

Getting Real Comfort from God

A Godly Response to a Pandemic – Part 13

Series Overview

Proverbs 27:1 says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” The COVID-19 outbreak certainly shows that this is true. When 2020 began, we had no idea we would face this new kind of challenge. Though it caught us by surprise, we know God was not surprised. He knew this would happen and will guide us through this challenging time.

This study guide is the second in a new Faith Baptist Bible study series called “A Godly Response to a Pandemic.” Each lesson will provide biblical teaching that enables us to think, feel, and live in a Christlike way throughout this pandemic experience.

Together, we’ll tackle topics like fear, anxiety, and loneliness. We’ll also examine our behavior as a church. Most importantly, we’ll learn about our loving, sovereign God who is all-knowing, almighty, always present, and trustworthy in every way.

Series Guidelines

This series will continue throughout our period of “social isolation” in New York City. To participate, please take the following approach.

1. A new study guide will be provided each Saturday at Shepherd Thoughts. You can follow the guide online or download and print it as a PDF.
2. Use each guide for an in-home Bible study from 9:30-10:30 a.m. on Sunday.
3. If you live with a Christian family, you can study together. If not, try studying together with another believer from Faith by phone or internet using a service like Facebook Video Chat, Google Hangouts, Skype, or Zoom.
4. For each study: (1) begin with prayer, (2) read the Scripture passage, (3) work through the study guide, then (4) end with prayer.
5. Then tune in early to the Faith Baptist Livestream on Facebook at 10:45 a.m. to post questions, feedback, and comments about the lesson. Pastor Overmiller will respond to your feedback before the 11:00 a.m. service begins.
6. You can also leave comments on the blogsite at the end of the study guide page and Pastor Overmiller will respond by sometime Sunday.
7. As a bonus, memorize a verse or more from the passage and think about it throughout the week ahead.

Lesson Introduction

If we're asked to describe the way we feel right now, a lot of words may flood our minds, but "comfort" is probably not one of them. Anger, impatience, frustration. Pain, anxiety, stress. Weakness, sadness, fear. Confusion, concern, nervousness. Words like these may be more accurate in describing the way we're tempted to feel right now. Would you agree?

Pandemic and social injustice aside, there's no way to eradicate hardships from our lives. Afflictions and trials, questions and mistreatment, sickness and sorrow will always come our way, in one form or another. So, as followers of Christ, we need to embrace the right approach and perspective.

We shouldn't let difficult experiences scare us, nor should we allow ourselves to become depressed and overwhelmed when they occur. Instead, we should learn to find our true solace in God who provides real and lasting comfort through Jesus Christ. What's more, we should also learn to comfort one another, pointing our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ to the comfort that God alone provides.

In case we haven't figured this out yet, it's time to accept the fact that no matter how hard they try, our politicians are unable to give us the comfort we need. Social policies and programs cannot do it, and no amount of money and medicine can do it either. So, together, let's take a close look at the comfort that God provides, as Paul explains in 2 Cor 1:3-4. Will you join me?

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, 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.

Study Guide

Consider the Background

These words appear in the opening of a letter Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth. One of the reasons he wrote this letter was to give an accurate view of suffering in the Christian life. Believers in the church were concerned that Paul's regular experience of suffering was humiliating for all of them. They were becoming ashamed and embarrassed to be associated with him and with the message of Christ's cross which he had taught them.

We face similar struggles today. We feel pressure from some who claim to follow Christ, yet they also insist that to follow him ensures physical and financial prosperity, honor and prestige – not suffering and hardship. We also face pressure from the unsaved culture who views our suffering and humility as a weak, shameful, and unattractive way to live,

preferring an active approach that seeks to resolve all of our problems in a forceful way, taking charge of our lives for our own personal advantage and refusing to be marginalized.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul pushes back against this worldly mindset by showing that the way of suffering is the way of true honor before God, so we should embrace it for God's glory. And in doing so, we will be able to receive true comfort from God as well.

Examine the Scripture

- By announcing God as the “God and Father” of “our Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul adapted a typical Jewish greeting. Such a greeting would normally speak of God as the Father of the Jewish nation, but here he refers to Christ rather than Israel. By doing this, he narrows the focus to Christ as the Messiah born from Israel but who unites us all together as one people, whether Jew or Gentile. All ethnicities find common ground before God through Christ.
- By calling Christ “Lord,” Paul highlights our obligation to submit to Christ and obey him completely, even when following him leads to suffering.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- How do cultural, social expectations clash with your new life of following Christ?
- Why is it vital to see God as the Father of believers from all nations, not just Israel?
- Why is it crucial to submit to Christ as Lord and Master, not just as Savior and Friend?

Examine the Scripture

- *Mercies* refers to feelings and actions that are rooted in compassion and show genuine concern and pity for the suffering and misfortune of others.
- *Comfort* refers to words and actions that provide consolation, encouragement, and reinvigoration in the midst of difficult or excruciating experiences.
- *Tribulation* and *trouble* (the same Greek word) refers to intense and painful experiences of distress and oppression. What kind of distress and oppression did Paul experience (read 2 Cor 11:23-29)?

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- What kind of distress and oppression have you experienced in your life?
- How much of your suffering was somehow connected to following Christ?
- Notice the word *in* (“*in* our tribulation” and “*in* trouble”). How does this word help us identify the kind of relief God provides for us when we suffer? (Hint: the natural, worldly view of relief looks for comfort *outside* of suffering, unlike the Christian view.)
- How does God feel and respond when his people are distressed and oppressed?
- Does this mean that he will always remove us from our suffering?

Examine the Scripture

- How many times does Paul mention *comfort* in these two verses?
- How many times does he mention *all* (or *any*, which is the same word) in these two verses?
- What does this dense repetition tell you about the truth that Paul is emphasizing?
- According to these verses, where did Paul find comfort when he suffered?
- According to these verses, how did Paul treat other believers who suffered?

Examine the Scripture

- Do you demand that God removes you from your suffering, or do you depend on him in the midst of your suffering instead?
- What do you know about God and Jesus Christ that can give you true comfort and peace in the midst of your suffering?
- What other believer(s) has God used to give you comfort in the midst of suffering? Did you appreciate what they told you or not? (We often want someone to show us *why* we are suffering or how to *get out of* our suffering, instead of someone to show us how to find comfort *in* our suffering.)
- How can you be a source of godly comfort to other distressed believers in the week ahead?

Conclusion

As believers, we need to accept suffering as a crucial part of the Christian experience. Though we should not pray for distress and oppression, we should not fight against it either. When it comes, we should turn to God for true compassion and understanding, submitting to Jesus Christ as our Lord, who also suffered for us in our place. Furthermore, we should encourage other believers to do the same, even though it is an unpopular approach both in the world and the church today.

Share Your Feedback

Now that you've finished this study, don't forget to tune in early to the Faith Baptist Livestream on Facebook at 10:45 a.m. to post questions, feedback, and comments about the lesson! Pastor Overmiller will respond to your feedback before the 11:00 a.m. service begins.