

Comfort—An Awesome Thing!

Theme: Comfort is essential during the hard times in life.

Review of Lesson 17

We all need to be encouraged and to be given a "pat on the back." Encouragement is aligned with giving praise; when we praise another, it ministers grace to their heart. The Lord clearly teaches us that it is a need of everyone to receive praise. Even some animals respond to human praise. Discouragement results from things going wrong (or not as we hope), and it robs us of joy and brings us down. It makes us feel tired, dissatisfied, full of self pity, and helpless. Because we all experience disappointment, God instructs us to give praise, comfort, and encouragement (edification) to each other. This enables a person to know they are appreciated by another human, which can help them move forward in life. To be an encourager, the main things to remember are: think positively, act positively, and speak positively (avoid the put-downs). Having a desire to build others up is a character trait the Lord can develop in each believer.



Bible Truth

Introduction

Comfort and encouragement are much alike. When we encourage another person, we give them a pat on the back and offer them praise. This can help someone know it is worthwhile to keep doing the right thing; otherwise they may get discouraged. Just as each of us needs encouragement, we also need comfort. Comfort basically means to make someone feel better about something that deeply bothers them; it helps them get through a hard time in life. Comfort addresses sorrow and pain, while encouragement inspires others with courage or cheers them up. Since the need for comfort is so necessary, it is an important topic in the Bible. The

goal of this lesson is to teach us the source of true comfort and how each of us can be a comforter to others.

In Psalms 142:3-5, King David describes his sorrow, **"When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path...For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul."** He tells of a time in his life when his spirit was overwhelmed; that means his grief was so real it was like being drowned in sorrow (sorrow seemed to flood over him; it overwhelmed him). David then looked around in the time of his deepest grief and found there was no human who cared, there

was no escape from his troubles, and no one was concerned for his life. However, during this time of deep sorrow, he realized God knew what was happening and was with him when no one else was. Realizing this, he then said unto the Lord, **"... You are my refuge... Attend to my cry..."** (Psa. 142:5b-6a).

Does this sound familiar? You can be sure there will be times in everyone's life when it seems no one really cares, when problems seem so large and so many that they are drowning us (overwhelming us). Just as with David there is only one sure and true place of refuge—the Lord. He is always there and always provides comfort. Likewise, He asks us to be compassionate towards others when they are suffering. So, in His place, we can be the flesh and blood representatives (who can be seen and felt) He uses to comfort others (whether saved or not).

Discussion: Share a time when you were really down in the dumps, but the Lord helped you in a remarkable way. (Teacher: ask teens to share a verse, experience, or person that touched them.)

The God of All Comfort

As Christ's ambassadors (representatives) on earth, we realize that He is the God of all comfort. **"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..."** (2 Cor. 1:3-4a). We carry that message of comfort to those around us. Being the God of all comfort means:

- He gives each of us the ability to enjoy life (Eccl. 3:13).
- He has the power to "lift us up" when we are down (Psa. 23:4).
- He provides the hope we need today and for tomorrow (Rom. 15:4-5).
- He makes us feel better (consolation) (Phil. 2:1).

We often think that if we had more "things and stuff" then we would be happy. God gives us verses like Eccl. 2:24 & 3:13 to teach us that we could have everything this life has to offer and still be unhappy. Solomon learned this the hard way through his life experiences. He learned that a person can have money, power, wisdom, friends, wives, and the best of everything and not be happy. Why? Because *the ability to enjoy life comes from God*; not from the things this world has to offer. **"... every man (person) should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God"** (Eccl. 3:13, parenthesis added). So one can have little or a lot, but it is God that provides the ability to enjoy life.

The Apostle Paul also confirms this, **"... for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content"** (Phil. 4:11b). That means he learned he could be mistreated, made to look like a fool, experience the loss of everything, and still rejoice (Phil. 4:12). He learned that nothing in this world can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35-39)—that certainly is the main thing that gives a person inner peace and joy. He learned he could do anything this life required because God gave him the strength to do it. That means he learned he could get through any tough situation in life because God walked with him, gave him strength, gave him hope, and provided the joy he needed even when he had nothing. Knowing this should give us great hope; it lifts us up. Now, to be clear, He will not remove every trial in our lives, but He will help us through them. Eph. 3:19-21 teaches that God can do things above or beyond our wildest dreams (beyond what we think possible). That often means getting us through a hard time without taking away the hard time itself or the people causing it (we can all think of that).

