

Nursing Home Message No. 37
II Corinthians 1:3-5

- 3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;
- 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.
- 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

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It should be easy to preach about God's comfort in a nursing home. There's so much suffering that calls for comfort: you would think a message about comfort would be a natural.

But sometimes, if we're in pain, we don't want comforting. Instead we want answers and relief. And if the answers and relief don't come we get angry. And then, well meaning comforters become more of an irritation than a help.

In the midst of our suffering we cry out, "Why, God? Why this? Why me? Why don't you make it stop?" At a time like that, someone who comes along with a soothing "Now, now; there, there" just seems to throw more fuel on the fire of our rage!

In Washington, DC there is one of the greatest information bureaus in the world. People from all over the country send questions to this bureau, the experts search out the information and then publish it in newspapers throughout the land. There are times, however, when even the great bureau is "stumped." They receive questions to which there seems to be no answer. In such cases they appoint a special person to do extra research and, if there is an answer, that special researcher finds it.

But there are some questions which no information bureau can answer. And, "Why is this happening to me?" is one of those questions. No human information bureau can answer it.

But, suppose someone else comes along who has already gone through the kind of pain we are suffering. That person we pay

attention to! Because that person may have learned something that even the great information bureau couldn't discover: something that will help us deal with our own pain.

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Did you know that some of the greatest people the world has ever known were also people who suffered great pain and difficulties throughout their lives?

Today we have sung some songs that were written by Fanny Crosby, "Praise Him (2), Near the Cross (6), Tell Me The Story of Jesus (32), Blessed Assurance (40), He Hideth My Soul (61), To God Be the Glory (72), and Redeemed (82)"

When she was just 6 weeks old, a cold caused an inflammation of Fanny Crosby's eyes. The family physician was not home, so a stranger was called. This doctor recommended the use of hot poultices, which ultimately destroyed her sight.

Late in her life Crosby wrote, "When this sad misfortune became known throughout our neighborhood, the unfortunate man thought it best to leave; and we never heard of him again. But I have not for a moment, in more than 85 years, felt a spark of resentment against him because I have always believed from my youth to this very moment that the good Lord, in His infinite mercy, by this means consecrated me to the work that I am still permitted to do."

At eight or nine years of age, while other children her age were preoccupied with jumping rope and playing hopscotch and tag, she penned these words:

Oh, what a happy soul I am,
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't!
To weep and sigh because I'm blind
I cannot nor I won't.

Throughout the years, Fanny Crosby wrote more than six thousand hymns.

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And that's what our passage this afternoon is all about. In the New International Version it reads:

- 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,
- 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.
- 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

Odd as it may seem, one of the greatest joys we may discover in the midst of our sufferings, is the ability to be a comfort to others who are also in pain.

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When Paul wrote these words to the Church at Corinth, he had just undergone a time of great suffering himself. In the New International Version of verses 8 and 9 he wrote:

- 8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.
- 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Paul saw his suffering as personally beneficial, driving him to trust God alone. But even more than that, he saw his suffering as directly benefitting those to whom he ministered, "God comforts us so that we may comfort you."

To experience God's comfort and consolation and encouragement in the midst of all one's affliction is to become indebted and equipped to communicate the divine comfort and sympathy to others who are in any kind of affliction or distress.

Verse 5 tells us why our suffering equips us to mediate God's comfort. Whenever Christ's sufferings were multiplied in Paul's life, God's comfort was also multiplied through the ministry of Christ. The greater the suffering, the greater the comfort and the greater the ability to share with others the divine sympathy.

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William Carey, the founder of the Baptist Missionary Society, struggled against continuous mocking and censure for many years before his dream of sending missionaries to other lands began to bear fruit. After almost 20 years of repeated defeats, the Society finally began to flourish. Carey himself was on the mission field in India and he had just finished a revision of the second Bengali version of the Bible.

Then on the evening of March 11, 1812, a fire demolished the mission, all Carey's manuscripts, and all the Bible versions in the publishing company's warehouse. But, as he walked through the smoking desolation the next day, Carey said, "In one short evening, the labours of years are consumed. How unsearchable are the ways of God! I had lately brought some things to the utmost perfection of which they seemed capable, and contemplated the missionary establishment with perhaps too much self-congratulation. The Lord has laid me low, that I may look more simply to him."

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How similar to Paul's words in verse nine:

9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Paul expected Christians to share the same kind of experiences that Christ had. We live in the same kind of world in which Jesus lived, we face the same forces of evil that He faced, and if we are faithful to Christ, we can expect to get the same reaction He received. This is a truth that we can readily accept intellectually. But, emotionally, we are still surprised and dismayed when trouble comes. We wonder what we have done wrong, what God is trying to say to us, and we have doubts about our relationship with Him.

But all who share Christ's trials are also heirs to all the resources of comfort that were his.

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Wayne Christianson was the Executive Editor of Moody Monthly magazine from 1955 through 1980. He got up at 5:30 every weekday morning to catch a 6:30 am train to Chicago to begin a workday that often ran upwards of 10 hours.

Wayne was born with a curvature of the spine. He stands only

four feet seven inches tall and has walked with a cane his entire life. It has never been easy for him to get about.

He began his career in 1938 by hitch-hiking across Iowa and Nebraska looking for work as a newspaper reporter. He had graduated Phi Beta Kappa in Journalism from the University of Iowa, but nobody wanted to hire a handicapped reporter.

He finally started on the weekly newspaper in Cherokee, Iowa at \$6.25 per week. He heard the gospel and accepted Christ as his Savior through visiting a serviceman's center maintained by Christian businessmen and he started at Moody Monthly in 1947.

Upon his retirement, his colleague Jerry Jenkins said of Wayne, "He's irreplaceable and unforgettable because he is: selfless, consecrated, insightful, prayerful, caring, sensitive, sacrificial, (and) loving." Jerry considered these things far more important than the fact that Wayne had built the magazine's circulation to over 100,000 during his career.

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As I stand here this afternoon, I wish I could offer you answers and relief. I wish I could make all your suffering go away. And I wish I could answer that question, "Why?" But I can't. Such is not within my power.

What I can and do offer you is a chance for joy in the midst of the suffering; a chance to become one of God's greatest gifts to a suffering world: one who can truly comfort others because you have been there yourself. And the place to begin is right here!

- 3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;
- 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.
- 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

Hallelujah!

Amen!

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