

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRU the BIBLE

For Those Who Grieve



DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE

Ecclesiastes 3 illustrates the circles of life, describing different seasons—a time to cry, a time to laugh, a time to grieve, a time to dance. Today, I want to talk to those who are grieving. Perhaps you've lost someone dear. Perhaps a life circumstance has changed, either through a job or a move or a family upheaval. You feel a big gaping hole in your life, and you need something to fill it in.

May I suggest to you that this hole be filled with comfort from “the God of all mercies”?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. –2 Corinthians 1:3

Did you know that about God? He is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. When you are convinced of the truth of God's Word, you can live it out with enthusiasm. Believe it today.

The early churches of the first century benefitted from this confidence. When they hit hard times, they were sure of God's Word. They rested on it at all times. Did you know that when Paul writes this letter to the church that meets in Corinth, he is also

addressing the church in your neighborhood, which is also God's church? We are *God's* church, the body of believers the Lord Jesus Christ purchased with His blood. The church in Corinth was like every other. When the gospel came to them, the scales fell from their eyes and the light broke on their darkened souls. They turned from their sins to the living Christ and went all over witnessing for Christ as His body. And this pleased the Lord.


To equip the Corinthian Christians for hard times, Paul now teaches them about God Himself. His lessons are rich and beautiful; take them to heart. Don't forget about God's mercies; *He is the Father of mercies*, he reminds us. God is the Father; that's His position in the Trinity. He loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son. Begotten means Jesus occupies a totally unique position in the Trinity. He is the eternal Son, and God is the everlasting Father. If you have a Father and a Son like that, then there never was a time when He had a beginning. Both the Father and the Son are eternal.

LOVE, MERCY, AND GRACE

Now Paul calls God “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” I want to stop here and spend a little time on three words: love, mercy, grace.

So much is being said today about love. It is sloppy theology to say God saves us by His love. Now it is true that God loves us. Oh, how He loves us! We just don’t know how much. It would break our hearts if we could grasp just how much God loves us. But God does not save us by His love. The Scriptures teach that we are saved by God’s grace.

Now what is grace? We call it unmerited favor, which means that God saves us on a different basis than merit. God loves us, but He does not save us by His love. He saves us by His grace. Why? Because He is also the God of all mercies—the Father of mercies. As “the Father of mercies,” God provided a Savior for us. We couldn’t be saved any other way. Anything that we have today is a mercy from God. He is the Father of mercy. In fact, He is said to be rich in grace and rich in mercy.



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Do you need mercy today? If you need cash, you go to a bank to get it. If you need mercy, go to the One who is the Father of mercies. If you need help, go to Him. After all, anything and everything you have today is a mercy from God. We don't deserve any of it, but He gives it all to us freely.

Our Father is also “the God of all comfort”—comfort means “to come alongside of.” The same word describes the Holy Spirit, the *paraclete*, the One called to our side. When the Lord Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, He said He would send a Helper. He will abide with you forever ... I promise to come to you. The Spirit of God is called to help you, to strengthen you, to relieve the loneliness, ease the grief, and calm your fears. He is your advocate in time of fear and trouble. He will be with you in the desperate hour of life. (See Psalm 30:10.) When our soul cries out for the Comforter, He comes alongside us. When we know for sure that God is with us in all life's troubles, we can live by faith and not by fear.

This is what we need when we're grieving. This true story illustrates it better than I can:

A young husband and his little girl were grieving the sudden death of his wife. After the service, friends gathered around them and urged them to go with them to their homes for a few days. He refused, saying he'd have to face the reality of life without his wife, and he would begin at once. He took the little girl back to the lonely house where everything in it reminded him of his wife. The little girl, sensing something was wrong but not old enough to appreciate the situation, kept calling for her mother. The child didn't make it easier by constantly reminding the father that he was not feeding her or putting her to bed like her mother did. When he finally tucked the little one in bed and he was in bed thinking the little girl was asleep, he cried aloud in his anguish of soul, “O God, it is dark down here.”

His little girl wasn't asleep and began to cry, "Daddy, it is dark over here, too." The father climbed in her bed beside her and tried to comfort her sobbing. Then she reached over in the darkness and felt for his face. "Daddy," she said, "I can go to sleep if your face is toward me." Being assured that he was watching her, she soon dropped off into peaceful rest.