"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another" (Romans

15:5a). This verse teaches that God is patient with us. This is really important, because what would life be like if God was angry with us for every wrong we did, or if He didn't have time for us? Our patient God wants to hear of our problems, our fears, and our concerns in life. He never grows weary of hearing from His sons and daughters. This same verse teaches that He provides us the comfort He knows we desperately need. Then we learn something else—He can give us the same mind (like minded) as His. So when we are comforted by God, it helps us have a mind like His with the desire to comfort others.

Discuss: Whoever thought it was good to go through a hard time? God indicates that removing the problems in life is not always best for us. So if He decides we have to go through a difficult problem, He will provide a way for us to do it. A way we never thought possible.

Comfort of the Word

God's Word, the Bible, provides us comfort, "...that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4b). The reason for this is the Bible's words are God's words;

they are true, reliable, and based on God's total understanding of who we are and what we need. There is a deep comfort the Lord gives us through His Word that is hard to describe; it truly is a spiritual phenomenon. No other book or writing can do this; some poetry or songs may offer some help, but not in the deep, remarkable manner of the Word. The Bible is God's special Book (like a divine Owner's Manual) telling us how to live our lives, how to prevent problems, and how to get back on track when things go wrong.

An important way the words of the Bible comfort us lies in the fact the Holy Spirit within us uses those words to speak to our spirit (Rom. 8:16,26). The Holy Spirit is called the "Helper or Comforter," because that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). He teaches us and comforts us like nothing else in the world. He uses the Word as He comforts us, and it seems we are more receptive to His ministry if we feed on the Word (know, think about, and study). So it is important to read and study the Word each day, so that the Holy Spirit can use it to speak to our spirit and help us each day. In that way, when hard times come, we will be better prepared to overcome them.

Life Applications

Comfort for Yourself

Sometimes you may have a nightmare and awaken with an overwhelming feeling of gloom—like you are in terrible danger or about to die. Even when fully awake you may have an unexplained panic or anxiety attack. These events produce a fear that is intense, and that fear does not easily go away. You cannot explain to anyone why or what is happening to you. Some people when faced with a medical problem or some tragic situation (like a friend in a bad accident)

will just "fall apart." During such times, it is very critical to read the Bible and repeat (say to yourself) memorized verses. Prayer is also important. These unexplained feelings can make life very miserable, and a sure way to overcome them is through prayer and the comfort of the Word of God. If you have a problem similar to this, it is extremely helpful to select some passages from the Bible (ahead of time) to read over and over when these fears come (examples: Psa. 16-19, 22-24, 37-38, 42, 104, 142-150; John 14; Rom. 8:18-

39; 2 Cor. 5-6; Eph. 1, 3:13-21; Phil. 2-4; Col. 3; 1 Tim. 6; 2 Tim. 1-3). As you first start reading and praying, your mind may wander, but stick to it and soon the fears will fade. The Bible offers what no other book can. The feeling of being overwhelmed with fear will melt away, you will experience the peace of God, and the comfort of the Word will become real in your life.

Comforting Others

"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 Cor. 1:4). In the trials of life, you will experience God's comfort, and that, in turn, will teach you how to comfort others. Knowing this really gives a sense of peace and calm, because you learn the Lord is not out to punish you, but just the opposite—He is merciful and comforting. Not only is the comfort we receive great, but it also provides us with the ability to comfort others. Comforting others is our duty; it is not the job of ministers, older people, or someone that is especially good at it. Just as each of us receives comfort, each of us is to give it. As you learned in the lesson last week about encouragement, comforting also has a snowball effect. Once the "ball of comfort" gets rolling, each person can learn to comfort others and receive it in return.

Activity: It would be good this week if you would plan to be a person (or continue being one) that gives comfort to others. This will make you an unusual person, but in a good way. Think of writing the names of the most important people in your life on a list. Beside each name, write how you could comfort them. Comforting can be very simple: just a kind word, a prayer, a text message, a thank-you card, a hug, or sharing a verse from the Bible. Then each day pray for God to give you wisdom on how you can comfort another person(s) and put it into action. God

knows that people in sorrow need someone they can see and touch to comfort them. God gives us the ability to do this.

