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Sermon Notes

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Finding Comfort in God Himself

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

BFL Class: “Finding Comfort in the Chaos”

December 1: Finding Comfort in God Himself	Andy Davis
December 8: Finding Comfort in God’s Word	Kevin Schaub
December 15: Finding Comfort in Your Identity in Christ	Richard Mounce
December 22: Finding Comfort in the Incarnation	Andy Winn
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January 5: Finding Comfort in the Church	Andy Winn
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Basic concept: our theology must affect our mindset, our emotions, and our actions. This is especially true in times of trial and suffering.

We must not simply absorb theological information without allowing it to transform who we are.

It is easy for us to seek comfort as worldly people do... from “creature comforts” (material things and circumstances that bring pleasure to our five senses) and fail to apply our years of bible intake to our souls. We have to learn to translate our doctrinal knowledge into the right heart state and righteous actions that each circumstance in life calls for.

J.I. Packer’s classic introduction to theology, *Knowing God*, had an early chapter entitled, “The People who Know their God.” It was based on a statement in the

Book of Daniel speaking of the future of the world, during a time of crisis unlike the world had ever seen... the time when the “abomination of desolation” is erected, the Antichrist is ruling, and people have to run for their lives.

Here is the verse:

Daniel 11:32 He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.

Packer used that phrase – “the people who know their God” – to establish the power of a deep personal knowledge of God on the lives of those who put that knowledge to proper use:

1. Those who know God have great energy for God.
2. Those who know God have great thoughts of God.
3. Those who know God show great boldness for God.
4. Those who know God have great contentment in God.

In this BFL class, we want to take the rich theological knowledge we have been blessed with, and translate it to proper heart states in every situation, and then to proper actions that will glorify God. This is especially important when we find ourselves immersed in CHAOS... the disorder of this present evil age.

My task is to zero in on “Finding comfort in God Himself.”

The richness of God and God alone... sufficient for every condition of the human soul. The infinite majesty of this God, the God described in these words from the Westminster Confession of Faith:

- 1. There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all***

things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just, and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

2. *God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.*

This God is sufficient in every circumstance for us... enough and infinitely more, to bring us comfort in astonishing levels of chaos. This infinite God will occupy our minds for all eternity. He is our heavenly treasure, and none of us will be disappointed.

Key text on comfort in suffering: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

2 Corinthians 1:3-11 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. ⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

⁸ *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the*

dead. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, ¹¹ as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

I. The Source of Comfort: God

2 Corinthians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort

A. Praise While Suffering a Strange Reaction for Normal People

1. Extreme trials... tendency to complain, to pull inward, to look inward
2. Naturally to upbraid adverse circumstances... to murmur, to question, to resist and rebel

B. Regenerate people learn to look upward and praise God no matter what the circumstances

Job 1:20-21 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

Paul has learned the secret of being content in any and every circumstance...
(Philippians 4:12)

One aspect of that secret is PRAISING GOD

Acts 16:23-25 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

C. Paul Focuses Totally on God for Comfort

"God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"

Paul's heart is warmed to bless God, His heart is full of worship to God, because of the taste of sweet mercy that he has received and experienced

Richard Sibbes: "It is the disposition of God's children, after they have tasted the sweet mercy and comfort and love of God, to break forth into the praising of God and to thanksgiving."

"It is as natural for the new creature to do so as for the birds to sing in the spring. When the sun has warmed the poor creature, it shows its thankfulness by singing. And that little blood and spirits it has being warmed after winter, it is natural for those little creatures so to do. It is as natural for the new creature, when it feels the Sun of righteousness warming the soul, when it tastes the mercy of God in Christ, to show itself forth in thankfulness and praise; and it can no more be kept from it, than fire can keep from burning, or water from cooling."

D. God and Father of Christ

1. Eternally Triune... never changes

Note: God does not need our praises, is not lacking anything. He is blessed, whether we bless Him or not, and He is praised, whether we praise Him or not.

Before God created the universe, He existed in Trinity... Father, Son, and Spirit. There was no lack of love, relationship, even praise going from one person of the Trinity to the other. God is eternally blessed in and of Himself.

But we need to praise Him... and it is good as the beginning of our comforts to focus totally on God

2. Forever blessed, the only source of our comfort

1 Timothy 1:11 the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

"Blessed" = simply, happy... happy in himself, happy in his godhead

3. The Ultimate Comfort from God: Sending His Son into the World

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

- 1) We should fill our minds with thoughts of God's eternal nature... Father, Son, Spirit

God never changes... is eternally worthy of our greatest praise and worship

If God was worth praising the last time your circumstances were favorable, He is still worthy now

God is still powerful

- 2) We should meditate on God's priceless gift of **"our Lord Jesus Christ"**

- 3) We ought to bless God for Christ: our mediator, our Great High Priest, our Atonement, our Lord

- 4) We should realize that the foundation of all our comforts from God is His far greater gift of Christ

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

- 5) We should rejoice that God has adopted us to be His own children... so not only is He the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but He is by adoption our Father as well

E. The Father of Mercies; the God of All Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:3 the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort

1. NIV has "compassion"... it goes deeper than that

2. Mercy is God's grace to persons in misery... grace sows the freeness of it, mercy shows the miserable state of the person receiving the blessing

Sibbes: "Always where misery is, either there is present or else possible mercy."

