

Comfort Conduit

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Song: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

At the cemetery, friends hugged me as I sobbed ugly sobs. “I know how you feel,” many whispered into my ear as they drew near. Some did not, but some did, especially those whose parents were in Heaven too.

Paul was no stranger to suffering. He elaborated in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27: imprisonment, beatings, shipwreck, floggings, and hunger were a few of the things he endured. Paul and his companions also experienced grave danger in Asia, a crisis so serious they feared death (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). Rather than despair, though, Paul relied on God and considered the circumstance an opportunity to minister to others.

The troubles we face may not compare to Paul’s, but God is present during our trials just the same. Perhaps our struggles involve job loss, loneliness, health issues, hurting relationships, or the challenges of aging. Whatever our greatest need might be, God is our comforter. Like Paul, our circumstances can empower us to encourage and comfort others. Let’s have a faith that pleases God and share that compassion with those who need it.

Father, thank You for comforting me with such compassion. Help me be a conduit of Your love to the hurting. In Jesus’ name, amen.

January 15–21. **Barbara Gordon** is a retired school teacher. Her favorite pastime is playing with grandkids.

Taste and See

Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him (Psalm 34:8).

Scripture: Psalm 34:1-10

Song: “How Great Is Our God”

My family’s favorite dessert is turtle cake. Caramel, chocolate, nuts—sweet delectability! The treat is rich, moist, and mouth-watering. My children use many adjectives to describe it, but you have to taste it for yourself to understand.

Today’s passage outlines several benefits of knowing God. David’s psalm reminds us that God hears our prayers, delivers us from our fears, rescues us from shame, and saves us from our troubles. After detailing the rewards of following God, the psalmist encourages us not to rely on *his* experiences but to experience God’s goodness for ourselves. He likens our soul’s need for God to the body’s need for food. And as we experience God’s protection, wisdom, peace, and forgiveness firsthand, we realize He is good, indeed!

To taste God’s goodness means getting to know Him personally. The first step is coming to Him through the atoning work of Jesus, His Son. Then as we read and study the Bible, pray, and listen to godly wisdom, we feed our relationship with Him. As He fills us with His goodness, we learn that we can take refuge in Him. As we experience Him for ourselves and learn to trust Him fully, our faith grows, and we come to know the sweetness of His love.

Father, I want to draw close to You and seek You in every circumstance. Thank You that I can trust Your faithfulness. You *are* good. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Heart Healer

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18).

Scripture: Psalm 34:11-22

Song: “Abide with Me”

My first pet was a black-and-white mutt that unexpectedly showed up one summer afternoon when I was about five years old. Despite her homely appearance, I fell in love with her at the first wag of her fluffy tail. I promptly named her Poochie, and we spent hours roaming the backyard. Hot evenings we sat on the porch together as I counted fireflies and ran my fingers through her fur. When Poochie didn't survive being run over by a car, I was grief-stricken. My mom tenderly held me on her lap and rocked me while I cried.

David was well acquainted with grief and in need of a comforter too. He mourned over his sin with Bathsheba, the death of an infant son, and the betrayal of friends and family. David's psalms outline his reactions to his many losses. In them he acknowledged his heartache, cried out to God, and chose to put his faith in the one who was always there for him. Experience taught him the truth of today's passage: God is near to those whose hearts are broken.

Maybe you are brokenhearted over the loss of a loved one, a relationship, or a dream. The very same God who was close to David in his heartache draws near to us in our sorrow as well. In the midst of our despair, we can follow David's example: feel the pain, appeal to the Lord, and know that He is near.

Father, when my heart is breaking, I will look to You for comfort. In Jesus' name, amen.

Be an Encourager

Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-15

Song: “This Little Light of Mine”

I took up running on my 50th birthday. Well, maybe not *running*. Some people walk faster than I run. My goal was to one day complete a 5K race. Early on, I jogged only when I felt like it and at a speed that felt comfortable. As you might imagine, this approach didn't yield great results. Then I made a discovery: if someone ran with me, I could increase my distance and better my time. Eventually I did compete in a few 5K events, but I needed the encouragement of others to motivate me to complete that goal.

