

BLESSED COMFORT

© 2000 Mark Beard

Text: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

■ Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean Chippie's cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said "hello" when "ssssopp!" Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie -- still alive, but stunned.

Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air.

Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who'd initially written about the event contacted Chippie's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore -- he just sits and stares."

It's hard not to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over . . . That's enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart.

Max Lucado, *In the Eye of the Storm*, Word Publishing, 1991, p. 11.

Having the song taken out of our hearts because of a trial can leave us feeling—well—let's just say, less than spiritual. Certainly it does not leave us feeling like reaching out to others in ministry. But actually, it is during or after those times that we are most able to minister to those around us who are hurting, struggling or in need of a compassionate listener.

The focus of this passage is not on suffering, as some might think, but rather it is on comfort. ■ "One of the key words in this letter is *comfort* or *encouragement*. The Greek word means "called to one's side to help." The verb is used eighteen times in this letter, and the noun eleven times. In spite of all the trials he experienced, Paul was able (by the grace of God) to write a letter saturated with encouragement." (Wiersbe) He starts his encouragement by pointing us to God.

I. BLESSED BE THE COMFORTER (v.3).

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort...”NIV

A. He is the Father of mercies or compassion (v.3).

Literally, He is like a parent who has compassion on His child.

B. He is the God of ALL comfort (v.3).

■ “What was Paul’s secret of victory when he was experiencing pressures and trials? His secret was *God*. When you find yourself discouraged and ready to quit, get your attention off of yourself and focus it on God.” (Wiersbe)

■ Joni Eareckson Tada, who was paralyzed from the neck down while still a teenager, wrote, “You don't have to be alone in your hurt! Comfort is yours. Joy is an option. And it's all been made possible by your Savior. He went without comfort so you might have it. He postponed joy so you might share in it. He willingly chose isolation so you might never be alone in your hurt and sorrow.

-- Joni Eareckson Tada, *Christian Reader*, Vol. 32, no. 2.

II. BLESSED BE THE COMFORTED (v.4a & c, 5-6).

A. We are comforted in all our trials (v. 4 a&c).

Sometimes our comfort comes in knowing that God is at work in our lives.

■ Oswald Chambers writes, “A saint's life is in the hands of God as a bow and arrow in the hands of an archer. God is aiming at something the saint cannot see; He stretches and strains, and every now and again the saint says, "I cannot stand any more." But God does not

heed; He goes on stretching until His purpose is in sight, then He lets fly.” -- Oswald Chambers in *The Love of God. Christianity Today*, Vol. 33, no. 12.

B. The more we are tried the more we are comforted.

C. Our affliction actually benefits others.

At least, our suffering is supposed to benefit others. The trials that we have been through enable us to testify of the goodness and provision of God from an experiential point of view. We can empathize with others.

■ Jess Lair defined Empathy as, “Your pain in my heart.”

■ Someone has said, “God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.”

John Henry Jowett (1817-1893) - Edythe Draper, *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992). Entries 1501-1503.

III. BLESSED BE THOSE WHO GIVE COMFORT (v.4b & 7).

A. We are comforted for more than one purpose (v.4b).

Again, the comfort we receive from the Lord should never stop with us. If anything we are to be vessels through which the mercies and comfort of God flow to others. It is the same principle of “blessed to be a blessing.” We are comforted to be comforters.

B. Our trials make us suitable for offering comfort to others.

Someone listed five important doors that problems open for us.

1. Problems often provide us with greater opportunities
2. Problems can promote our spiritual maturity (Ps 105:16ff)
3. Problems prove our integrity (1 Pt 3:15)
4. Problems produce a sense of dependence
5. Problems prepare our hearts for ministry (more empathetic)

CONCLUSION

■ Six young men were slated to compete against one another in Seattle, Washington. The event was the hundred-yard dash. The men lined up, waited for the starting gun, and took off in a sprint. About halfway down the track the man in front stumbled and fell, skinning his hands and knees. The other five men stopped and helped him up. After they brushed him off and were sure that he was unhurt, they decided to finish the race together, holding hands. None of the judges could tell who won the blue ribbon; none of them could see through their tears. No one in the stands that day would ever forget this demonstration of compassion. As the race ended the crowd stood and cheered for ten minutes. These young men were competing in the Special Olympics, and they showed that they cared more for a fallen friend than for winning a race.

--Stories for Preachers and Teachers

There is more to living for Christ than just seeing that we finish the race and make it to heaven. If we fail to stop along the way and help someone who has fallen—like we too have done—then we have completely misunderstood the call to be Christ' disciples.

Alternate ending

■ Pat Krantz lost her 9-week-old baby, Michael, in 1975 during open-heart surgery. Well-meaning friends and family tried to comfort her: "You're so young [22 at the time]; you can have another baby" or "You have one healthy child already; you should be thankful." Yes, Pat was thankful for her healthy child, but also devastated by her baby's death.

For two years, she floundered, trying to understand the "craziness of grief." Her mother, who had lost three children, offered comfort. But a

contact outside the family helped, too. Pat met Cheryl, another grieving mother, at the Mayo Clinic, where Michael's operation had taken place. Cheryl's faith and her background as a nurse helped Pat to open up through a steady stream of letters.

That journey through heartache led Pat to form a "Bereaved Parents Support Group" in Madison, Wisconsin. At first, the gathering of parents twice a month was small. But word spread. Over a 10-year period, Pat has reached more than 900 local families. This ministry, which adds 60 to 75 new families each year, has accelerated her spiritual growth, she says.

She also grew in other ways. With input from professionals and parents, Pat wrote a booklet covering concerns such as autopsies, grief, marriage, and subsequent children. Today that material is used by healthcare professionals in all 50 states and across the world.

In 1982, the unthinkable happened again to Pat Krantz and her husband, Joe. Their son, Matthew, was stillborn midway through the pregnancy.

"Everything I did right turned out wrong," Pat says. "I took great care of myself—I don't smoke or drink, and I had the best doctor. But it still happened."

Pat admits this loss was worse than the first one in some ways. "I ranted at God, wanting to know what I did to deserve this pain again. But God listened and eventually gave me peace." A peace, she says, to be content without all the answers.

During the Christmas season five years ago, Pat initiated an annual memorial service for her group of bereaved parents. "The holidays are so geared toward children, it is especially difficult for these parents," Pat, herself a mother of five living children, explains.

The first year, her group decorated a Christmas tree with lace ribbons, a remembrance of each child. A father volunteered to write a song. Pat describes the time as sacred. "If you could measure success by tears, it was a huge success."

-- *Christian Reader*, "Ordinary Heroes."

