

## God's Comfort

**Comfort, comfort my people, says your God** (Isaiah 40:1).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40:1-5

**Song:** "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

The trauma of a house fire is a terrible experience. When the emergency workers and firefighters arrive, their first job is to extinguish the flames. But the people who have lost their homes are in shock and need help too. Many towns have adopted a teddy bear giveaway for those who need a soothing bear hug. Children—and adults too—find comfort in holding a stuffed bear.

Daily life is full of large and small troubles and stressful situations. Teddy bears are temporary comforts. Family, friends, professional counselors, and even strangers can all help when our lives seem to be spiraling down. But God offers His permanent comfort. He understands our woes and hurts. He stands ready to help. Wonderfully, God can do so much more than just empathize with our pain. Beyond feeling compassion, God is there to help us through our troubles. He does not promise to always take problems away, but He promises to be with us and see us through. He carries us when we no longer have strength to go on.

**Heavenly Father**, thank You for Your love and comfort to us each day. Help us to call on You because You are the giver of great grace and comfort. In Jesus' name, amen

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December 21–27. **Judy Carlsen** lives in Illinois with her husband of 45 years. She enjoys reading, traveling, photography, interior decorating, her three grandchildren, and serving the Lord in and outside of the local church.

## The Most Important Message

**“There has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”** (Matthew 11:11).

**Scripture:** Matthew 11:2-15

**Song:** “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations”

In 1924, the Flying Scotsman, Eric Liddell, refused to run an Olympic race on a Sunday. He went on to win a gold medal for a longer race. The bigger story is that, after his Olympic triumph, he fulfilled his promise to return as a missionary to China. After 18 years, he died in a Japanese civilian internment camp. Liddell had been a loving, gospel messenger to Asians who had never heard the good news.

Jesus called John the Baptist a great prophet. John willingly proclaimed that the kingdom of God was coming soon. He challenged the Jewish leaders to think about God’s promises through past prophets. A coming Messiah would lead the Jews out of bondage to sin. Many believed the Messiah would overthrow the Roman government. But Jesus was referring to His kingdom in people’s hearts.

Those who follow their God-given task of sharing the good news are helping others to know about Jesus’ mission. He is the Messiah, who came to take on the sin of those who accept Him as Savior. He made the ultimate sacrifice so we can become His beloved children. There is no more important message than that!

**Dear Father,** we are in awe that You would allow us the privilege of being Your messengers to those around us. Help us to share this truth of salvation today to someone who needs to hear. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## A Simple Man

**“[Jesus] is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (John 1:27).**

**Scripture:** John 1:19-34

**Song:** “I’d Rather Have Jesus”

Dwight Lyman Moody preached the gospel to thousands during his lifetime. A late-1800s evangelist, Moody’s work can be compared to Billy Graham’s outreach. It would have been easy for him to allow all the publicity to go to his head—but he didn’t. The preacher knew who he was: a simple man surrendered to God. When people complimented him on his preaching, he would pray for God to empty him of his ego and give God the glory.

This humble attitude also exemplified John the Baptist. He was a popular preacher before Jesus began His ministry. John was called by God to give a simple message: the kingdom of God is coming. He was to prepare the way for Messiah. That mission was extremely important, but John never lost sight of who he was: a simple man ready to be used by God.

Each of us has been given a mission by God. He has given us our gifts and abilities, and the capacity to use them—if we are willing to do so. D. L. Moody and John the Baptist are good examples for us to follow. We are simple people whom God can use for His glory.

**Our Father**, please help us to understand what gifts You have given us. Thank You for the potential work we can do for You if we allow You to use us, Your simple people. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Who Is the Messiah?

**“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”** (Matthew 17:5).

**Scripture:** Matthew 17:1-8

**Song:** “Jesus, Messiah”

When archaeologist Howard Carter uncovered King Tut’s tomb in Egypt in 1922, it was a major worldwide event. Hieroglyphics on walls of all Egyptian tombs showed that this ancient people worshipped their kings, the sun, the moon, the stars, the Nile River, and—yes, even cats. The ancient Egyptians were a people searching for a god to worship.

