



When Life Beats You Up – Part 1

The Basis of Real Comfort

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, have you acquired your weighted blanket yet? They're all the rage these days. The first time I saw it I was standing in line at CVS and I saw these boxes next to the checkout and, you know, 15 pounds or 20 pounds or 25 pounds. And I did what I usually do when I see weights. I turned away. (audience laughing) And I realized that there were pictures of blankets on the boxes. I didn't understand this. I was like, whoa, blankets, weighted blankets? I don't think I'm claustrophobic but being pinned to my mattress all night is not my idea of comfort. It really isn't. And the only reason I was thinking about weighted blankets this week is because I was looking to see what the world has to offer when you're discouraged or down, you're feeling really bad. Well, I found one website at the top of the list it was get a weighted blanket. I thought, well, that's the problem. I'm feeling weighted down already when I'm depressed. I don't need any more weight on me. And then I found other things. There was this one Web site that said what you need is what they were selling, of course, is a human-sized pillow that you're just supposed to cling tightly to make you feel better. One was a service that you could pay for where they would call your phone periodically throughout the day and some automated voice would tell you positive things like, "You got it, man," and "Go get it" and "You can do it." And there was another one that was similar to that where you could pay a fee and they would sing you like lullabies and like nursery rhymes or something. It was just interesting. I found one that was for crying therapy, not cryotherapy, that's different, crying therapy where you just get with people and cry. Probably my favorite one was that you can pay this company, you have to go to them, but they would bury you in the sand. I thought, well, that'll solve all my problems. (audience laughing) And then I look closely they don't bury your head they just bury your body in the sand. I thought, okay. Your problems will still be there when you dust yourself off and get out of your sand therapy.

So all of that looking at what the world has to offer when you're not feeling good reminded me that this series at the beginning of Second Corinthians is probably going to be more helpful than I even imagined. Because whatever the world's got to offer when you're down and discouraged is nothing compared to what God offers us in the first eleven verses of Second Corinthians Chapter 1. And we're going to take three weeks to work through those eleven verses. And today I want to get started with the first three verses. That's all we'll get through. But in those first three verses we've got a lot of the key to what is going to be expanded upon throughout this opening section. And it's all for people who feel discouraged. And if you're not feeling discouraged today, just hang around, right? You'll be discouraged eventually because everyone gets discouraged. And there is a great problem that we are all vulnerable to in this sin-laden world is we're going to feel bad. So even before we read the first three verses, can you look down to verse 8 in this passage and see that Paul himself, the author of this letter, confesses this, Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 8. We'll look at this in more detail in the future. But here's what it says, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength," now, this is the key, we despaired, "we despaired of life itself." I mean, you know what that spells.



That's kind of a poetic way of saying we didn't want to keep living. We didn't want to live anymore. And he goes on to explain it. He says, "Indeed, we felt," verse 9, "that we'd received the sentence of death," that we're not going to make it through all of this. Now, Paul admits that he can feel that way just going about his duties. And he's, you know, he's a missionary of all things, working for, you know, this Christian missions organization, if you will. Right? And he's saying, I just felt like I wanted to die. I don't want to keep living. So if you come into this room, you say, well, you might have a little pat on the back, some spiritual pat on the back for me, you know, my blues on a Monday morning. This goes all the way to the core of people saying I don't want to live anymore and godly people can feel that way. Moses felt that way and confessed it to God, "Take my life." Job felt that way. A very godly man, the most godly man in his generation, says, "I curse the day I was born. I wish I wasn't even born." We see it in Jonah. Maybe not the best chapter of his life there in Jonah Chapter 4. But he says, "God, just kill me." We see that there are godly people, including Paul himself, feeling so disillusioned, so discouraged, so depressed that he feels like I don't even want to keep living. Well, these first eleven chapters are going to help us sort all that out.

