

"Downcast Don't Last"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 May 2024

Preacher: Justin Bryant

[0 : 00] I invite you to turn with me to the book of 2 Corinthians. We will be continuing our study through this wonderful book of the Bible.

I hope that it continues to bless you, that you're beginning yourself to see the shape of this book, that weakness is the strength of God, that the gospel may seem unfavorable in worldly eyes, but is actually a beautiful, lovely, and wondrous thing hidden in a weak package.

2 Corinthians chapter 7, you'll find that on page 1780 in your pew Bible. Today we will be studying verses 5 through 7.

But before we do, I want to ask you rhetorically, what comforts you the most? Think about that in this life.

What thing or what comforts you when you're having a hard time? Is it a person? Is it a place? Is it a thing?

[1 : 14] I mean, we all know how kids latch on to things that bring them comfort. You know, everyone knows the kid with their blankie, or their lion stuffed animal, or a cool new tricycle, whatever thing it is that brings them comfort.

They love them. They love having them close. And the best thing for them when they're in difficulties is often having that comfort object near.

This passage will talk a lot about comfort. And the beautiful, best part of it is that God is the one who comforts us.

So I invite you to read with me 2 Corinthians chapter 7, starting in verse 5. For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side.

Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless, God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.

[2 : 35] And not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So here, I imagine you can already start to see the way that this truth rings through.

Comfort, solace. I want to point out where this comfort comes from. We will get to the fact that its ultimate origin is God, but immediately, Paul is comforted because he loves the Corinthians.

And when you love someone, you rejoice when good things happen to them. Paul is laying out in this passage that he was in great difficulty, and what brought him comfort was to hear good things about the people he loves.

Like we studied last week when I talked about bold love, that Paul made the argument that everything he had been saying before that was very bold and confronting to the Corinthians in their mistakes, he set out of love because he wanted to help them.

[4 : 05] Now he continues to argue and prove that he loves them, and he does this by giving an example of how he was comforted when he heard good things about them.

If you love someone, you rejoice when you hear good things about them. Paul proves his love by his rejoicing over them in this example.

So it starts in verse 5. For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side.

Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Most of us have probably at one time or another felt what Paul is talking about.

where your troubles seem to surround you so much that you cannot get away from them. That you feel like you are assaulted on the outside and assaulted on the inside.

[5 : 12] It's bad enough to be tired, hungry, struggling in your life to add to that discontent, bitterness, brokenheartedness, sorrow.

This is a complete picture of difficulty. Paul is explaining the suffering that he was in, not so that he can mope about the hard times he's been through, but so that he can show how great the comfort he gets from them is.

Little sufferings are solved by little comforts, but big sufferings, they need big comforts. And so Paul's setting the stage.

He's saying that I was suffering a lot. So when my love for you comforted me, it must mean I love you a lot.

If love rejoices with good, then the rejoicing that is greater than deep suffering means that there is great love.

[6 : 29] He continues on in verse six, nevertheless, God who comforts the downcast. It's such a sweet little line.

Paul really, he could have left it out and made his point. He could have said, you know, nevertheless, I was comforted when I heard about Titus, and then I was comforted when he gave me a good report about you.

But Paul doesn't want us to forget who's ultimately behind his comfort. God. And a God who comforts the downcast or the lowly, the people who are broken and struggling.

He says, I know God was behind this because he's just that sort of God to comfort people when they feel crushed by everything around them.

Paul says, when I was struggling, God was my comfort. Behind all of these things is his love.

[7 : 36] Paul is right, and he's in agreement with James when James says in chapter one, verse 17, every good gift, every good and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to turning.

Paul says, I know where good comfort comes from. It's not from this world. It's not from things, from my blankie or my TV or my success.

It comes down from the father of lights, the God of mercy, the one who loves to comfort the downcast. He's my comfort. It also makes me think that Paul must have paid close attention when Christ was teaching because on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus belabors the point that God is a God who loves to comfort specifically the lowly, the broken, the struggling, the poor.

That you might think God loves the rich people of the world the most, but Jesus' point in the Sermon on the Mount is God is often closest to the people who are most broken.

Matthew 5, verses 3 through 10, this is from the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[9 : 13] See who God's blessing is for? The poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. See who God's comfort is for?

The poor, the ones who mourn. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. His blessing is for the lowly and the meek.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Paul heard this teaching and he said, I know what kind of God God is.

