

Comfort Ye, Comfort Ye My People¹

Leader's Guide

By Sharon Rapp

Sidebar: 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 and 10b–11a

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ^{4a} who comforts us in all our troubles, ^{4b} 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. ^{10b} On [God] we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, ^{11a} as you help us by your prayers (NIV²).

Opening Prayer: *You came to earth, O Christ, as Lord, But now You laid aside. You lived Your years in servanthood; In lowliness You died. Lord, help us walk Your servant way Wherever love may lead And, bending low, forgetting self, Each serve the other's need.*³ Amen.

Opening Discussion: Read aloud together core verses **2 Corinthians 1:3–11a** (see sidebar). What is your reaction? With a partner or small group, discuss an act of comfort that God brought to you through other people. What was the situation and how did the action encourage you?

Note: The author was drawn to this topic through a medical condition during which many acts of comfort were received from family and friends. A list (most certainly incomplete and intended to be a thought starter) of those encouraging, uplifting, and supportive actions is included in the Leader's Guide (available from your leader or on line).

Comfort and Covenant

How is God the Father described in **verses 3–4a** (sidebar)? In **Nehemiah 1:5**? In **Psalm 86:15**?
Father of Christ, Father of compassion, God of all comfort, comforts us in troubles; great and awesome, keeps His covenant of love with those who love and obey; gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love, faithful

Verses 3–4a ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ^{4a} who comforts us in all our troubles, ...

Nehemiah 1:5 ⁵ Then I said: "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands,

Psalm 86:15 ¹⁵ But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

What has God promised in the following verses that brings comfort to His people?
Redemption/reconciliation/salvation, adoption; new life through Baptism, eternal life; forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper

Galatians 4:4–5a ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ^{5a} to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (ESV)

Romans 6:4–5 ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
⁵ For if we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Matthew 26:26–28 ²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” ²⁷ Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.” ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

List some examples from the Old Testament where God showed comfort or compassion.

Answers will vary, but may include: promise of a Savior (Genesis 3:14–15); Noah’s rescue from the flood (Genesis 7–8); Abraham and Sarah to have a child (Genesis 18:9–15); providing ram as sacrifice instead of Isaac (Genesis 22:9–14); Israel (Deuteronomy 14:2); Moses’ seeing the Promised Land (Genesis 34:1–4); Ruth and Naomi (book of Ruth); fatherless, widows, lonely (Psalm 68:5–6); Israel; David (Psalm 86:17); remnant (Isaiah 11:16–12:1); Jacob (Isaiah 43:1–2); Zion (Isaiah 51:3); Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in furnace (Daniel 3:16–30); Daniel in lion’s den (Daniel 6:22); people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:10)

God is caring: *The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.* (Psalm 145:13b–14) He keeps his covenants: *The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.* (Acts 2:39) God considers believers as family: *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!* (1 John 3:1a)

Concern and Compassion

Read again **verses 5–7** (sidebar). What consequences are possible from giving comfort? How might we trust good to come from trying circumstances?

Sufferings, distress – produce patience, endurance, hope

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.

What reassurance does our Savior offer in **John 16:33**?

Peace because He has overcome the world

³³ “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.”

What does **Philippians 2:5–8** tell us about the nature of Christ? **John 14:10**? **Hebrews 4:15**?

God and man, servant, humble, obedient to death on a cross; one with the Father, Father working through Him; empathetic, understands our temptations, sinless

Philippians 2:5–8 ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!
John 14:10 ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.
Hebrews 4:15 ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Name some examples from the four Gospels in which Christ offers comfort. Can you think of an instance in which He helps someone whom others had overlooked?

Answers will vary, but may include: us; Paul and Christians in Corinth through letter (sidebar); Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:11–14); Joseph through a dream (Matthew 1:18–21); water to wine (John 2:9); Jesus to the crowd (Mark 8:1–8); disciples in the boat (Matthew 14:25–33); healing of the lepers (Luke 17:12); raising Lazarus (John 11:33–44); (his mother and the disciple John (John 19:26–27); disciples (John 17:20–21); woman with a discharge of blood (Matthew 9:20–22); appearance to Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13–33)

Jesus was especially drawn to those who needed comfort — including those others had ignored: “*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners* (Mark 2:17).” We are to follow His example: “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you* (John 20:21b).” Christ reassures the disciples: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8)

Connection and Communication

In **verses 4b and 10b–11a of 2 Corinthians** (sidebar), how does Paul invite the family of God to be of assistance?

