

10. Comfort to comfortless

July 1, 2012

Many of us have heard the word “PTSD” from news concerning many of our military veterans who have hard time adjusting back to civilian life returning from the battlefield they were in. Last year alone, in the State of Colorado, 350 veterans who returned from the wars committed suicide due to their PTSD. This is a big social issue that the vast majority of us do not know, nor do we know how to comfort those who go through this.

Even though their physical bodies may be back with their families and friends at home, their emotional and psychological world is still back at the combat zones of either Iraq, Afghanistan, or who-knows-where. Their minds are still reliving the terrors of the killing fields, reexperiencing the deafening explosions of incoming artillery or roadside bomb. Or even feeling guilt for nothing more than being alive while their battlefield buddies were blown to pieces.

Ironically, those who have never been in a battlefield can still go through PTSD. Posttraumatic stress disorder, a.k.a. PTSD, is a severe anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to any event that results in psychological trauma. This event may involve the threat of death to oneself or to someone else, or a threat to one’s own or someone else’s physical, sexual, or psychological well-being, overwhelming the individual’s ability to cope. That is why rape victims and victims of child molestation have such a terrible time throughout their lives.

Hurting people need words of comfort. But they need more than words. They need someone who can lighten the weight of their loneliness, their broken health, and their despair. They need a reassuring voice that firmly but gently says, “I’m here now. We will go through this together. Don’t be afraid.”

However, all too often, that comfort doesn’t come. Eventually many of us learn that even the best parents, spouses, or friends cannot give us that deep personal assurance we want for ourselves and others. Only God.

Mercilessly, Job had been pounded by his so-called friends – Eliphaz and Bildad. Before Job could take his next breath, Zophar the youngest of the three was on his face to chastise him for the sins that he had no idea of. These three were not there to comfort Job, but to harass, to insult, to belittle in the name of God for His defense, as if the Lord could not defend for Himself.

A. I SENTENCE YOU GUILTY

Job 11:1-4 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said: 2 “Should not the multitude of words be answered? And should a man full of talk be vindicated? 3 Should your empty talk make men hold their peace? And when you mock, should no one rebuke you? 4 For you have said, ‘My doctrine is pure, And I am clean in your eyes.’

I don’t know who died and left Zophar in charge, but for some reasons he sentenced Job guilty in v1 through 4. Then he called Job an airhead in v5-12, and called him too stubborn to repent in v13-20.

Here in this portion, Zophar was showing his anger toward Job. Yes, there is the time for righteous indignation.

Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath

These three friends did not know anything about Job's sins, but they assumed that there had to be a tremendous amount of sins because Job was in this terrible situation. How sad it is when people who should share ministry end up creating misery to the needies.

Though conversing face to face, these guys' hearts were a thousand miles away from Job. What they were saying to Job was information which he did not need, nor did he ask for.

Listen, information is giving out; communication is getting through. We can get information from any source. Just get on Google and type in what you are looking for. You will get a truck load of it. What we need when we're suffering is the comfort and close communication of someone who truly cares. We want someone to "get through" to us, to speak to us in the depths of our need.

Throughout the rest of chapter 11, Zophar delivered a lecture in 'Zophar Theology 101' – as if Job needed another lecture. And, unfortunately, quite a few Zophars are still on the loose today. If you haven't met one, just wait, you will. He or she will come along, with absolutely no capacity to "connect the dots" or discern your real need.

These modern day Zophars don't understand how God is working in your life, yet they have a customized message of shame and blame for you, and they may even say, "It's from God." or "God told me to tell you." Why do they do this? Because you are not doing what they believe you should be doing. Or you're doing what they believe you should not be doing. Of course, everything should be according to their legalistic standards.

B. COMFORTING THOSE WHO ARE COMFORTLESS

Whether you are in a comfortless situation or you want to comfort someone whom you care about, we should know where to find our true comfort.

Please pay attention to what I am about to say. The word "comfort" is not some cheezy fortune cookie notes or daily horoscopes. I hope that none of you read those stupid demonic things, nor depend your daily life on them.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

The Greek word for 'comfort' here is "paraklesis". Its definition is "a calling near, summons for help, supplication, exhortation, and encouragement".

The true comfort only comes through the Holy Spirit. One of the many things we learn from the Bible is that the reassuring Spirit of Christ works in ways that are not always our ways. This is graphically illustrated in the life of someone who probably experienced as much trouble as any war veteran, addict, sexual-abuse victim, someone with a terminal disease, or bereaved person you have ever met.

