

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

2 CORINTHIANS 7:8-12

STRENGTH FOR THE WEAK



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

How can we strengthen the weak? How can we encourage the discouraged? How can we fill the empty? How can we lift up the downcast? How can we comfort the uncomfortable?

I'm sure we all ask these questions from time to time. We see people suffering and we want to help them, we want to lift them up, but how? It seems so complicated, maybe it should be left to experts like counselors.

Or perhaps we are suffering ourselves and long for some joy, some bright in the dark. Where can I get joy in the middle of affliction? When we're in the pit, it seems impossibly difficult.

2 Corinthians 7:2-7, 13-16 answers both questions: How can I comfort? and how do I get comfort? Paul provides four simple answers, four simple sources of comfort that we can all give and get.

BACKGROUND

Paul's multiple afflictions form the background to this passage.

- **The suffering of heart-shrinking:** Make room in your hearts for us (2)
- **The suffering of false accusation:** We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one (2)
- **The suffering of one-way relationship:** I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you (3-4)
- **The suffering of ministry fatigue:** For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without, fear within (5)

Little surprise that Paul was downcast (6).



How can we get or give comfort in such circumstances?



1. WE COMFORT WITH PRESENCE (6)

God comforted the downcast

But God, who comforts the downcast (6)

In our culture, 'comfort' is often associated with 'luxury, pleasure, enjoyment, relaxation.' The word originally meant 'with strength' and that's how it's used in the Bible. It's not about softness but strength. In the Bible, it's someone who comes with strength for the weak.

Any comfort in this world is ultimately from God. He is the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3). He loves to comfort his people (Isa 40:1), and has devoted one of his three persons to that ministry (John 14:26). There is no comfort in the world that is not from God. God notices when his people need comfort.

Titus comforted the downcast

But God, who comforts the downcast, **comforted us by the coming of Titus** (6)

Paul was down in the dumps, moping around with a bad dose of "the poor-me's," weakened by multiple sufferings, lacking energy and motivation. God saw this and sent Titus, Paul's fellow-missionary, and son in the faith, to raise Paul's spirits and lift his mood.

At one of his lowest points, Paul heard a knock on the door, and opened it to find Titus on his doorstep, just back from his ministry travels to Corinth. How Paul's heart soared. Just seeing him standing there surged energy into his spirit. The physical presence of Titus re-charged his battery in a way that no amount of letters or reports could. Paul was always anxious to be with his flock and not just write letters to them.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Give comfort through physical presence. God has made us physical beings who need physical presence. This is why in-person church is so important, why your presence in church is so important. Your just being here is a comfort to others.

Get comfort through physical presence. If you feel weak, a simple step to get strength is to be physically among God's people. Your being here lets you get comfort from others.

PHYSICAL PRESENCE IS
SPRITUALLY POWERFUL



Can I do more to comfort others than just be present?



2. WE COMFORT WITH LOVE (7)

And not only [comforted] by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you (7)

Titus was comforted

Perhaps fearing the worst when he visited the Corinthians, instead of it being a disheartening visit, it was a heartening visit. Instead of weakening Titus, the Corinthians strengthened him. What in particular comforted Titus? The Corinthians love for Paul, which he then comforted Paul with.

Paul was comforted

...as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.

Paul's previous letters to the Corinthians had been critical and convicting. He rebuked them for tolerating immorality, for division, for party-spirit, for dishonoring the Lord's Table, and for prioritizing spiritual gifts over love. Paul no doubt feared that all the Corinthians would just cut Paul off and discard him. Imagine how anxious Paul would have been to receive Titus's report about the Corinthians' response.

But, instead of leaving him, they longed for him; instead of hardening their hearts to him, they tenderized them; instead of discounting him, they treasured him; instead of rejecting him, they rejoiced in him. And this rejoiced Paul's heart all the more.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Give comfort by the way you respond to correction. Do you turn on the messenger or do you turn to God? Do you hate the rebuker or do you love him? Do you leave for a more comfortable life or do you comfort with a loving life?

Take comfort from loving responses to correction. Whether we are parents, bosses, elders, pastors, etc., we can find tremendous comfort when those we've had to correct respond with longing, mourning, and zeal.