He is a God who comforts the downcast. That is a beautiful truth and I don't want you to miss that in this passage.

[10 : 20] But Paul continues on with the example he's giving of his love and the comfort that he's received from the Corinthians. Verse 6, he continues on to say, God who comforts the downcast comforted us by the coming of Titus.

This is a side example that he's giving. He's saying, I love Titus and when I was in distress seeing Titus made me feel better, made me rejoice to know that he's safe and sound.

And so he's preparing them so that he can say, when I heard good things about you, that made me happy. That must mean I love you too.

If Titus' arrival comforted me and I love him, when I'm comforted by your good news, that means I love you. That's what Paul's saying here.

You can know who I love by who makes me rejoice. I rejoice with Titus and I rejoice also with you, is Paul's point here.

[11:33] He continues on to work this out in verse 7, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation that is comfort with which he was comforted in you when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

This is the main point that Paul's making in this section, that I love you and I was comforted when Titus told me that you were sorrowful for the bad things you had done.

Because repentance, sorrow over wrong, is a good thing, and it made me happy, rejoice to hear good things about you. love rejoices with good.

In this great difficulty Paul was going through, what made him feel better? The Corinthians, who he loves. So don't forget to connect this back to Paul's bold love.

All the things we've been studying in chapter after chapter where he's laying putting the hammer down on the Corinthians, he doesn't mean them meanly.

[12:55] He means them because he loves them and he's willing to speak the truth to them in love for their good. And they can be sure that he loves them because he's comforted in his deepest distress by hearing good things from them.

He rejoices with their good. So Titus, to understand a bit more of this story, what had happened is Paul was planning to go to the Corinthians, but he heard that they had still not corrected their behavior.

So he didn't want to have to yell at them and correct them in person. He writes a letter, he hands it to Titus, and he sends Titus to them so that the next time Paul has a chance to come, hopefully it will be a good, sweet visit.

So Titus goes with a letter and he corrects them and reads the letter to them. And the Corinthians are so heartbroken by their mistakes that they turn from them.

They correct the behavior and Titus rejoices. he's comforted. Oh, these Corinthians who were in deep problems, they've heard the truth and they've responded.

[14:19] Oh, what a comfort. And he comes back to Paul and Paul hears, they got my letter and it fixed things.

Oh, how my heart is comforted because I love them. That's what Paul is laying out here. the Corinthians were in sin.

They had allowed someone who was sexually immoral to just wander in their midst and celebrate like any other Christian, even though he was actively sleeping with someone who was not his wife and who was related to him and his family.

and they heard the report from Paul through Titus and they were moved to sorrow over their sin and they repented.

Paul had spoken the truth in love and it produced good things and Paul rejoiced for it. Love rejoices with good and bold love rejoices when sinners come to repentance.

[15:31] This is so important when we think about speaking the truth in modern times. There are plenty of people who fashion themselves as modern truth speakers, prophets, ready to yell at anyone who does anything wrong for any reason and they will claim I do this because I'm loving.

but they don't rejoice to see people move to sorrow and repentance. They rejoice at being correct and telling other people they're wrong.

That's not bold love. That's self-righteousness. What Paul's doing here is bold love because as soon as they repent he receives them.

He forgives them. He no longer holds their past mistakes against them but rejoices to see that they've repented. That should be instructional to us.

If we are boldly loving people, if we are telling the truth to people, we must be excited to see them repent and not make them second-class believers or second-class church members but welcome them back fully.

[16:51] we have all sinned and we all need grace and we must be ready to receive repenting sinners. And look at the response because Paul in chapter 2 verse 3 talks about the letter that he wrote to them.

This is what he was trying to get to happen. Chapter 2 verse 3 And I wrote this very thing to you lest when I came I should have sorrow from those whom I ought to have joy.

Having confidence that my joy is the joy of you all for out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears not that you should be grieved but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

The response to all of Paul's tears and troubles was great repentance. They mourned.

They had an earnest desire to make things right with Paul, a zeal to be close to him again. That's genuine repentance.

[18 : 11] In this loving care, this rejoicing over their repentance, doesn't it prove that Paul really cares about them? And so they shouldn't be offended when he speaks hard truths because he says them as one who loves them.

So I think that that really helps to understand the passage Paul is talking about here, but what does it mean for us?

I mean, I'm pretty confident that you're not the Corinthian church, that you've never met Paul in person. None of us are Greeks a thousand miles away from here.