Let's start with the first three verses. I'll read it for you, then we'll take it one verse at a time to see if we can get the elements that will be key for us dealing with this in a much better way than you buying a human-shaped pillow to hang on to at night. Verse 1, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the Church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia." Now, I gave you a map on this not that we're going anywhere but this is the setting of where we're at in this city. And as I often say, if you've heard me preach for a while, I'll refer to Corinth sometimes as the Orange County of the ancient world. And one of the reasons is where it is. Now I know it's hard to find on the map, but if you see that little map there, you might recognize this is southern Greece. Now, in the Bible, we often talk about the two words Macedonia, the region and Achaia. Right? That's like the northern part that's off this map to the north. And then this is all here, including the Peloponnese, that big island there, that looks like an island. It's all part of what we call in the Bible Achaia. Now, if you look closely the landmass that comes down on Greece there, and there's a little, little bar of land. It's so small, you can hardly see it, it's called an Isthmus, just a little connecting piece of land. That's where you'll find right smack in the middle of that, you'll find the city of Corinth.

Now, you could think about how if everything is like this hourglass that goes through this one little piece of land, there's a lot of traffic that goes through Corinth. And because also to the north, you'll see the Gulf of Corinth and then underneath a gulf that feeds into the Mediterranean. You have so much commerce coming through from the north and the south that this becomes a wealthy place. And it's a very well-established place by the time the Apostle Paul goes there in Acts Chapter 18 and we learn that he stays there for a while. He has success in leading people to Christ by God's grace, people become Christians, including people who were leaders in the synagogue, and this becomes a thriving church. Now, this is Second Corinthians. Paul's already written what we have in our Bibles as First Corinthians and even confesses in First Corinthians he had already written them before that. So there are several communiques that he sends off to Corinth, a very important church and a very important city. And he says, I'm writing to this church, "in the whole of Achaia," people all over



the place that come and worship together under the leaders, the pastors at Corinth. And then he gives his traditional salutation in verse 2, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." And then we start, if you're reading from the English Standard Version or most translations will start a new paragraph here and there's a heading here, "God of all Comfort," if you're reading from the English Standard Version and whatever it might say in your English translation, it sets off the beginning of this theme. But I'm going to connect these first two verses to where we're going in this paragraph and it starts with verse 3 that gives us the heading. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and," here's where the English Standard Version gets this title, "and the God of all comfort." And then he's going to go on to explain more of the application of this.

But we can get a lot of applications from this if you can just read it with me a little bit anachronistically. And by that I mean that there's a lot that we're going to read back into the first couple of verses just by way of applicability. In other words, there's a lot that's going on even in the first verse that helps us understand that it's important to the whole theme of comfort. If God is the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort," and he's going to talk about I've even felt like despairing of life but here's the thing: God can comfort us in all of that. It's helpful even to know how the first verse helps us see the connection to some of the solutions that he's going to give us in this book. So let's look at that first verse again that simply identifies himself as an apostle and with "Timothy our brother." He says, "Our brother," because he's not his biological brother, obviously. As a matter of fact, he calls him a son in the book that he writes to him. The letter he writes to Timothy, Paul calls him my son, "my true son in the faith." But all of this means is that there's a close relationship that Paul has with Timothy, a fellow minister among the churches.

But Paul identifies himself as an apostle, an apostle of Christ. Now, I just want to take those two words together, because there are two words that share something in common. And if you've been around here, you often hear me say the difference between a translation and a transliteration. And here we have two words, and you should know the second one clearly is a transliteration. The word "Christ" comes from the Greek word "Christos." Christos means one who has been anointed and the anointed one from the Old Testament picture if you had a priest or a prophet or a king, they would have the anointing oil poured on their head as a ceremony that begins their ministry. And Christ, of course, is the prophet, priest and king. He's the ultimate anointed one. So we transliterated the word Christ and we use it all the time in English. We know what it means. The word "apostle" is also a transliterated word. It translates, if you will, the word "Apóstolos," which obviously is just we're trying to anglicize in our English language what we are saying in the Greek language and we don't translate it. And why that's important is because Jesus pulled all of his disciples together. Disciples means they were followers or learners of Christ. And he says, I'm going to designate twelve of you and I'm going to designate you apostles.