The apostle Paul used the backdrop of “the day of the Lord” to instruct believers to build up and encourage each other. Whether it's concerning the prospect of Christ's return or the uncertainty of daily life, we sometimes need reassurance. Paul indicates God's provisions for our work of encouragement: faith, love, and the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

Who can we encourage today? A heartfelt note, text, or phone call might uplift another person's spirit. Praying for or with someone can provide peace and comfort and perhaps bring about a change of circumstances. Simply spending time with someone who is lonely can bring a sense of being seen and cared for. Encouraging others builds faith in both the giver and recipient.

Father, I'm grateful that You are a God of encouragement. I want to build others up as well. Show me who needs uplifting today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Choose to Rejoice *Always*

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

Song: "To God Be the Glory"

Rejoice *always*? Surely the apostle Paul didn't mean *always*. When I've lost a loved one, endured medical emergencies, or mourned relationships gone bad, rejoicing has not been the theme of my prayers. I pray often, but praying *continually* seems like a stretch. Giving thanks is easy . . . unless my circumstances are crummy. But Paul says we should give thanks in *all* circumstances.

Paul teaches these three imperatives in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 as God's will for us. And as the one who penned these directives, Paul was no stranger to adversity. He experienced floggings, stoning, hunger, thirst, shipwreck, and many other hardships. Yet he encouraged those to whom he was writing to persist in being joyful, prayerful, and thankful even in the midst of life's very real struggles.

Our own struggles may include, among other things, a job change, relocation, relationship loss, health issues, or loss of a loved one. Such unexpected and unwanted events often create tension and grief. Yet through the ups and downs of life, the Lord remains with us, and He does not change. As we embrace Paul's principles of rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks, we will navigate the changes and challenges of life with the fullness of God's grace and strength.

Father, thank You that You fill me with Your grace and strength as my heart is continually turned toward You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our Eyes Are on You

[King Jehoshaphat prayed,] “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chronicles 20:12).

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:5-12

Song: “My Hope Is in You”

Several summers ago our family vacationed at the Grand Canyon. Our adventurous agenda included hiking the nine miles to the bottom of the canyon, spending the night in a tent, then climbing out the next day. All went as planned until we encountered a flash flood on our way back up. Car-sized rocks tumbled around us as we sat on a ledge, paralyzed with fear. When the ground stabilized a bit, a park ranger came through and gathered all the hikers to a central location to walk the rest of the way out together. We kept our eyes on this ranger. He knew what we needed to do to get to safety.

King Jehoshaphat turned his eyes to God when he learned that a vast army was about to attack. The king’s response to the frightening report was to pray. With the people of Judah gathered around, Jehoshaphat ended his prayer to the one who could save them with these profound words: “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chronicles 20:12).

When choked with fear and indecision, we can pray the words of Jehoshaphat with confidence. Turning our eyes to the Lord and admitting our helplessness invites His intervention in our distress. As we look to Him, He will meet us and see us through.

Father, when I don’t know my next step, I will look to You and call on You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Battle Is Not Yours

[Jahaziel said to King Jehoshaphat,] “This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s’” (2 Chronicles 20:15).

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:13-20

Song: “Because He Lives”

Every year I look forward to the first hummingbird of the season. The feeder hanging outside my kitchen window has six ports with perches, which ought to be plenty for the three or four birds I have each year. Apparently, though, hummingbirds are among the most territorial of birds. Within two or three days of their arrival, the fighting begins. The most aggressive one dives and chases any other bird that tries to take a sip of the sweet solution. The feeder is never empty, but “Boss Hog,” as we call him, has an agenda and is determined to win the battle at all costs.

Jehoshaphat’s “Boss Hog” enemies were on their way, and the odds did not look good for Judah’s king. He prayed, though, and God answered. Jehoshaphat did not have a plan, but the Lord did. First, God told the king not to be afraid. The next steps were to march, stand firm, and watch. God’s people did just that, and when they finished their march, they found that the enemy armies had already destroyed each other.

Jehoshaphat’s experience reminds me to bring my fears and trials to the Lord. He is faithful and able to see me through absolutely any physical or spiritual battle.

Father, I will choose to trust You and not be afraid. I know You are always with me. In Jesus’ name, amen.