

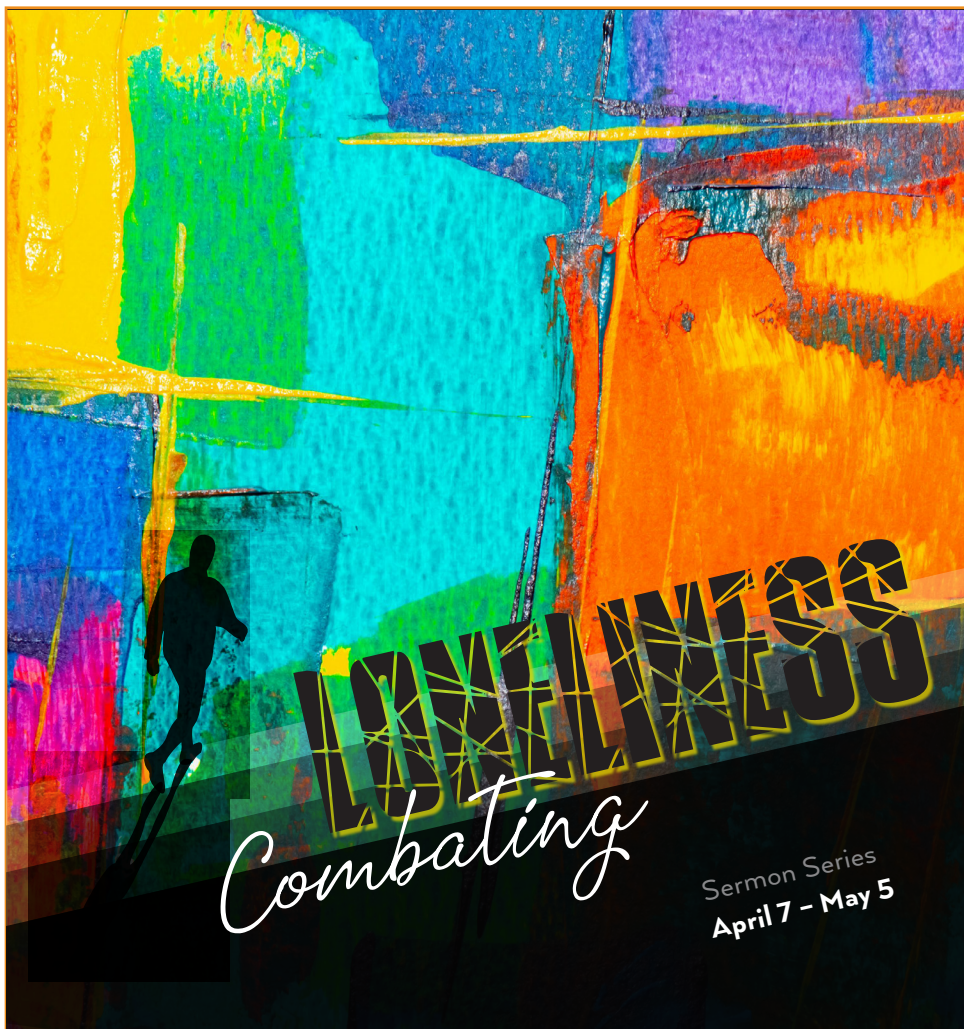
GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

DEVO

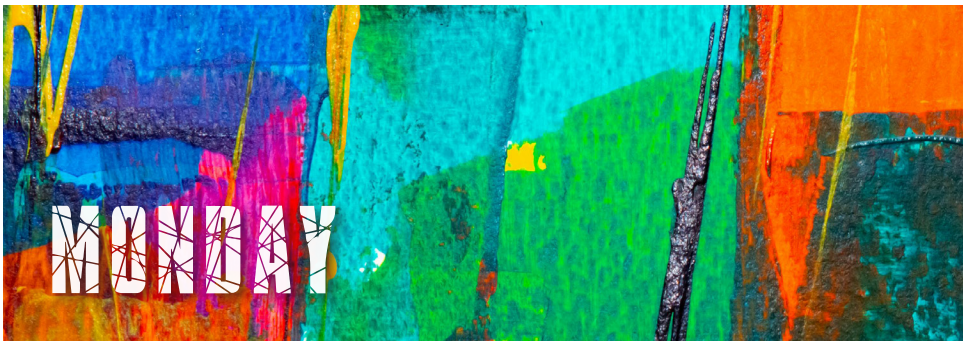
APRIL 29 - MAY 3, 2024



LONELINESS

Combating

Sermon Series
April 7 - May 5



Read **2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Luke 15:17-24; Psalm 103:13-14**

