

A Life of Ease

Many of us go through life hoping that eventually we will enjoy a life of ease, have it made, and be able to sit back and relax in comfort. Television and radio ads repeatedly tout the virtues of some product or service which will not only make our lives easier, but fulfilled (think of car commercials or mortgage refinancing offers). There's even a website called, "The Comfortable Life," dedicated to helping people achieve more comfort in day-to-day living (and no doubt making the website owner some money along the way).

Easy living, however, is not the type of comfort we should desire. Rather, and in stark contrast to modern advertising, the Bible tells us that we will experience hardships along with God's comforting grace. In this week's passages, we will see how God calls us to receive his comfort during hardships and, in turn, deliver his comfort to others.

Monday – Comfort

"Soar back through all your own experiences. Think of how the Lord has led you in the wilderness and has fed and clothed you every day. How God has borne with your ill manners, and put up with all your murmurings and all your longings after the 'sensual pleasures of Egypt!' Think of how the Lord's grace has been sufficient for you in all your troubles." Charles Spurgeon

1. Please read 1 Corinthians 1:2-4. What do the words grace, peace, compassion and comfort mean in this passage? Have you ever received those from God? When? How?
2. According to verse 4, what is God's purpose in comforting us?
3. What do you think of when you read the word "trouble" in verse 4? Do you know anyone in trouble who can use comfort, the kind you can pass on from the comfort God has given you?

Making it Personal: Spend time considering who you may know that can use God's comfort. Pray, asking God to show you how to pass on his comfort to them.

Tuesday – Spread it Around

"Compassion costs. It is easy enough to argue, criticize and condemn, but redemption is costly, and comfort draws from the deep. Brains can argue, but it takes heart to comfort." Samuel Chadwick

1. Please read 1 Corinthians 1:5-7. Have you ever suffered for your faith in Jesus? What promise accompanies our suffering (see verse 5)?
2. Verses 6 and 7 suggest that suffering should be felt throughout the Body of Christ (all believers), just as comfort should be shared. How can you share in the suffering of fellow believers? How can you spread the comfort of Christ around?
3. According to the end of verse 6, what is the fruit of Christ-centered suffering and comfort? We all need to grow in our ability to endure hardships. Do you desire to grow in endurance? Are you willing to go through trials in order to grow in that area?

Wednesday – Life Gets Deadly

"A Christian is someone who shares the sufferings of God in the world." Dietrich Bonhoeffer

1. Please read 1 Corinthians 1:8-9, along with 2 Corinthians 11:24-30. What types of hardships had Paul and his companions endured?
2. Paul, who just wrote of patient endurance in verse 6, makes a startling admission in verse 8. What do you think he meant by saying the hardships were more than they could endure?
3. Now look at verse 9. What was God's purpose in allowing Paul and his friends to endure such hardships?

Digging Deeper: Read Acts 9:1-19. This passage recounts Paul's (then called Saul) conversation with someone who had suffered the cruel death of crucifixion, carried out by the Roman army. How did that experience help Paul understand the power of God to help those facing deadly peril?

Thursday – Life Gets Easier

"We are always in the forge, or on the anvil; by trials God is shaping us for higher things." Henry Ward Beecher

1. Please read 1 Corinthians 1:10-11. What had been Paul's experience when faced with "deadly peril?"

Text insight: The word "peril" comes from a root word that means "try." The same root gives us the words "experiment" and "experience." We can think of a perilous experience as an experiment that may try us to the point beyond our ability to endure. This will lead us to Christ, who can bring us through such trials.

2. How does Paul say we can help bring God's comfort to those facing hardships?
3. According to verse 11, what does Paul hope will result from answered prayer?

Friday – Comfort

"I would rather feel compassion than know the meaning of it." Thomas Aquinas

1. Please read Isaiah 40, verses 1, 11 and 29-31. How does God provide the comfort announced in verse 1? Do you think this comfort is only in a spiritual sense, or is it physical as well?
2. Look at Isaiah 57:15. What strikes you about God choosing to comfort "the lowly?" How did our exalted God bring ultimate comfort through Jesus Christ?
3. Now read Isaiah 49:13 and 53:9. How are we to respond to God's comforting work? Have you ever turned to God in joyful thanks for what he has done for you?

For the Weekend: Compare Isaiah 65:19 with Revelation 21:4. How is Isaiah's comforting prophecy ultimately to be fulfilled? Now read 1 Corinthians 1:2-11 again. How can you be part of bringing God's comfort to those around you who are facing hardship today?