

How God's Comfort Helps Us Overcome

Rich Nathan
May 18 & 19, 2019
Overcomers
2 Corinthians 1:3-7

We've been doing a series here at Vineyard Columbus that I've titled "Overcomers" this past month. There are so many things we need to learn to overcome in life – the loss of a parent in childhood, a learning disability, a bias against us because of our gender or race or age or accent.

There's also one thing that always needs to be overcome in all of our lives is what the Bible calls "sin". Either sins that we commit or sins which are committed against us.

The first week in our Overcomers series, we heard a story of a man who was imprisoned on drug trafficking charges for 15 years. He had to learn to overcome the consequences of his own sin.

The second week, we heard a story of a man who was the grandson of a woman who was brutally murdered by four teenagers. He had to learn to overcome the consequences of being sinned against.

This week, we'll hear the story of a woman who was abused for years by a family member. She also had to learn to overcome being sinned against.

You know, the two great parables of Jesus in the gospel of Luke – what are they? They stand like two great mountains in Luke: On the one hand, we have the parable of the Prodigal Son. On the other hand, we have the parable of the Good Samaritan. And these two great parables can be divided into these two categories. The Prodigal had to overcome the consequences of his own sin. And the victim who was beaten and left for dead in the Good Samaritan had to overcome being sinned against.

I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that we can be sinned against in a myriad of ways. We can be victims of violence – physical violence or the threat of physical violence against us or against a loved one. Some of you have experienced domestic violence in your own homes. You can be sinned against by a parent who repeatedly displays towards you an attitude of contempt or disdain. They refuse to acknowledge your value or worth. They regularly communicate to you that your thoughts and your feelings don't matter.

We can be sinned against by a bully who makes fun of us or puts a label on us. Someone can be sinned against by a predator who convinces them to do something

illegal or uses them to make money or trains a child or a vulnerable person to meet the needs of the predator. We can be sinned against by the absolute emotional unresponsiveness of a spouse – a spouse who is always cold, always withholding, always disconnected.

Two weeks ago, we learned that one way that we can overcome being sinned against is by forgiving. Forgiving is something that we do. Something we choose.

Today, I want to look at a second way we can overcome being sinned against. That's by being comforted. Comfort is something that God does. Let me read the scripture for today:

Slide 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

³ 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 receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 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.

The word “comfort” is found 10 times in this short passage. The incredible number of times that “comfort” or “comforted” shows up in this brief text is really striking in view of the fact that the word comfort is only found 31 times in the New Testament – 25 times in all the writings of Paul, 17 times in 2 Corinthians, and 10 times in this short introduction.

One New Testament scholar put it this way:

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If Paul is the apostle of comfort within the New Testament, then 2 Corinthians is the letter of comfort, with 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 being the paragraph of comfort.

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What does God's comfort mean?

Comfort in the New Testament always means more than soothing sympathy. Certainly, it can mean that. Certainly, we're comforted when somebody puts their arm around us. But biblical comfort is more vigorous, stronger than simply being soothed or rocked or held. If we examine the word “comfort” we find:

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Com – fort

That root word “fort” comes from the Latin *fortis* which means brave. We talk about “fortitude”, the mental and emotional strength to face a difficulty or adversity with courage. We talk about being “fortified”, being strengthened and protected against attack. Comfort is something that God does in putting strength in us. God’s comfort enables us to keep on when we feel we can’t go on. We stand up when we feel like we want to give up. We overcome when we feel overwhelmed.

The Bible does not promise a “comfortable life” if by that we mean stress-free, hassle-free life in which we all get wrapped in bubble wrap. What God does promise is comforting, strengthening, encouragement, fortitude no matter what life throws at us. What God does NOT promise is protection from abuse or hurt or failure. Why do we need comfort? Because life is not fair. Do you know that even if you are obedient to God, you can be sinned against? You can be as perfect as Jesus and still be rejected and cursed at and be the victim of violence.

The New Testament speaks about affliction or troubles 45 times, but it’s mentioned by the Apostle Paul more than any other writer. Afflictions and troubles are mentioned more in 2 Corinthians than in any other book and troubles or afflictions are mentioned more in this passage than anywhere else in the New Testament.

Here’s what we read:

Slide 2 Corinthians 1:4

⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Slide 2 Corinthians 1:6

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.

The word for troubled or distressed is the Greek word:

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Thlipsis = Heavy weight that crushes us

In medieval England, one way that they carried out capital punishment was by *thlipsis*. A man would be forced to lie down and he would be tied to a board. Then they would load that man up with heavy weights until he was literally crushed under the weight.

Paul was talking about the things that can happen to us in life that literally crush us – they are just simply too heavy for us to bear.

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How does God's comfort come?

I want to mention three ways that God's comfort comes to us when we are being crushed by a heavy load. God does not necessarily take us out from under the affliction. Often in the midst of the difficulty, in the midst of the trial, he enables us to bear up, to stand up when we want to give up.