All true comfort comes from God... anything else is shifting sand; but there is no better comfort than God himself... the comfort of knowing him better and feeling him to be close

Isaiah 43:2 *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

Daniel 3:24-25 *Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king." ²⁵ He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."*

II. The Need for Comfort: Suffering

A. The Sufferings of Paul

1. Paul Has Gone Through Severe Trials

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.*

2. Paul expects to go through many more

1 Corinthians 4:9 *For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.*

3. Paul's credentials of suffering... unmatched in church history

2 Corinthians 11:23-27 *I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.*

4. Paul's amazing perspective on suffering

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

B. The Universal Suffering of God's People in this Present Age

1. No one gets through this world unscathed by suffering

John 16:33 [Jesus said] "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

2. We should expect it and be ready for it

1 Peter 4:12-13 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

C. The Types of Christian Suffering

1. Ills common to all human beings

1 Kings 2:1-2 When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. ² "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said.

Romans 5:12 sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned

Disease, pain, accidents, financial troubles, natural disasters, disappointments, losses (of any possession or situation that is pleasant), wars/rumors of wars, separations, change.

2. Trials unique to Christians

The more Christians are boldly and energetically “seeking first his Kingdom and his righteousness,” the more the world will beat on them.

2 Corinthians 1:5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

2 Timothy 3:10-12 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings-- what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...

God is especially zealous to come alongside his children who are suffering persecution for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

2 Timothy 4:16-18 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

BUT... this doesn't mean that he doesn't also walk with his children who are suffering afflictions and sorrows that are common to the human race.

III. The Purpose of Suffering: Maturity and Ministry

A. Spiritual Maturity

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Part of the spiritual maturity is a strong awareness of **CONSTANT DEPENDENCE ON CHRIST!!**

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

This is a strong PURPOSE statement... the reason why God orchestrated the trial in Asia was to teach him the vital lesson of constant reliance on God.

Self-reliance is of the essence of our declaration of independence from God... but it is a deep LIE:

Acts 17:28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'

Romans 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

When everything is going well in our lives, we tend to grow pridefully independent of God.

Deuteronomy 32:15 Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior.

Deuteronomy 8:12-14 When you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

When we are suffering, we flee to him, losing the illusion of self-reliance.

God alone can "raise the dead." And when we are in our graves, all self-reliance will be gone. Christ will raise us from the tomb by his power. The more we are

aware of that, the healthier and more dependent on God we will be now. But we need suffering to achieve that!

B. Spiritual Ministry

2 Corinthians 1:3-6 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. ⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

As we go through specific trials and receive specific forms of comfort from God, we are thus equipped to come alongside others that go through the same sufferings...

Look at the "SO THAT" in verse 4: God **"comforts us in all our troubles, SO THAT we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort that we ourselves have received from God."**

Yet... notice that those who go through suffering and receive comfort are able to help people going through ANY KIND of suffering... not just the specific one they have gone through

And, the comfort we receive from God is always ultimately the same: GOD IS ENOUGH!

Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

Colossians 2:2-3 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

V. Applications

1. Expect suffering... know that it will come... prepare for it... know that you need it in order to be mature
2. Learn how to translate your doctrinal knowledge of God into real comfort in daily life
3. Meditate more on God's attributes; deepen your knowledge of God (see next page)
4. Pray for a ministry of comfort with other Christians who are suffering

Adoration: What God is Like

- 1) Self-existence: *"I AM WHO I AM"* Exodus 3:14
- 2) Immutability: *"I the Lord do not change."* Malachi 3:6
- 3) Absolute Perfection: *"As for God, his way is perfect.."* Psalm 18:30
- 4) Eternity: *"Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."* Psalm 90:2
- 5) Immensity: *"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heavens cannot contain you."* 1 Kings 8:27
- 6) Perfect Unity: *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."* Deuteronomy 6:4;
- 7) Omnipresence: *"'Am I only a God nearby,' declares the Lord, 'and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?' declares the Lord. 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?'"* Jeremiah 23:23-24
- 8) Omniscience: *"Great is the Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."* Psalm 147:5
- 9) Omnipotence: *"I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted."* Job 42:2

- 10) Spirituality: *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.”* John 4:24
- 11) Invisibility: *“No man has seen God at any time.”* John 1:18
- 12) Holiness: *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory.”* Isaiah 6:3
- 13) Wisdom: *“...to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!”* Romans 16:27
- 14) Truthfulness: *“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind.”* 1 Samuel 15:29
- 15) Love: *“God is love.”* 1John 4:16; *“God’s love endures forever.”* 1 Chron. 16:34
- 16) Compassion: *“Our God is full of compassion.”* Psalm 116:5; *“Jesus wept.”* John 11:35
- 17) Patience: *“The Lord is gracious and compassionate... slow to anger.”* Ex. 34:6
- 18) Goodness: *“The earth is full of God’s unfailing goodness.”* Psalm 33:5
- 19) Grace: *“But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate.”* Neh. 9:17
- 20) Mercy: *“For the Lord your God is a merciful God.”* Deuteronomy 4:31
- 21) Righteousness: *“Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God...”* Psalm 71:19
- 22) Justice: *“For I, the Lord, love justice.”* Isaiah 61:8
- 23) Wrath: *“God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.”* Psalm 7:11
- 24) Sovereignty: *“[God] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”* Ephesians 1:11
- 25) Glory: *“The city does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.”* Revelation 21:23
- 26) Happiness: *“Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him.”* Psalm 115:3