Comforting others, hope for delivery, prayers

Verses 4b and 10b–11a ^{4b}so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. ^{10b}On [God] we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, ^{11a}as you help us by your prayers.

How are we also able to serve in this way? See **Matthew 22:37–40; 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3; Hebrews 10:24; 1 Peter 3:8**.

Love the Lord, love neighbor as self; work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, endurance inspired by hope; spur one another on; live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble

Matthew 22:37–40 ³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

1Thessalonians 1:2–3 ² We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.
³We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:24 ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

Who is honored when we comfort one another? See **Matthew 25:37–40**.

Our Lord and King

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’ ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ⁴⁰ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

What other situations can you recall from Acts and the Epistles where comforting takes place? Answers will vary, but may include: Conversion of Saul (Acts 9); Peter’s vision and meeting with Cornelius (Acts 10); Peter’s escape from prison (Acts 12:1–17); Paul’s preaching to the disciples in Antioch (Acts 14:22); Paul’s concern for jailer (Acts 16:22–28) and jailer for Paul and Silas (Acts 16:29–34); Islanders (Acts 28:2); Paul’s joy at the coming of Titus (2 Corinthians 7, 8); Jews among fellow workers comforting Paul (Colossians 4:11); Paul’s concern not to be a burden (1 Thessalonians 2:7–12)

How does the Apostle Paul embolden us in **2 Corinthians 1:21–22? Colossians 3:12–17?**

1Thessalonians 5:11–14?

God makes us stand firm in Christ, anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, put His spirit in our hearts; be clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, forgive, word of Christ in us, doing all in the name of the Lord; encourage one another, respect those who are over us, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone

2 Corinthians 1:21–22: ²¹ Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²² set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Colossians 3:12–17: ¹² Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

1Thessalonians 5:11-14. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. ¹² Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love

because of their work. Live in peace with each other.¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

How does the Lutheran Women's Missionary League encourage us, children of faith, to follow Christ's example?

Answers will vary, but may include:

LWML Mission Statement: The mission of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League is to assist each woman of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in affirming her relationship with the Triune God so that she is enabled to use her gifts in ministry to the people of the world.

LWML Vision Statement: The LWML is the leading group for LCMS women where each woman is welcomed and encouraged to use her unique God-given gifts as she supports global missions and serves the Lord with gladness.

The League Pledge: In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His Kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him. Amen.

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Music: "Serve the Lord with Gladness"; "Lutheran Women, One and All"; "With Joy We Come Together"; "Praise, Love, Serve"

Printed Materials: The *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* magazine; Bible studies; devotional materials

Missions: Vehicles for giving (such as mites) and serving (such as mission trips)

Events: Local meetings, district, and national conventions; retreats; service projects

Comforting, encouraging, serving demonstrate our love and are our response to salvation. When we feel ill-equipped, Isaiah 41:10 encourages: *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* When faltering, we can remember Christ's words to Paul: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* (2 Corinthians 12:9) Strengthened through Word and Sacrament, we can engage, encourage, equip, and enjoy the process — *rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man* (Ephesians 6:7 ESV).

The keynote workshop presenter at a professional conference out of state, I learn from my husband's call that my dear mother has received her eternal healing. A colleague finds me sitting alone, crying quietly, in an empty meeting room. Promising to let the co-leaders of the convention know immediately, she speaks words of empathy and sends me to my hotel room to begin packing. Two leaders arrive and, after hugs and prayers, encourage me with news that a replacement session is being readied. One returns to help with those preparations. The second contacts the airline, confirms the needed change is available, drives me to the airport — then waits until the ticket is exchanged, my husband knows when to meet me, and I'm ready to walk to the gate. What sweet comfort!

