

God's comfort - also for me

A visit to a doctor, a referral to a specialist, or an admission to hospital already causes so much stress and uncertainty. When you receive the tidings of a bad diagnosis, or you are going through a difficult time of illness and pain, it brings a lot of questions and fears, mixed emotions and deep loneliness to the surface. You try to comfort yourself in different ways, but you cannot keep your thoughts from running wild. You wonder with whom you can talk about your unrest. Where do you find true comfort?



What is comfort?

To be comforted is important for the healing of illness; it gives us strength to get through our pain and struggle; it brings closure, surrender. Comfort is knowing that we are not alone; that others are carrying our pain with us. Comfort is when someone helps us to dry the tears, like a mother comforting an injured child. Comfort is to be able to laugh again through the tears, to see everything in a new light, to get renewed hope.

Where do I find true comfort?

Of course, family or friends can comfort us. Their closeness, or small gestures of care, like a touch or a warm smile, can already bring so much comfort. There is comfort in knowing that others are helping to carry our pain. Words can bring comfort, prayers, reminding us of God's promises. To be in a familiar environment, amongst familiar faces, can comfort us. Bits of good news bring comfort; as well as care or medicine. Mostly, however, we search for a deeper comfort, a comfort which can bring peace to the struggle which is raging on the inside. Often, this comfort only comes with the tears, only when we have learned to honestly bear our hearts in front of God. Let us look at a few Biblical examples:

- ***King David's lamentations to God***

Like David, we are all in search of someone to comfort us, but sometimes we cannot find anyone. "I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none." (Ps. 69:20). It is very sad when you cannot find comfort! "In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted." (Ps. 77:2). There are several lamentation Psalms where David cried out his sufferings before the Lord - and that is precisely where he finds comfort. Psalm 6:7 and 9: "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears... The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer."

There are people who mock David's God and made him doubt: "My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." (Ps. 42:5).

In Psalm 131, he could write: "O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore."

- ***Job finds comfort in the encounter with God***

Perhaps you are experiencing something of Job, who sat without comfort in ashes. His friends tried to comfort him, but it did not help. They wanted to give all sorts of explanations, reasons for his illness. "It is your sin, your debt!" they said. "Just repent your sin and ask for forgiveness, then it will be better", or "Your faith is not strong enough" or "It is God's will that you suffer this way, Job. Just accept it!" Easy answers, without comfort! Miserable comforters.

But Job keeps bringing his struggles, his questions, his doubts and pain to God, laying it sincerely before God: "When I say, 'My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint,' then you scare me with dreams and terrify me

with visions, so that I would choose strangling and death rather than my bones. I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are a breath.” (Job 17:13-16). In the struggle with God, Job discovered that it is not the answers to all of our questions, our understanding of debt or deserving, our friends or our circumstances which bring true comfort. Comfort does not lie in the question: “Why, oh Lord?”, but in the question: “Where are You, oh Lord?” Job discovered that in his deepest suffering, God was always with him, held him and carried him. Therefore, he could surrender himself, his illness, and his circumstances to God, he who is almighty, all-knowing and merciful. In the encounter with the Lord - “... now I have seen You myself ...” - precisely there he found comfort.

- ***Hezekiah cries before God***

We read in Isaiah 38:1-6 how ill Hezekiah was. He wept bitterly and prayed to God. Then God said: “I have answered your prayers. I have seen your tears.” God extended his life with by 15 years.

Perhaps you want to weep at this moment. If you do cry before God, you will be comforted. You are not blessed because you are ill and sad. You are blessed because your illness and sadness can bring you to God, the Comforter.

Jesus Christ brings comfort

God’s comfort means more than to just be healthy. In John 16:33, Jesus says: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” God does not stand indifferent to our pain. Therefore, God sent his Son to this world to descend into our broken world, to take our pain and sorrow onto him, to hang on the cross, deserted by God, on our behalf, so that we will never be deserted by God again. Jesus says: “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

The Holy Spirit is our Comforter

God also poured his Spirit into the world to comfort and accompany us through all our life’s experiences. His Spirit is our actual Comforter. In the world there are many tears. It will be like that until the end, but the Spirit comforts us with Jesus’ promise: “Behold, I am making all things new”, says Jesus. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelations 21:4). Because we know of this victory, we are comforted today already, in our current circumstances.

Comfort in praying to the Holy Trinity

We can lay all of our doubts before God in prayer: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:26-39)

Lord, at the moment it feels like I am swimming in a bottomless pit. Reach out your powerful hand beneath me and please lift me up so that I can hope, believe and trust again that your Word and promises are true. Father, you know my pain, sadness, worry and sorrow. Please let your will be done in me. Thank you for blessing me with your strength, wisdom and love. Thank you for your mercy, every day. Thank you that I can also reach YOU today through prayer. I praise you God, because you are wonderful. Amen!

Other comforts from scripture:

Psalms 23:4; 27:1 and 14; 38:9-15; 73:26; 94:19; 119:50;

2 Corinthians 1:4; 4:16 to 5:10;

John 5:1-15; 2

Thessalonians 2:16-17;

James 5:14-16.



