

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 - What a wonderful God we have—he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of every mercy, and the one who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials. And why does he do this? So that when others are troubled, needing our sympathy and encouragement, we can pass on to them this same help and comfort God has given us. You can be sure that the more we undergo sufferings for Christ, the more he will shower us with his comfort and encouragement.

*How effective are you at recognizing God's comfort and encouragement when he gives it to you?
What are you doing to provide comfort and encouragement to others in the body of Christ?*

Throughout all the trials of your life, the Lord God will never abandon you. His love for you is without limit and what he wants for you is greater than you could ever imagine. But throughout your earthly existence you're living in a fallen world whose organizations and systems are under the control of the evil one. So when you take a stand for Christ, you will be attacked by the people, organizations, and systems that are under the devil's control. The more you take a stand for Jesus – the more you will undergo suffering for Christ. Yet, you're going to have to take that stand if you want to lead God's way and meet God's value criteria on the judgement day.

- *1 Corinthians 3:13 (NLT) - But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.*

From a worldly perspective, you might think it's not fair that you have to share in Christ's sufferings. It might even scare you a little thinking about how Christ suffered on the cross. But if you'll look at the spiritual realities of your life, you'll realize that God is for you, and you need have no fear. (Deuteronomy 31:6b) After all, you ARE a citizen of heaven. You are NOT a citizen of this world. Your future is eternal life with Christ while the future for the citizens of the world is eternal death in hell. Remember, you're in the midst of a spiritual war, (Ephesians 6:12), and the devil hates the reality of the "Christ in you." (Colossians 1:27) At any time that you allow the devil to get to you, he's going to cause suffering.

- *Philippians 3:20 (NLT) - But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.*
- *Psalms 118:6 (NIV) - The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?*

Are you allowing the devil to get to you – and then suffering as a result? Whenever you don't or won't claim the power of Christ or you're unprepared/unwilling to do the works that Jesus did, (John 14:12), then the devil is going to find a way to get to you. You know the devil repeatedly attacked Jesus. How? It was through people who lied, manipulated, misrepresented, mis-stated, threatened, and attacked him to undermine his moral authority. There were also times when the crowd wanted to attack him physically, (John 10:39, Luke 4:30). Bottom line: the devil will manipulate people to do to you the same things they did to Jesus. Is that fair? From the devil's perspective it is! So you have a daily decision to make. Are you God's leader who is willing to deal with the threats and hurts associated with being a Christian leader, or do you think it's unfair and prefer to walk in concert with the devil?

- *Mark 8:34-36 (NLT) - Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"*

If you focus your mind on Christ, you can always overcome the devil's attacks and ***God will shower you with his comfort and encouragement.*** That's God's promise and when God makes a promise, you can cash that in the eternal bank. So, if for any reason you're not feeling or sensing

God's comfort and encouragement, then you're either not standing up for him or you're not paying attention.

- *1 Peter 5:8 (NLT) - Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*

Look at Jesus' example of leadership under pressure. Jesus kept his "cool" despite the things that were consistently happening against him. He didn't lose his focus or buckle under the pressure because he understood his purpose and believed God would give him the comfort and encouragement he needed when he needed it. He also knew just what comfort and encouragement to provide to others. Getting comfort from God and knowing what comfort to give others is one of your key reasons for prayer. Jesus understood that prayer is dialogue. How about you? When you pray you may get just the encouragement you need – and you may also get the insights you need to encourage others in the family of God.

- *Ephesians 4:12 (ESV) - To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*

Jesus had the courage and determination to follow through on everything he was called to do, and, of course, he was attacked for it. The same is going to happen to you and anyone else who is doing God's work. Yet, with every attack upon any of God's people, the Lord will also provide comfort and encouragement. How God will do that for you will be unique to you.

