

LOVE PART II: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN WHICH GOD'S WORK WILL THRIVE

INTRODUCTION

- Welcome, Prayer, and Review
- How suffering helps us minister to others – personal example
- Four elements of a loving relationship



CONCEPTS AND OBJECTIVES

- Concept: God calls us to suffer so that we would be qualified agents of his comfort and compassion.
- Personalized: I need to ask, 'Where has God led me through suffering and what has he taught me through it?'
- Related to Others: I need to look for the sufferers that God has placed in my path. Have I functioned in their lives as God's agent of comfort.

THE REALITY OF SUFFERING

- Most counseling and personal ministry involves suffering. Most people who ask for prayer and need help are in some form of trial. And sometimes, it can get quite messy. "Welcome to the hospital"
- Suffering is a reality in a fallen world (Gen. 3:14-19; Job 5:7; John 16:33; Ecc. 5:15-17; Phil. 1:29)
- Suffering takes many forms (James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 2 Cor. 6:4-10; 11:24-29; Heb. 11:35-38). What are some common trials people face?
- For the believer, all suffering is temporary (Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Rev. 21:3-4)
- Nevertheless, our suffering here on this earth can go deep. It's been said that all of us are either going through a trial, coming out of a trial, or about to enter a trial. Maybe even all three! You probably get a lunchbreak during your shift. And hopefully you get a day off from your regular job. But there's no "time off" where we are completely exempt from trials and can let our guards down. Only in heaven will we enjoy everlasting rest.
- God uses suffering to help us minister to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-11; Eph. 3:13; Phil. 1:12-14)
- Jay Adams: "Counselees will object, 'But you haven't gone through the same problems I have.'" You may point out that Paul doesn't say you must. Paul assumes that the same comfort is to be found for one problem that may be found for another. God's comfort is God's comfort. It is the comfort that is similar—regardless of how problems may differ. This is true because the principles of comfort are the same whatever the problem may be. And the One from whom comfort comes is the same. After all, recognizing the sovereignty of a caring, omnipotent and omniscient Father who is in control of the universe and working all things together for your good (for example) is, in fact, comforting in any and all situations, isn't it?" (*Christian Counselor's Commentary*)

TABLE DISCUSSION

- Choose one trial from the list on the board
- Now go beyond the experience itself, and consider what might be the "entry gates" into the way a person interprets that trial. Remember, we learned on p. 49 that "an entry gate is not the problem or situation itself but the way in which this person is struggling with the problem. (It might be fear, anger, guilt, anxiety, hopelessness, aloneness, envy, discouragement, desires for vengeance, etc.)"
- Counsel will be needed along the way, but right now we're just focusing on building a loving relationship. What are some specific ways we can comfort those who are hurting?

WEEK 6 VIDEO: "BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN WHICH GOD'S WORK WILL THRIVE"

HOMEWORK

- Complete the "Make It Real" Section in Lesson Six.
- Read Lesson Seven Study Guide to prepare for next week's lesson.

WAYS TO COMFORT A FRIEND WHO IS SUFFERING

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There are many reasons God may allow Christians to suffer, but according to 2 Corinthians 1:4, one of the main reasons is so that we in turn “may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.” God is not necessarily disciplining you for some unrepentant sin. Satan is not always responsible for adversity and affliction. In many cases, your trial simply exists to draw you closer to God so you will then be able to comfort others. Trials are a kind of “care-giver boot camp”.

I can personally testify that on many occasions, God has used trials to grow my empathy toward others and my ability to pray for and counsel them. This is one of the benefits of the “gift” of suffering (Phil. 1:29).

This week, I began to jot down ways God can use us to comfort others, and before long, I had come up with over 80 ways. These can be broken down into three major categories – physical comfort, emotional comfort, and spiritual comfort. What would you add to the list? Think of a friend who is currently suffering. How might you comfort them today?

IDEAS FOR PHYSICAL COMFORT

- Mail or deliver a hand-written note
- Use the power of touch
- Bring flowers or a small gift
- Open a window or take them on a walk
- Bring a child along to visit
- Sing or play music for them
- Show a few pictures of family and share stories
- Bring a gentle animal along, such as a comfort dog
- Treat them with dignity and respect
- Smile
- Give them eye contact
- Laugh together
- Cry together
- Involve all five senses – taste, touch, smell, sound, sight
- Put yourself in their shoes and imagine what it might be like
- Make yourself look nice for them
- Send a care package with snacks, notes, and a small gift
- Take care of some practical need
- Look for both natural and medical ways to manage the pain
- Help them obtain the best medical care possible, while fixing their hope on God
- Get to know their likes and dislikes
- Surprise them with some random act of kindness or pleasure
- Look for simple ways to make them comfortable and preserve their dignity

IDEAS FOR EMOTIONAL COMFORT

- Ask how they're doing
- Send a text message
- Call them and let them know you're thinking about them
- Track and recognize a significant date on the calendar (e.g. birthday, anniversary)
- Read old letters or journal entries together
- Spend unhurried time together
- Love them “blindly” and unconditionally
- Ask kids to make a craft for them
- Read to them
- Talk about their hobbies and interests
- Play a game or do a craft or puzzle together
- Ask them for advice
- Ask them for help
- Discuss end-of-life decisions

- Thank them for the impact they've had on your life
- Get others to sign a card or note
- Be extra patient with them when they're irritable
- Set up clear boundaries – for their sake and yours as a care-giver
- Celebrate small victories
- Let them know you miss them
- Help them put off thoughts of guilt, regret, self-pity, and blame
- Beware of trying to “fix” them or give them unsolicited advice

IDEAS FOR SPIRITUAL COMFORT

- Pray with them
- Ask how you can pray for them
- Ask what God has been teaching them through this trial
- Pray for them, then let them you're praying for them
- Remind them of the gospel, and how Christ came to put an end to sin and all its consequences
- Talk about your heavenly home
- Talk about the rapture
- Talk about the resurrection and glorified body
- Share something God has been teaching you from his word
- Recount God's faithfulness in the past
- Remind them Jesus is our high priest who can perfectly sympathize (Heb. 4:15)
- Remind them God still has a purpose for them here
- Talk about God's wisdom, love, and power
- Encourage them where you see God at work and evidence of grace in their life
- Treat them as you would treat Christ (Matt. 25:37-40)
- Ask the elders to serve communion to them and pray for them
- Provide videos that give mental and spiritual interest
- Encourage them to stay involved at church
- Read God's promises to them
- Talk about and pray for those who need the gospel
- Remind them no trial is wasted, but is only given when necessary (1 Peter 1:6)
- Ask forgiveness when you have done wrong, been insensitive, or let them down
- Pray the Spirit will bear the fruit of love, joy peace, patience, and self-control
- When appropriate, help them examine themselves and confess any sin
- Meditate on your identity and union in Christ (Galatians 2:20)
- Share missionary stories and Christian biographies
- Share counseling materials that can help bring comfort, guidance, and victory
- Help them recount God's many gifts and blessings
- Thank God that he has not treated us as we deserve. “Anything better than hell is a blessing.”
- Talk about and pray for the next generation
- Explain God's all-sufficient grace (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)
- Talk about Jesus, the friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24)
- Help them forgive anyone who has done them wrong, stomping out any root of bitterness (Heb. 12:15)
- Talk about God's perfect, final justice (Romans 12:19)
- Brainstorm ways they can love their enemy (Romans 12:20-21; Matt. 5:38-48)
- Point them to the means of grace (Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, etc.)
- Help them develop a theology of suffering

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).