The God of All Comfort

Paul begins his second letter to the Corinthians with praise. After identifying himself and Timothy as the authors of this letter and greeting the believers in Corinth, who were the recipients, they begin their letter with praise. This observation caused me to pause and consider my own communication style. When sending an email to a group of friends, how often do I begin with praise? Very seldom, I must admit. Typically, I try to convey some warmth regarding our mutual relationship. But Paul and Timothy remind us that our primary focus should always be God.

In verse 3 Paul and Timothy identify God in three ways. Firstly, He is the “*Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” It was their faith in Jesus that united Paul and Timothy with the Corinthian believers, but they focus their attention on God as Jesus’ father. In Roman times, the father image likely evoked thoughts of authority, since Roman society was very patriarchal, and fathers possessed nearly absolute authority over their families. Such an image was relevant to the relationship between Jesus and His Father in that Jesus subjected Himself to His Father’s will. But Paul and Timothy had a broader image of fatherhood in mind.

Secondly, Paul and Timothy identified God as the “*Father of compassion,*” qualifying the fatherhood of God as being defined by compassion. God knows the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of His children and He responds accordingly. In Jesus’ story about the gracious father (aka, “The Parable of the Prodigal Son”), He says of the father when he sees his wayward son returning home, “*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him*” (Luke 15:20). The word Paul and Timothy use in 2 Corinthians is literally *mercies*, suggesting they have in mind God’s gracious love.

Thirdly, Paul and Timothy describe God as “*the God of all comfort.*” In this context, the word used connotes *encouragement*. God is the one who encourages those who are struggling. Paul and Timothy likely had in mind the words of David: “*As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him; for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust*” (Psalm 103:13-14).

QUESTIONS

How has God comforted you in times of loneliness?

PRAYER

For La Casa Church/ECO

Pray for the new people who are thinking about taking a step towards baptism and membership. Also, pray for more people to know about Jesus through La Casa Church.



Read **2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 7:5-7**

The Purpose of Comfort

The second verse in this week's text affirms that the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort "*comforts us in all our troubles*" (1:4a). Paul and Timothy's statement provides a reality check for any who think the Christian life should be trouble-free. They assume—probably based on their own experience—that Christians are not exempt from troubles.

Paul and Timothy were no strangers to trouble. Later in this letter Paul recounts his troubles: beatings, being stoned, shipwrecks, hunger, thirst, false accusations, and more (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Rather, troubles and comfort go together. When Paul writes, God "*comforts us in all our troubles,*" he does so from personal experience.

Paul and Timothy also explain the purpose of God's compassion and comfort: "*so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God*" (v. 4b). God's mercy and encouragement is not only intended for our personal benefit—to help us when we are experiencing difficulties—but it is intended to benefit others as well. Just as we sometimes need God's comfort, so also others sometimes need God's comfort. His comfort of us teaches us how to comfort others.

One implication of this view of the purpose of comfort is that God typically comforts people through others. In fact, as we read later in the chapter, this had been Paul's and Timothy's experience when the Corinthians sent Titus to them with a message of comfort. Paul wrote, *"But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever"* (2 Corinthians 7:6-7). Essentially, Paul is stating that God comforted him and Timothy through the Corinthians so that they in turn could comfort the Corinthians and others.

If God comforts us through others, we need to be open to communicating our troubles with others, allowing them to be instruments of God's comfort in our lives. Sometimes people share personal prayer requests with me, followed by instructions not to tell anyone else. While I understand the desire to avoid questions or possible embarrassment, I believe God wants us to be more transparent and vulnerable about sharing our needs.

QUESTIONS

With whom do you share your troubles? Whom do you comfort?