Closing: Making a connection is a start and can often be done quickly by sending a text, e-mail, card, or note. Placing a phone call, writing a letter, sending flowers or visiting take more planning and time, as does delivering a gift or meal. Each act, however, communicates love and care. And no matter how busy the day, there is time for prayer.

Closing Prayer: Abba! Father! You had compassion on us in sending Your Son to fulfill the law, allowing us to become Your children through faith. Holy Spirit, keep us mindful of our Savior's command and empower us to be kind, caring, heartening servants. Lord Jesus, give us courage to follow Your example, sensitivity to the needs of those around us and willingness to communicate Your love through prayer and acts of comfort. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Sing or say together "Take My Life and Let It Be" (*LSB* #783; *LW* #404; *TLH* #400).

¹ Isaiah 40:1 KJV ²References NIV: The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible, 1978 ³"Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way" (*LSB* #857)

When time allows: Think of at least one person who needs comforting or encouraging and make the connection. Reread Jesus' words of consolation, promise and prayer in John 14-17. Research the word "comfort" and its synonyms in a concordance or study Bible.

Note to leader: The List of Sample Actions of Caregiving is found on the following page.

List of Sample Actions of Comfort
(incomplete and in no particular order)

contacts from pastor
visit the weekend after diagnosis from daughter and boyfriend (now son-in-law), who brought games to play and kept us laughing and positive
friend who was in my room at when doctor came with probable diagnosis and asked: "Would you like to have this discussion in private or would you like me to stay? If so, is it OK to ask questions?" At my request she stayed, asked questions, then helped me remember answers and tell my husband.
hat party after diagnosis and prior to treatment — laughter with friends was enormous lasting support; crazy hats to try on; balloon faces for "models"; made list of 10 top reasons great to have no hair during summer hats from silly to practical to seriously elegant
friends sitting with the family during surgery
members of family who came (some from out of state) to be with us during time of surgery
friend who stayed at house with dog during surgery
prof who offered office for husband to use to make phone calls/send e-mails in privacy
daughters who each spent nights with me in the hospital
friend of daughter's who brought a cooler of juices/colas for people who stayed with me at hospital
colleague who visited and brought pair of warm socks
brief visit in hospital from principals and superintendent (in hospital city for meeting)
calls, cards, [texts], e-mails, notes from diagnosis through convalescence
hugs, hugs, hugs and prayers, prayers, prayers
uncle who called every week to ten days during treatment
food, across convalescence and chemotherapy
husband who delivered days of lesson plans to school
substitute teacher who worked daily in my absence
husband's shampooing my hair after surgery and shaving my head when the time came
adding cable outlet to bedroom
the cousin's wife who asked, then sent wig she had chosen after her surgery + the care kit
friend's gift of *31 Days of Praise*
books and magazines (on loan or to keep)
friend helping husband cut and bring to our house load of wood for the wood stove
friend's gift of blank (thank you) notes
sister-in-law who sent gift of warm terry cloth robe (appropriate to wear when visitors came to house)
neighbors raking the leaves in our yard
books on cancer and surviving cancer
people who stayed with me so my husband could get away
friends talking me through the retreat I missed and bringing the favor— a rice neck warmer!
flowers/plants, especially those that could later be planted outside [Note: as white blood cell count diminished, patient may be cautioned not to handle cut flowers or to dig in soil.]
friend's hug as she sat down with me on Sunday when husband was helping with communion and I was weak from chemo
sister-in-law who sent a bouquet of flowers following each chemo (5) and a pony tail for the ball caps (1)
welcome back applause from colleagues at school at meeting when principal announced I was back
gift basket of personal care items, such as lotions
gift basket/mug of teas/coffees
gift card for pre-made meals; renting movies; bookstore
wig shopping with daughters (I became a redhead!)
humor — example: husband, when I had no hair: "All of a sudden, I have a strong urge to go bowling!"
makeover; teach scarf tricks
[gift of toys/games for children in household]
[Cell phone, if not already available]
[basket of small wrapped items to be opened when person is feeling down]
[ginger tea and/or candy]

sharonrapp3/4/06, 8/18/10, 8/4/15,12/10/17