In the dark, the anxious father thought over this incident and the simple faith of his little girl's trust in him as a father. Then he cried out again, "O God, it is dark down here, but I can bear it if I know Your face is toward me." Soon he too was sound asleep. The Holy Spirit in a time of darkness and emergency confirms the sad spirit of the child of God. He assures him that he is a son of God and that the Heavenly Father is watching, loving him as he grieves.

REAL AND FAKE COMFORT

Everything we have is a mercy. Not only is He the Father of mercies, He is also the God of all comfort. You can test that in the crucible of life. Suffering is the acid test. He will comfort you in the hospital. He will comfort you at the funeral home when you have a loved one there. He can comfort you in any place at any time. He is the God of all comfort.

There is an authentic comfort, and there is a counterfeit one. I don't like to hear people sigh and say, "God has permitted this to come to me and I accept it," when they don't accept it but rebel against it. Be honest with God. Tell Him how you feel. Tell Him you don't like what is happening to you. He knows all about it anyway. He wants you to talk frankly with Him. Comfort can be genuine or fake.

There is a popular notion that comfort is some sort of saccharine sweet sentimentality with a note of weakness. I can remember that when I was a little fellow I was always falling down. When I'd skin my knee, my mother would kiss it and say, "It's all better now." She kidded me into stop crying. Now as a sentiment, it's

sweet and lovely. But there came a day when I went away to school and I got discouraged by the hardships of life. Then she sat me down with some pretty strong medicine. She said, “Now you must be a man, my son.” That challenge was also a comfort.

God allows us to have trouble that we might comfort others, also—“that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble” (2 Corinthians 1:4). It is amazing how my experience with cancer has been a comfort to others. God permits us to have trouble so we may be able to comfort others.

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PAUL'S EXPERIENCE, LIKE OURS

Paul knows all about trouble and God's comfort through it all. He told the Corinthians that when he first was in Asia, the times were so intense he didn't think they were going to make it. *"As it turned out,"* he said, *"it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally."* (See 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.)

Paul's experience models that God sometimes allows us to have trouble or to be sick. Paul said he felt like he had a death sentence on him (this could have been when he was sick or when he was attacked by a mob in Ephesus). But God delivered them. And He'll do it again, rescuing us as many times as we need rescuing, he added.

God does permit Christians to suffer. He has a good reason, a very wonderful purpose in it all, though we may not see it at the time. He works it all out for the good of those He loves. He intends for it to serve a good purpose so we can comfort someone else. Regardless of what you're going through, God gives it to you so

you can share the blessing with others. Your health, your wealth, your talent or a gift—He wants you to share it with others. Each issues from the mercy of God. So does suffering. You might not have thought it was goodness and mercy to have a couple of dogs yapping at you to keep you from going to the left or to the right, but it is God’s mercy that keeps us on His path, and He uses trial and difficulty for that purpose.

Paul walks softly through these truths, but he says with great assurance, “*God has delivered me from death. And right now, He is delivering me.*” And then, without any boasting, he says, “*We trust that He will still deliver us*” (2 Corinthians 1:10). Paul didn’t know that God would, but he believed He would. On that basis, he told them how glad he was that God gave him today and the opportunity to give out the gospel. “*Keep praying for me,*” he asked.

Life on life—that’s how Paul described the work of the ministry. We pray for each other, we help each other in trouble, we learn how to trust God from watching each other go through trouble. Our testimony in life matters. God uses it to show others how to live by faith. We don’t rely on our own wisdom, but we live our lives in “simplicity and godly sincerity” (2 Corinthians 1:12). Suffering, in part, produces this grace. God’s mercy produces qualities in our lives that we are to share.

The gospel itself is a big “yes!” It is a glorious, positive gospel. God has done something for us, and it’s the best news possible. God means well by you. You have a faithful God and a sure Lord Jesus Christ. And not only that, you have the indwelling Holy Spirit. One statement summarizes the total ministry of the Holy Spirit today:


Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. –2 Corinthians 1:21

God establishes you; it is the work of His Spirit. First, He convicts us of sin, of righteousness, and judgment. Then, if when we are convicted, we confess our sin and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, He regenerates us. And now saved, we become His abiding place. He indwells us, is at home in us. He is with us through all of life's sorrows and joys, and He comforts us in our grieving.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets from the TTB.org website. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden table.

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