PRAYER

For La Casa Church/ECO

Pray for partnerships with organizations that serve the Latino community and for ways in which La Casa can participate.



Read **2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Philippians 4:10-13**

Contentment in Suffering

The third verse in this week's featured text shows a proportional relationship between suffering and comfort that may be hard for us to accept. Most of us would prefer only a little bit of suffering—if any—and an abundance of comfort. But Paul and Timothy express a direct correlation between the two: *"For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ"* (2 Corinthians 1:5). The comfort we experience, it seems, is proportionately related to how much we suffer.

The idea that we *"share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ"* could be translated more literally, "the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives" (Linda Belleville). That certainly sounds appealing, right? But what Paul and Timothy are writing about here is not simply suffering or troubles that everyone experiences, but the sufferings of Christ. That is, they are concerned with those sufferings that result from our identity as Christians.

The experiences of suffering that Paul describes later in the letter were the direct result of his and Timothy's commitment to following Christ. We often hear of Christian brothers and sisters around the world who suffer hostility, persecution, ostracism, imprisonment, and

even death because of their faith in Jesus. Although few of us have experienced such suffering, perhaps God is calling us to provide comfort to such fellow believers in their times of distress.

Paul and Timothy noted that just as the sufferings of Christ overflowed in their lives, so also the comfort of Christ overflowed in their lives. Christ set the example for His followers of suffering unjustly. But He also abundantly comforts those who share in His sufferings.

As Paul confesses in his letter to the Philippians, Christ's comfort did not always mean the end of his troubles. Rather, it meant that he learned to be content with what God provided: *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength"* (Philippians 4:12-13).

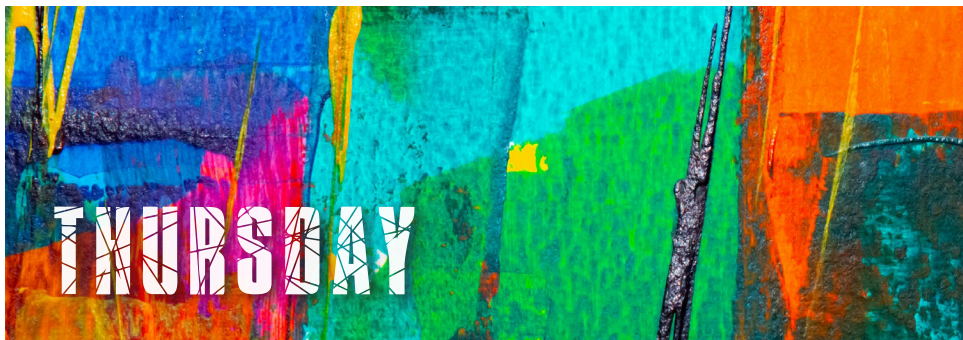
QUESTIONS

How can we comfort those enduring the sufferings of Christ?
In what situation do we need to learn to be content?

PRAYER

For La Casa Church/ECO

Pray for the immigration process of the Garcia Family and all the implications it brings. Pray for the timeline of this process.



Read **2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 1 Corinthians 4:8-13**

Sharing God's Comfort

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian believers, he had challenged them over what appears to have been an expectation that Christians should only experience victory and prosperity. He seems to contrast their self-perception of living the good life as Christians with his and fellow disciples' experience:

"Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! ... We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!" (1 Corinthians 4:8, 10)

Biblical scholars believe that the Corinthians thought Paul must have done something wrong to suffer as much as he had and, in this text, he writes to correct that view. Paul argues that, in fact, his suffering has been for the Corinthians' benefit: *"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"* (2 Corinthians 1:6). Rather than suffering being a sign of weakness or God's disapproval, it is God's work in the believer to produce a positive benefit for both the individual and for others.

While we may think the Corinthians were shortsighted or merely naïve, do not we often express a similar view? How often, when we see someone struggling, do we ask ourselves how they got themselves into such a mess? Or like the disciples, perhaps we are happy to send them away to take care of their own needs (Luke 9:12). Such views overlook the fact that all humans are beneficiaries of God's grace and that none of us gets what we deserve.