The Bible has some interesting things to say about how we treat other people. It says the man who loves his wife loves himself (Eph. 5:28). So there is a connection between the way you feel about yourself and the way you see others. If you like yourself, you will tend to like others. Conversely, if you do not like yourself (ashamed, angry, embarrassed), others can sense this and that will affect how they relate to you and vice versa. As a child of God, you do not have to be ashamed, angry, or embarrassed. This may be hard to understand depending on your situation in life. Please know that each believer is a precious person in God's eyes and He sees you as a new person (2 Cor. 5:17); there is no reason to dislike yourself or to go in the opposite extreme of thinking too highly of yourself. It seems that if you are satisfied with (or like) yourself the more you will find the good in others. The way you see them has an effect on how you relate to them, and how they view you. If you constantly criticize and look for the negative traits of others, this will be reflected back to you. If you focus on the positive, if you look for the good in others and how you can help them, then they will view you as a comforter and not an enemy. Just as God does for you, demonstrate your love and appreciation for others and show them how important they are to you. Soon they will do the same.

Discuss the following fictional story (not doctrinally correct, but it makes points worth noting).

In a weird dream, a person was given a tour of both Heaven and Hell. The first tour was of Hell. The dreamer was surprised, because all of the occupants were seated at a banquet table loaded with every wonderful food and delicacy known to mankind. The

Devil very proudly pointed out that no one could ask for more. However, when the dreamer looked carefully it was easy to see no one was smiling. There was no comfort or joy. The people at the table were sickly and nothing but skin and bones. Then the dreamer saw that each person had a fork strapped to one arm and a knife strapped to the other arm. Each fork and knife had a five foot handle which made it impossible to eat. So with plenty of food available, everyone was starving.

The next stop was Heaven. The same scene occurred, same foods, same knives and forks strapped to the arms of the occupants. However, the people in Heaven were laughing and having a wonderful time.

They were healthy and well fed. The dreamer was puzzled and wondered how, under the same conditions, results could be so different. The People in Hell were starving and miserable; in Heaven they were well fed and happy. Then the reason became clear. Each person in Hell had been trying to feed him/herself. A knife and fork with five foot handles made it impossible to eat. In Heaven, each one was feeding the person across the table. By helping one another, they made life enjoyable and fed themselves.

(Teacher: this dream of the next life represents life on earth now. It teaches that God gives us the ability to enjoy life, provides us comfort and joy in unusual ways, and desires that we help one another.)

Take 2 Heart

Summary

We all go through times in our lives when we need some comfort to help make us feel better. When King David's heart was overwhelmed, he cried to the Lord because that was his only source of true comfort. God is the God of all comfort. That means He gives us the ability to find joy in life, lifts up heavy hearts, provides hope so we do not think things are hopeless, and makes us feel better. King Solomon learned that the ability to enjoy life comes from the Lord, not the things we have. The Apostle Paul taught he could be mistreated, suffer wrongly, and lose all things yet rejoice because he knew the Lord would provide for him. The Word of God provides us comfort, because it is God's wisdom, in addition, the Holy Spirit uses those words in our lives. So we are comforted by the Lord, and He, in turn, asks us to comfort others. As a new person in Christ, you can be satisfied with who you are and confidently reach out to others.

Gospel

The most comforting thing in this life and for all eternity is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16). He had to die in your place so that your sins could be forgiven. The moment you believe in Jesus Christ you become saved. That belief starts a new relationship with Him and assures you of a home in Heaven. Once you are saved, He will provide an inner comfort that you never had before. Then you will have assurance of the Lord's continual working in your life for your benefit. The God of all mercy and comfort will be part of your life forever. You will become a new person in Christ; you will be a son or daughter of the Almighty God.

Encouragement

Please know, dear teen, you are God's child and loved by Him. There is more to your new life than you may have ever thought. There is more to your life story

than you have dreamed. God knows all this and has plans for you. He has seen all your tears and collected them (Psa. 56:8)—meaning He feels your pain and will provide for you. The Lord will provide the comfort only He can give. The God of all comfort is like the author of a great mystery novel who keeps the ending a surprise and the best for the last. As you mature, the mystery of your life (your story) will become clearer

and clearer. God is taking you on a journey now with many ups and downs, but He has the best planned for the end—exactly what you need. In Heaven, it is likely that God will whisper a new name to you that only you will understand (similar to Rev. 2:17). You are that special to Him. Future generations will rise up and thank the Lord for your faithfulness.