From where did apostle Paul write those two verses? From a nicely air-conditioned office library while he was sipping a tall ice-tea after he polished off a 16 oz T-Bone steak? Let's get a glimpse of apostle Paul's regular day of the missionary journey he was on:

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness--

Wow, the majority of us would have bailed out. Paul had been on his three missionary journeys from A.D. 45 till 58; and after that he'd been in and out of joint until he was beheaded by that Roman crazy emperor Nero's command in A.D. 67. Do you think that Paul was qualified to comfort someone who is going through hard time? Yet in spite of all his pain, he came through it praising "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort".

What was Paul's secret? Was his pain threshold so high that he didn't even feel the pain like the rest of us do?

1) God who comforts

Paul was more than a survivor. While remembering and bearing the scars of the past, he wasn't broken and embittered by his memories. He was able to look back and see that the darkest times had actually prepared the way for a sunrise.

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed--

Paul could bounce back and stayed in the course. Do you know how? He didn't keep his eyes on the situations he was in, but the One who stood behind the goal line – his Savior Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

2) Our weakness that helps

2 Corinthians 1:8-10 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us

Here we see that Paul found comfort only after coming to the end of himself. Through thoughts and emotions of weakness and despair, he was brought by God to a reassuring hope he never could have known through merely good times. It was in helplessness that Paul learned to rely on the Lord and to take heart from God's ability to rescue him from the shadow of death.

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Correy Ten Boom, a Dutch Christian survivor of the Nazi Holocaust during World War II said, "You may never know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have."

C. JOB'S ANSWERS

In his reply, Job answered all three accusations: He affirmed God's sovereignty in Job 12 and his own innocence in chapter 13. But in chapter 14, he talked about not having any hope.

1) God's Sovereignty – Chapter 12

Contrary to Zophar's assumption, Job keenly understood God's sovereignty. He had followed God, worshiped Him, and obeyed Him. He admitted that he didn't understand the earthly reason for his suffering, but he held on to his faith.

God's sovereignty is over individuals as well as nations. He can enlarge a nation or destroy it, or give it freedom or bondage. All He has to do is take wisdom away from the leaders, and the nation's destruction is sure. Proud people don't like to hear this message. Ever since the city of Enoch in Genesis 4 and the Tower of Babel in chapter 11, mankind has been trying to build and manage nations without God; and the end has always been failure and judgment. America is right on that track.

2) Job's Innocence – Chapter 13

In chapter 13, Job affirmed his integrity and his blameless position before God. In fact, he must have wished that he had something to confess, if that would have meant that God would hear his voice and restore him. Yet he still maintained his innocence.

A couple of things I wanted to point out before we go to chapter 14:

Job 13:7 Will you speak wickedly for God, And talk deceitfully for Him?

Just about all of you receive emails from your Christian families and friends that contain forwarded messages that demand you should forward as well and not to break the chains. I am not against those forwarding emails, but before you forward them, please verify the truth of the contents.

www.snopes.com or www.truthorfiction.com

If you don't check and just forward them to someone else, you are being a part of internet gossips or deceptions. God doesn't need you to speak wickedly or talk deceitfully for Him, understand?

Job 13:15a Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.

Job did not have a "commercial faith" that would make bargains with God or sell his faith to the highest bidder – God or Satan. He had a "confident" faith in God. That doesn't sound like a man looking for an easy way out of difficulties. Job did not understand the Lord's reasons, but he continued to have confidence in God's goodness. That is faith! That's what we need.

3) Job's Hopelessness – Chapter 14

Throughout chapter 14, Job used several images to illustrate the hopeless condition of man in this world. Though there are several mentions of resurrection in the OT, the early believers like Job did not have assurance of the life after death. But those who are born-again have that assurance of the life after death in heaven with Jesus. What a day will it be!

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

The invitation was given to all in mankind. But the invitation itself will not take anyone who rejects Christ as one's Savior and Lord to heaven, rather the acceptance of the invitation will seal the deal. Because God the Father does not force everyone to heaven, but by their own free will.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) The Lord uses those who already have experienced difficult situations to minister to others who are in the same situations. Be available.
- 2) God's love does not keep us from trials but sees us through them. Be strong.
- 3) When we are at an end of ourselves, that is the beginning of God. Be ready.