The one true God has always existed, but many people—like the Egyptians—have been blinded by Satan to not understand or reach out to Him. When John the Baptist preached about the coming kingdom of God, he knew the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah were about to be fulfilled. When John baptized Jesus, God the Father spoke from Heaven. He identified Jesus as His Son, the anointed one, and told the people to listen to what Jesus had to say. Their centuries of waiting for the Messiah were over. Some Jews believed, but sadly many did not.

Many people today wonder if Jesus was the real Messiah. Jesus not only claimed to be the chosen one; He also proved it by healing many sick people and preaching about God’s kingdom. Even more, He gave himself as the ultimate sacrifice so that those who believe in Him could have eternal life with God.

**Dear Father,** thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, as the long-awaited Messiah. Help us to live in light of this truth and receive Him as our personal Savior. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Suffering for the Gospel

**“The Son of Man is going to suffer at their [the teachers of the law] hands”** (Matthew 17:12).

**Scripture:** Matthew 17:9-13; Malachi 4:4-5

**Song:** “Jesus Paid It All”

We hear on the news about Christians in many countries suffering for their faith. They are tortured, imprisoned, and even killed. Persecution is increasing in the United States too. Students, teachers, and coaches who are bold Christians sometimes endure hostility, taunting, threats, and violence.

Suffering for the sake of the gospel brings to mind the suffering our Lord Jesus Christ endured. He came from Heaven to liberate people, to willingly suffer and die as the perfect sacrifice for our sin. Instead of welcoming this wonderful fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, the Jewish people rejected Jesus’ sacrifice for them. The leaders plotted to kill Him for blasphemy.

Each person must choose to accept or reject Jesus’ gift of salvation. When we share the good news of the gospel, we may experience rejection and suffering. But to have someone we know take a step of faith toward Jesus is worth any suffering. Philippians 3:10 says, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

**Dear Father,** suffering sounds scary. Help us to depend on You when we suffer for the gospel’s sake. Thank You that Jesus suffered in our place on the cross. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## The Holy Spirit's Work

**As soon as Jesus was baptized . . . he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him** (Matthew 3:16).

**Scripture:** Matthew 3:13-17

**Song:** "Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"

I was almost 5 when I accepted Jesus as my Savior. Back then, the Holy Spirit was referred to as the Holy Ghost. That gave me chills. I eventually learned that God is actually three persons in one. I could picture majestic God the Father sitting on His throne. Jesus was easy to understand, since He came to earth as a human. But the Holy Spirit? I found Him hard to fathom.

God the Father's action of sending the Spirit as a dove on the important occasion of Jesus' baptism is helpful. All three persons of God were present in ways people can recognize to mark the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus prayed to the Father regularly while He was here. He also was led by the Holy Spirit so He would follow the Father's will.

The Holy Spirit came as counselor to the disciples after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:8), and still guides Christians today. He helps us pray and convicts us of sin. He gives us His power to share the gospel. He fosters His fruit: "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). We will grow more Christlike as we respond to the Spirit's work in our lives.

**Father,** thank You for Your gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us to grow in You as we allow the Spirit to work daily in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

## The Fruit of Faith

**“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance”** (Matthew 3:8).

**Scripture:** Matthew 3:1-12

**Song:** “Cleanse Me”

A veteran in his 70s wakes up every morning asking God, “What do You want me to do today?” Instead of complaining about standing in line at the Veterans Administration, he talks with other veterans. He listens to their stories and encourages them to seek God. Driving home, he sees a car with a flat tire and helps fix it. He believes God opens his eyes to see needs around him so he can help.

John the Baptist saw the correlation between repentance and faith. When a person truly repents of his sin, he will exhibit his faith. True repentance is more than just saying a few holy-sounding words. It means a complete turnaround. John preached boldly to the Jewish leaders who came to hear him. Some accepted his words, repented of their sins, and were baptized in the Jordan River. Others apparently came just to see this odd desert man. They listened, but walked away without changing their lives.

When we repent of our sins and live lives pleasing to God, we will bear fruit. It can be the fruit of living a godly life. It can also be fruit of bringing others to a saving knowledge of God. A third kind is doing good works to God’s glory. While good works do not save us, they are the result of honoring Him and giving Him glory.

**Heavenly Father**, open our eyes to see what You have for us to do today. Help us to show our faith by our good works. In Jesus’ name, amen.