Next time we experience some measure of comfort, encouragement, or consolation, let us ask ourselves, "With whom does God want me to share this? Who in my circle of influence needs such comfort or encouragement as much, if not more, than I?" Paul and Timothy recognized that God comforted them not merely to relieve them of the trouble they were experiencing, but so that they could share God's comfort with others who were suffering.

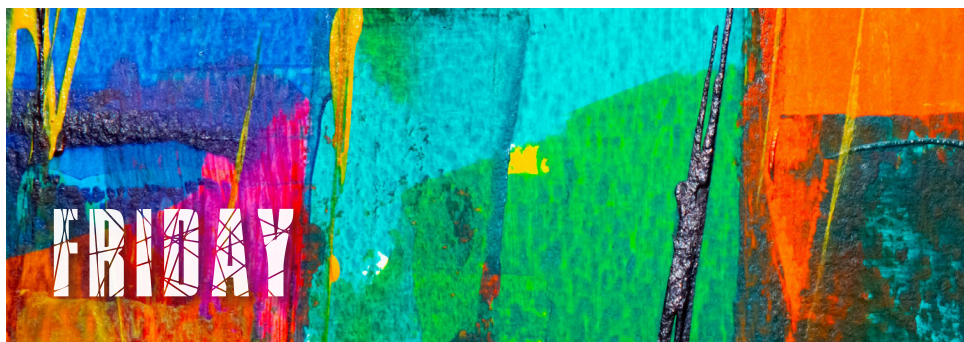
QUESTIONS

When did you last experience God's comfort? Who in your circle of influence needs you to now comfort them?

PRAYER

For La Casa Church/ECO

Continue to pray for the financial provision for the upkeep of the church planting.



Read 2 Corinthians 1:7

Mutual Comfort

In today's text Paul and Timothy reveal the ultimate outcome of comfort: hope. *"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"* (2 Corinthians 1:7). When we are going through particularly difficult experiences, we may lose sight of any sense of hope.

This is especially the case when we focus on our difficulties—the broken relationship, our own sinful behavior, loneliness, financial troubles, or poor health of ourselves or loved ones. During such problems, it is easy to allow the impossibilities of our problems to consume our thinking. We cannot see a way out; we worry about the future. We may even question whether God knows or cares about us. Certainly, Paul and Timothy were tempted to feel self-pity regarding the difficulties they and the Corinthians faced.

But despite their sufferings, Paul and Timothy were able to write: *"Our hope for you is firm"* (v. 7a). Why was their hope firm? Because they knew *"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort"* (1:3). They knew that their God would comfort them and would also comfort their friends in Corinth. They knew that their sufferings were not the end of the

story but just a part of the larger story of God's work in their lives and in the lives of the Corinthians. They knew that God would use their sufferings for their own benefit and for the benefit of others.

Next time we find ourselves in a dark place, let's shift our focus from our problems to our God who loves to comfort His children. Have our problems caught God by surprise? No. Are they too big even for Him to bring something good out of them? No, not at all. Does God still love us and offer us hope? Yes, without a doubt. Is His commitment to our well-being still firm? Yes, as firm as ever.

Given what we have read this week, one key to shifting our perspective is to be willing to share our struggles with a trusted friend and allow him or her to encourage and comfort us. The Corinthians had done this for Paul and Timothy through Titus, and Paul and Timothy hoped to do the same for the Corinthians.

QUESTIONS

With whom can you share your struggles and experience mutual comfort?

PRAYER

For La Casa Church/ECO

Pray for ECO church planters Gio and Indra and their leadership team. Pray that they may continue to have faith as they sow the soil. Pray that they will face the challenges and trust God who is the One who sustains and gives growth.



Sources

- Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011).

These devotionals are written by a team of Glenkirk volunteers who represent a range of beliefs within the evangelical spectrum. As such, some of the expressed views may not necessarily represent those of pastoral leadership. If you find yourself challenged by a devo, explore why that might be and, should you have questions or concerns, please reach out to Pastor Kate Wallace Nunneley at KNunneley@GlenkirkChurch.org. If you are interested in joining those who pen Glenkirk devotionals, please contact Pastor Kate.

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