

# Called to Comfort



## *Personal Ministry in Difficult Times*

*by Don Schmidt*

*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 (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Or as the New Living Translation says, “When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given to us.”*

### *Difficult Realities*

Many of us have been there. Life has dealt us one of its difficult blows. We are hurting, at times confused and discouraged, possibly even angry with God or others. When into the midst of our grief enters a fellow believer, well-intentioned, but with words that only serve to further burden our already heavy hearts.

Or maybe we have been with someone who was having to face certain painful realities within their own lives. We wanted to encourage them, but the fear of not knowing what to say, of speaking insensitive words, or simply saying the wrong thing inhibited us when God wanted to use our ministry in their life.

### *Difficult Words*

Psalm 137 gives us the account of a very painful incident in the history of the Hebrew nation. Once again, God had responded to their sin and idolatry by allowing a foreign nation to overrun their borders and bring judgment upon their land. This time it was the Babylonians who overcame the armies of Israel and led most of the people into a captivity that lasted for 70 years.

In this case God's judgment struck at the very heart of their national identity—He removed them from Zion, the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey, their land of rest. For a people who considered themselves to be God's chosen nation and who viewed the land as their entitlement, the shame of defeat was very pronounced.

To heighten the pain and loss which they felt at that time, their captors mocked them by saying, “Sing to us one of the songs of Zion!” These were the songs which they sang as a nation to celebrate their national identity and to commemorate the Lord's deliverance in difficult times.

The captors' taunts had the effect of rubbing salt in an open wound. We are told that the Hebrews sat down by the rivers of Babylon and wept. They hung their harps upon the willows asking, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" It is a picture of those who have suffered one of life's severest blows and, in the midst of their heartache, had others to trivialize their grief and despair.

#### *In Times Like These*

Many of us have been by our own rivers of Babylon. And all of us know others who have passed through these dark valleys. It is during times like these, that we need to be reminded of God's power to save and the comfort of His presence. But like the Hebrews, it will only increase our ache to have someone suggest that a believer can live untouched by the pain of our current lives.

Dr. Coffin, a pastor who lost his teenage son in a tragic automobile accident, stated his experience this way, "In other words, in my intense grief, I felt that some . . . were using the comforting words of Scripture for self-protection, to pretty up a situation whose

bleakness they simply couldn't face."

This is different from what Peter writes in his letter to persecuted believers. After reminding the believers that their ultimate salvation was "ready to be revealed in the last time," he went on to say that it is "in this (in the hope of a future salvation) you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials" (1 Peter 1:6).

#### *Understanding Eden*

The next time you are with someone who is facing their loss and pain, it is important to remember that all of us are out of "the Promised Land." When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in the Garden of Eden, a land of paradise where their souls were nourished and they communed daily with their Creator. It was specifically for this sort of environment, a perfect paradise, that God created us.

When man sinned however, God barred him from that garden, and every person since Adam has experienced the painful realities of a life lived outside of Paradise. This life as we know it isn't what God

intended us for. And along with the rest of creation, our souls groan within us awaiting the final redemption when all will be restored to its original glory.

At that time every tear will be wiped away. At that time every wrong will be avenged. At that time every loss will be restored. But while we await the return of our Lord when He will carry us to glory, we must all face honestly the struggles of a life that is so much less than what God intended for us.

By understanding that even our Savior was "a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief," we will come to recognize that grief is a reality which all must accept in this life. Understanding this will help us to realize that our role as an encourager isn't to hurry others through their pain in an attempt to find relief. Rather, we have been called to walk with them into their pain in search of our Father who will be to us the God of all comfort.

#### *Meaningful Comfort*

None of us enjoys life's difficult realities, whether our own or those experienced by a friend. However, difficult times often

reveal a pathway that leads us to a deeper awareness of God and His presence in our lives.

Along this path we will begin to experience our Lord as the God of all comfort. We will understand that He never intended for us to live above pain, no matter how great our faith. We will recognize that it is difficult, even at times impossible, to sing songs of joy while captive in a foreign land. And by weeping with those who weep, we will enter their experience of Babylon and allow our presence and faith in God to provide for them the strength and encouragement that each of us needs in those times.

© 2000 Donald Schmidt, M.A.B.C., is a licensed professional counselor and Assistant Pastor for Family Care at Calvary Baptist Church.