a common experience, a common grief, so we can each look into the loving, compassionate and fully understanding eyes of our God, and know He knows as well.

It wasn't long after I lost my son that I realized that the heart of God not only understood my grief but knew it firsthand and to a degree that dwarfed my own. Not only did His Son die, but He died in sinful alienation from His Father. Now, it was in obedience to the Father's will, but He was carrying the sins of the whole world – past, present and future. Father God

not only watched Him die but sent Him to Hell all for us. It was the horrible complete judgment we all deserved.

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, Phil 3:8-10

You see, there is an amazingly deep relationship, a fellowship derived in suffering. Of course, there are the 'hill top' experiences – powerful encounters with a holy, all powerful God – just ask Moses, Peter, or Elijah. And there is a fellowship there too.

But just ask any soldier who has fought for his life alongside another. The bond of a really meaningful shared experience is very powerful. And God has shared your grief, your suffering. Is it any wonder He calls His Spirit "Comforter"? The name literally means one who comes along side to help.

So how does this comforting work? It's like a pearl. Like the very doors of heaven.

This is how it works. Each time you come to God in prayer or worship and find the understanding kindness in His face, your pain is covered, it is assuaged. The scaring, however, is not removed. As with Christ's scars, you keep them just like that piece of grit in the center of a pearl. But, slowly and purely, that grit, that scar, is transformed. Oh, you will always know it is a gritty deal at the core, but God and others will increasingly see it as a pearl. Yes, this comfort is an increasingly

beautiful thing; a patient process requiring lots of face-time, lots of fellowship, with our Father and our Savior.

Out of this fellowship, you will find the trust to continue, to know that His coming along side is indeed to help. It's not about answers or 'what-if's' or quick-fixes. It's about a continual covering, it's about communing, it's about eternal assurance and healing. And I will tell you from first-hand experience, it does work. That's because, like with my friend and I, you can look into His eyes and say, "You know. I know you know," and be comforted.