I'm preaching this to Worcester. I have a series of observations from the passage for you that I think you should take to heart and apply to your own life.

The first thing is love rejoices with good. If you love people, a sure sign that you love them will be that you rejoice when good things happen.

[19 : 25] At my work, I've seen it play out over and over again that when one person gets a promotion, everyone else starts complaining. And it shows that they don't love that person, that they care more about what happens to them.

They didn't lose anything when that other person gets the promotion. They're the same as they were, but they hate to see other people have success that they don't have. That's not love.

Yeah. The loving heart says, even if I didn't get the promotion, I'm so happy that good things are happening to you. I'm so happy that this played out.

We see this with relationships too. I've known a lot of single people and I've struggled in my own heart to be jealous when other people get married, when that's something that I want.

But the loving heart says, I'm so happy that good things are happening to you. It makes me rejoice. If you want to measure your love for people, measure it by how much you rejoice when good happens to them.

[20 : 45] How happy you are when you see good things happen to others. Because if you're anything like me, most of the time, the thing that makes you happiest is good things happening to yourself.

That it's all about the me show and what I can get. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, that famous passage about love, he says, love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth.

That the happiest thing for a loving person is to see the people they love, repent and do better. So where does your joy come from?

Does it come from loving people and seeing good happen? Or does it come from your stuff, your success, from your own prosperity or the prosperity of others?

Jesus, his joy came from your benefit. Second observation, God is behind it all.

[22 : 00] Verse 6 says, nevertheless, God who comforts the downcast comforted us. Does it say comforted us by a miraculous feeling of happiness out of nowhere?

It says, comforted us by the coming of Titus. God most often isn't working in magical ways where you can't see what's going on.

It's not either there's an explanation or God is working. It's oftentimes the very things that help you were sent by a God who is sovereign over everything that happens.

Like I read earlier, every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father. He's behind it all. That person who comes to you and says the nice thing, that's a gift from your loving Father.

that beautiful sunrise, that's not just the earth turning on its axis, that's a gift from your Father of love.

[23 : 14] Those friendships, those family, the ways in which you have many things that others lack, whether it's success or ability or friends or whatnot, those all come from the Lord.

See them as messages from God of love. Like little love notes, a husband leaves his wife on different things to show that he cares for her.

God is leaving love notes for you all across your life to say, come to me because I care for you. Even the bad things, he's even behind those, but not to hurt you for your good. Just like Paul has spoken boldly to the Corinthians and Ben said words that are harsh or hard to hear, he did not say it to hurt them, he says it for their good. God puts bad things in your life not to hurt you but to do good, to drive you away from this world and towards him to give you opportunities to pursue righteousness and hate sin. [24 : 35] This is so often the case when you're loving people and you're trying to care about them and then they do something that gets on your nerves. You think, if only they just didn't do that, then it would be easy.

Well, God allows them to annoy you so that you might learn to love better and to care less about yourself and more about others. He sent their annoyance to you to teach you a lesson. Even the bad things are a gift from God. Romans 8, 28. We know that all things, not some, not most, not all good things, but all things work together for good for those who love God, those who are called according to his purpose. Trust. Love rejoices with good. God loves you and he rejoices to bring good to you in every circumstance.

God comforts the downcast. I touched on this earlier, but it's worth sitting in for longer. [25 : 53] When you think of God, don't just think of someone who's holy and just and omnipotent, but also think of someone who takes great pleasure in helping the weak and helping the lowly.

Someone whose, whose preferred task is to be out and about caring for people who are suffering. You know, we've all seen people like that who they're always quick to go to those who are suffering the most.

You know, I think of Beth who, who goes over to spend time with Steve almost every day. And you see it in her character. You should see it too in God's character, that he is a God who loves to help you when you are suffering.

And if he is, then run to him. Paul knows exactly who God is, and he hangs his hat on it. He is a God who helps the lowly. God rejoices with good, and so he comforts us when we're at our weakest, that he might rejoice to fill our lives with every goodness.

[27 : 18] James 4, 6, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. When you are humble and lowly, God will, will comfort you.

with God, downcast don't last. But consider a deeper example. Paul had given an example of his love for the Corinthians and the comfort he received. But consider the example of God's love for you. God is not just that he's happy when good things happen to you. It's that he sent his son, God in the flesh, to die on the cross for you. You want God to prove that he loves you?