First, I think we find in this text that

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We are comforted by who God is

Here's what we read in verse 3:

Slide 2 Corinthians 1:3 (this is an old version of NIV that uses mercy instead of compassion)

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy and the God of all comfort,

God is the Father of mercy. He's the epitome of mercy. He is the source of mercy. His entire being is characterized by mercy. Anyone who turns to God wanting to be forgiven will receive mercy no matter what they have done. He's also the God of all comfort. God is not called the God of all shaming, the God of all condemning, the God of all vengeance or the God of all judgment. He is the God of all comfort. Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Bible are all characterized by comfort.

So, how do we receive God's comfort? By opening ourselves up to God. By welcoming God, the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – into our pain. Instead of trying to comfort ourselves, we have a thousand ways to self-comfort with food and alcohol and drugs and sex and TV watching and shopping. Instead of healing our own wounds through self-comfort, we invite the Father of mercy and the God of all comfort to step into our pain.

Second,

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We are comforted by God working through others

Slide 2 Corinthians 1:10-11

¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. 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.

God uses other people to bring us his comfort. He uses other people's prayers. He uses other people's words. He uses other people's example. He throws us a lifeline through other people. The Christian life is not just me and God. It's me and God's people and God. Often we miss God's comfort because we've distanced ourselves from God's people. We need the church!

Vineyard Columbus wants to be a church that throws drowning people lifelines, not anchors. We want to be a church that offers people comfort, not condemnation.

We're comforted by who God is. We're comforted by what God does through others. There's one more way that God comforts us and that is:

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We are comforted by God as we comfort others

Slide 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

³ 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 receive from God.

A few weeks ago, we talked about our forgiveness of others. I said that forgiving others is just passing on a drop of water from the ocean of forgiveness which God has given us. Comfort is the same thing. But as we experience God's comfort, we must pass that comfort on to others. What we discover is this incredible cycle where we find ourselves even more comforted as we comfort others.

Today, I want to interview a woman who has been part of our congregation for 12 years. Nicole Braddock Bromley is an author and international activist on issues of sexual abuse and human trafficking. Nicole is the founder and executive director of OneVOICE and OneVOICE4freedom as well as co-host of the OneVOICE Podcast.

Let's welcome Nicole.

Trigger Warning

1. Where were you raised?
2. So, life was just ideal, wasn't it? You used the term "outwardly" everything was ideal. What was wrong?

3. Why did you keep this secret? In your experience, why do other girls and boys keep a secret like this?
4. How did this situation change? How did what you were going through become known?
5. What happened when Mom heard your story? Was Mom's reaction common in your experience?
6. How did your step-father's death affect you?
7. There was a turning point for you at a summer camp. Will you tell us about that?
8. What happened as a result of you sharing your story?
 - Letters from other campers
 - Opened the Bible to 2 Cor. 1:3-4
 - The power of a simple step of obedience
9. Many people shrivel up as a result of abuse or, indeed, as the result of other kinds of significant suffering in life. They become smaller. But you seem to have grown despite the abuse and suffering that you went through. What do you think are some of the keys which would allow us to grow instead of shrink? To become bigger rather than smaller, despite going through a period of suffering or abuse? What's made a difference in your life?
10. What doors has God opened up for you over the last 20 years?
11. As you've given away comfort how has that brought you comfort?

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Pain put me into hiding. Purpose called me out.

Explain what that means to you.

12. In a congregation this size, what would you want to say to people who have experienced what you experienced growing up? Or are experiencing now?

Dismiss campuses.

Following today's services, Nicole will be participating in a book signing at our bookstore.

If today's message raised some issues for you, you or someone you love might benefit from becoming part of a Support for Life group.

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All Things New

Category: Healing

Beginning Thursday, June 6th from 7-9PM Cooper Road Campus, for 8 weeks

Beginning Thursday, August 29th from 7-9PM as Sawmill Road Campus, for 8 weeks

Cost \$15 per person (includes book and workbook)

For more info on either group, email supportforlife@vineyardcolumbus.org

Pre-registration is required

The purpose of this 8-week group is to create a safe place for women with past sexual abuse to share their stories and to receive further healing. We will go through Nicole Bromley's HUSH book and SOAR workbook. Registration and books for a nominal fee are required for participation

Not Alone: Healing from Sexual Abuse for Men

Category: Healing

Contact: Chris at cw4prc@gmail.com

Beginning date: To be determined, Please contact Chris for info

The purpose of this group is to create a safe place for men with past sexual abuse to share their stories and to receive further healing. Together we will work through issues like shame, fear, and anxiety and discover the power of Jesus to help us overcome. You are not alone. Participation is closed after the first week. Registration is required for participation.

13. What would you want to say to those of us who are told a story like yours by a family member or a friend?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to communicate to our congregation?

Ministry Time

1. Call for loved ones who do not know how to address this.
2. Apologize on behalf of the church bodies, church leadership who made you feel like it was your fault. You can leave that shame.

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- II. How does God's comfort come?
 - a. We are comforted by who God is
 - b. We are comforted by God working through others
 - c. We are comforted by God as we comfort others