LOVE TO COMFORT
AND COMFORT TO LOVE



Paul was comforted by the Corinthians' loving response to him personally.
What about their response to his message?



3. WE COMFORT WITH REPENTANCE (13)

Therefore we are comforted (13).

The Corinthians comforted

The Corinthians read Paul's rebuke of their sin and responded with true, deep, long, wide, and practical repentance (9-12). Their willingness to undergo the discomfort of repentance comforted Paul. His rebuke made them uncomfortable, but their repentance comforted Paul.

Paul was comforted

We often ask other Christians, "How are things going at your church?" Or we get asked this by other Christians about our church. A common response is "We're encouraged." But what is our source of encouragement? More numbers? More income? More programs? More staff? What about...more repentance? "We're really encouraged by the repenting in our church." Paul was comforted not only by the Corinthians' loving response to him but by their hate-filled response to sin, as we saw last week (9-11).

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

How can I be an encourager? If you ever ask that, and you should, why not try Corinthian repentance. As we're going through the law of God in the morning service, no doubt there are some painful moments as God's law targets specific and special sins. Our instinctive reaction may be to fight the message and even the messenger. Why not try the Corinthian response and see how much encouragement it gives to so many.

How can I get encouragement? Maybe we need to redefine encouragement in order to see it. Maybe it's all around us as people repent of their sin but we are not looking for repentance as a source of encouragement and so we're not receiving encouragement from their repentance.

CORINTHIAN REPENTANCE IS
COMFORTING REPENTANCE



Giving and getting comfort is really not so complicated, is it?
No, and its simplicity is seen also in the comfort of consistency.



4. WE COMFORT WITH CONSISTENCY (13-16)

Your consistency refreshed Titus

And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling (13-15).

Although he went to Corinth in fear and trepidation about what kind of response he might get there, yet he returned with a refreshed heart overflowing with joy that the Corinthians were exactly as Paul had described them to him. They were consistent with how Paul had found them before and how Paul expected them to be towards Titus. The result was that Titus' spirit surged with affection for them because they were just as Paul had told him and received him with respect and honor

Your consistency rejoiced me

I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you (16).

Just as Titus rejoiced in the Corinthians' consistency with Paul's description, Paul rejoiced in the Corinthians living up to his expectations of them. He was confident enough in their spirituality that he boasted of them to Titus, at the risk of being made to look stupid if he was wrong. Having been proven right that they would be with Titus as they had been with Paul, his confidence was now complete, filling his heart with gladness.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Give comfort through consistency. If you want to give comfort to other Christians, simple consistency can do it. Stable, steady, reliable, Christians are a tremendous comfort to others.

Get comfort through consistency. If you are cast down, don't look for the spectacular, but just look around and find strength in the steady simple consistency of God's people.

CONSISTENT CHRISTIANS ARE
COMFORTING CHRISTIANS



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others stories



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

- **Gospel:** Get and give comfort in affliction through your repenting and others repenting,
- **Jesus:** If Paul got joy from presence, love, repentance, and consistency, how much more did Jesus when on earth and does Jesus now in heaven.
- **Worship:** Praise God for any comfort in life. Whatever means God uses to comfort us, let's trace it all back to his sensitive eyes and loving heart of tender mercy (6).
- **Prayer:** Write out a prayer that reflects this sermon, or use this one: "God of all comfort, comfort me with your comfort and help me to be a comforter of others too."
- **Church:** Paul said "I'm proud of you" to the Corinthians for their encouraging response to God's Word (4, 14). I happily say the same to you, the members of First Byron CRC.
- **Monday:** Look for opportunities comfort those with physical or mental illness or disability by simply being with them.
- **Hell:** Without repentance you will have eternal weakness and pain with no possibility of comfort.
- **Heaven:** Look ahead to the day when all weakness and discomfort will be replaced by God's perfect strength and comfort.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has God comforted you in the past? Or used you to comfort others?
2. How has your view of comfort changed through this sermon?
3. How and from whom will you get comfort this week?
4. How and to whom will you give comfort this week?
5. Can you think of times when you've weakened and discouraged God's people?
6. How would you explain or illustrate the truths in this passage to a young child?