Oh, how very kind and good my heavenly Father has been to me! I have no aches or pains, no rheumatism, and now in my ninety-third year I can do a day's work at the orphan houses with as much ease and comfort to myself as ever.
~ George Mueller

One of the ways Jesus dealt with the constant attacks on his character, integrity, and ministry was God giving him a picture of his future. Jesus was wholly human, (John 1:14, 1 Timothy 2:5), and like you, he had to work with his own mind. So, God gave him comfort and encouragement in the ways that Jesus needed it. God gave him a voice from heaven (Matthew 3:17), transfigured him on a mountain top, (Matthew 17:2-3), and told him that his kingdom was not of this world, (John 18:36). How God will comfort and encourage you will be unique and just what you need. When you stand for Christ and the devil begins his attacks, look for some sign, miracle, or wonder where the Lord is doing something, just for you, so you won't quit or lose heart. You should expect God's intervention. Look for it, listen for it, and be aware of it.

- *John 13:3 (NLT) - Jesus KNEW that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God.*

Don't confuse the world's systems of "comfortable" with the "true comfort" that only God can give. If you're looking for God to make your life more comfortable from a worldly perspective, you may be waiting a long time. Whatever worldly comfort someone might have, it won't last. In reality, what comfort can be had without God? How can the ungodly be comfortable when they're looking at an eternity in the *fiery lake of burning sulfur*? From the Lord's perspective, the ungodly are considered *like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment. They have no place among the godly and the path of the wicked leads to destruction.* (Psalm 1:4-6) God will not spare the ungodly and the sinner. Hell is not a place of comfort.

- *Revelation 21:8 (NLT) - But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.*

What the Lord will do for your comfort and encouragement may, at times, seem small or fleeting to others, but it will be significant and important to you. And he won't give you comfort or encouragement just once. As you keep standing for God, he will keep comforting and

encouraging you. It might be that perfect insight you needed. It might be a picture of your future self or future generations. It might be a compliment, look, or pat on the back. It might be a direction to take or the answer to a problem. It might be words of encouragement or bringing the right person into your life just when you need them most. It might be a vision for your service to God or how to use your leadership to change the world for the better. How God will comfort and encourage you will always be an exciting reality, and always – just what you needed when you needed it.

If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair. ~ C.S. Lewis

Jesus understood his Kingdom was not of this world. (John 18:36) He was not a “good ol’ boy” or part of the system. He was not a politician, elected, promoted, or had monetary power. He had no positional authority and was not “schooled” in the rabbinical tradition. (John 7:35) He stood against traditions of men, disagreed with the elite, believed the Word of God over religiosity, refused to submit to special interest groups or societal prejudices, and did not apologize for putting God before the affairs of people. He did, however, have moral authority based on his willingness to bring his life into alignment with God. His convictions, behavior, and use of God's word made his life and words persuasive and thereby a threat to those with worldly power. That is also part of your life and leadership. Jesus did NOT seek the comfort of this world. And since you too are NOT a citizen of this world, your emphasis should not be on gaining the world's comfort but being comforted like Christ was – and comforting others like his did.

The Lord God promised comfort and encouragement for you – and the majority of the time it's going to come from your Christian brothers and sisters. Your need for the family of believers can never be overstated! But that also means that you've a great responsibility and accountability to support other believers. You have been called by God to lead and there will be many, many times when you're the one who needs to give comfort and encouragement.

- *2 Corinthians 1:4 (NLT) - He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*

Whenever you see, hear, or sense your brother or sister suffering in some way, you need to step up and do something. If you turn your back on them, then you're not living up to your calling. And as a leader, you have a greater responsibility in this. You are accountable to God to support others in the body of Christ. Listen to the Holy Spirit to give you the insights you need about how to provide that comfort or encouragement. It may be as simple as words of comfort or as complex as providing some type of physical support. It could be a meal, money, a hand-up, a handout, a perk, an advantage, support, influence, relief, warmth, preference, your protection, leverage, recognition, assistance, your backing, a service, or a gift. How you encourage and comfort others in the body of believers is as unlimited as God is unlimited. The fact that God expects it from you, in reality, should be all you need to make sure it happens.

- *2 Thessalonians 3:13 (NIV) - And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.*

Your leadership is only through the grace of God. Your safety, health, wealth, and everything you have is only through the grace of God. Is it really too much to ask for you to help others in the body of believers? After all, God promised to provide you the encouragement and comfort you need when you're suffering. Why wouldn't you want to do the same for others?

- *Daniel 2:21 (YLT) - And He is changing times and seasons, He is causing kings to pass away, and He is raising up kings; He is giving wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those possessing understanding.*