Look to the cross of Jesus Christ. He loves you this much. He loves you enough that when they were pounding a crown of thorns into his head and he could have stopped it at an instant, he kept his mouth shut.

[28 : 32] When they were driving the nails into his hands and he could have called down a legion of angels to help him, he did not.

because he loves you. Because you are downcast, you should be downcast in your sins, you should feel that and he wants to comfort the downcast with the cross of Christ. He wants to comfort us as sinners by paying for every last sin. You know how you comfort someone in crippling debt?

Pay for their debt. You know how you comfort people lowly and filthy in their sins? You pay for every last one of them.

And that's what God does for us in Jesus. He pays for all of our sins. Put your trust in the God who comforts the downcast.

[29 : 43] Don't try to be righteous in your own might. Don't try to make yourself good with God by your own strength. It's not God comforts the self-righteous or God comforts the perfect.

It's that God comforts the downcast. Humble yourself, recognize your sin, lay them all at the feet of Jesus and receive the perfect comfort. comfort by faith, by trust in him.

Another observation, one of God's main comforts is through relationships with people. All over this passage, the source of comfort is relationships with others.

Look at them. First, you have God and Paul. Paul's relationship with God is the vehicle for his comfort. That's where he gets it from, is from being in a relationship with God. Paul and Titus, Paul is comforted by his relationship with Titus. That's the vehicle by which that comfort comes. If they weren't friends, he wouldn't have had any comfort by seeing him. [30 : 59] It's their relationship. Titus and the Corinthians repentance. If they had no relationship, he wouldn't have been comforted.

I know I'm belaboring the point, but it's worth it. The Corinthians and Paul. Paul would have no comfort if he had no love and relationship for the Corinthians. Because the people involved by God's grace have gotten into deep relationships with each other. They've also gotten into deep comfort.

If you are struggling or if you're going to ever struggle, which, hint, that's every one of you, you're either struggling now or you're going to struggle at some point, comfort.

One of the best places you can go to get comfort is relationships with God and with his people. Those will be the main vehicles of comfort in your life.

[32 : 05] Put yourself in them or you're leaving comfort on the table to wash away in the wind. Take full advantage of it. Don't be isolated, but encourage one another.

Hebrews 10, 24, and 25, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Do not neglect the assembling of yourselves together, but encourage one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Love people. Love God. especially loved believers, and it will bring you deep comfort and rejoicing. Two more observations and then we'll close. Look at what true repentance looks like. Verse 7, And not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you.

Here is the true repentance, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, and your zeal for me. If you do not repent, you will go to hell.

[33 : 25] Is repentance just, I'm sorry, God. There's a difference between true repentance. You know the difference when someone is actually apologizing to you or when they're just being polite.

or just trying to placate you. Oh yeah, I'm sorry. You know. Or when someone goes, I deeply wronged you.

I hurt you. You suffered because of it, and I'm sorry. I want to do whatever I can to make sure I never do that again.

I'm sorry. here we have an example of that true repentance. Earnest desire. That is, from deep within them, they wanted to do whatever they could to bring peace where there had been a split. Mourning over their sin. They were sorry for what they did. They grieved. I love that mourning is the word we use when people pass away.

[34 : 37] It's a picture of grief. You should grieve over your sins. If you don't, you haven't truly repented. Zeal for the one offended.

They had zeal for Paul. They wanted to do whatever they could to uplift him, for they had made him sad by their sin. that's what true repentance looks like.

Final observation. God's comfort is enough for your deepest distress. Paul was surrounded by troubles in every which way.

You heard him describe it. This is no half-rate solution to your problems. He's not a band-aid God, but a complete recovery God.

It's not just a little bit of ibuprofen that takes the aches away. This is a God who makes you better than you were before the damage happened.

[35 : 48] Look to him. Paul was in deep distress and God's comfort, which he sent through people was more than enough.

Downcast don't last with God because his comfort is enough for your deepest, deepest distress and pain. Let us close with Psalm 61 verses 1 through 4, which highlights God's comfort for the downcast so beautifully.

Hear my cry, O God, attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to you when my heart is overwhelmed.

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in your tabernacle forever.

I will trust in the shelter of your wings, for those who love the Lord will be full of rejoicing when God fills the world with his goodness.

[37 : 00] Let us close in prayer. Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you that you would regard those as lowly as us, as worthless as we are.

May we be comforted and comfort others with your truth and your love. in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may rise for our closing song.

Too many pockets.