Now, it has a very specific technical definition. And it means when he calls them apostles, you're not just going to be my followers and you're not only just going to be teachers among the people, but you're going to carry my authority in the early Church here as my representatives. And when you speak as an apostle, you're speaking with the authority of



Christ. You're my delegates, my envoys, my sent-ones. And that, by the way, would be the translation we would use if we tried to translate the word instead of transliterating the word. We would say the sent-one. I just want you to think about that. When Paul says sent-one he means something big. I'm sent with the authority of Christ here. And the reason I say that and might include him even in the way I explain that as part of the twelve, is because I'm assuming in the New Jerusalem when it says the twelve names of the apostles of the lamb are going to be inscribed on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem, I'm assuming Judas' name isn't going to be there. And in the book of Acts, it seems like Paul takes his very important role as an authoritative spokesperson, so much so that God's Spirit uses him to write Scripture, that he's probably going to be, and this is just an opinion here, the 12th apostle, just an idea. It's not Matthias in Acts Chapter 1 that they roll dice for. But the idea of us saying he's an apostle, clearly it means much more than what we're going to see in these first eleven verses. But it certainly involves the application of where he's going.

And that is that if we're going to talk about comfort, God uses people, the instrumentality of human beings, as sent by the will of God to accomplish the goal. God is the, "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." But guess what? He uses people in this regard. Let me prove this to you. Go to the seventh chapter of Second Corinthians, Second Corinthians Chapter 7. Here's a good example of what I mean by this. And of course, you've got to give me some latitude here that I know what apostle means in the larger sense, I just explained it. But I just want to show you one small slice of it is, yeah, all of us have sent-ones and it is used in a non-technical sense in the New Testament as someone who goes as a representative of Christ, not in some revelatory, authoritative way, but as a minister, as some people poetically say, as the hands and feet of Christ. People are used that way. And as it relates to comfort, that's clearly in view in the first eleven chapters and throughout the Bible, including this passage. Look at verse 5, Second Corinthians Chapter 7 verse 5. "Even when we came into Macedonia," which remember is what we would see as off the map to the north in Greece, "our bodies had no rest." OK now, that's part of the problem some of us have when we feel down and disillusioned and depressed and despondent, you know, our bodies are not at rest. So we're kind of set up for feeling bad. And it says, "We were afflicted at every turn." And that's an analogy about driving through life and we turn this way and that way. And everywhere we go everything's going wrong as we might say. "Fighting without," that's kind of a tough translation. Let's just say this: fighting on the outside of my life compared to this, and fears on the inside of my life. And you know what that's like. It's like we've got conflict here, conflict there and on the inside I'm just scared, I'm afraid. And then it says, "But God who comforts the downcast."

Do you want to know what downcast feels like? When no rest, afflicted, fighting, fears all of that. But God is a God who comforts the downcast. He comforted us. Now, here's the instrumentality, by the coming of a human being, Titus, "by the coming of Titus." So God wants to comfort Paul. And here, seven chapters earlier, he says, yeah, "God is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." And one of the things that happened in my life, he says here in Chapter 7, is God comforted me. I was downcast and he did it through the instrumentality of Titus. He says, "Not only by his coming," verse 7, "but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you." You human beings gathered at the church at Corinth.



You encouraged Titus, and Titus encouraged me and the news, and I just read this for the sake of where we're going in the book of Second Corinthians, he says and "He told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me." OK, those three words are attached to the object, which is him. And he says, you longed for me, you mourned for me and you had zeal for me. I wasn't there. You wanted to see me. You mourned for me, you longed to have me there, and you had zeal for me. You were a champion for me. Now you think, well, that's kind of just selfish. And he's got a fragile, you know, ego. And maybe he's so overly concerned for his reputation. That's not at all what's going on here. The Apostle Paul knows there are threats to the Church. There are people who are false apostles. They're claiming the authority of Christ. And you can imagine the problem in the first century when we don't have a written New Testament and here are people saying, here's what Christ thinks, here's what Christ says, and here's the real apostles, as he says in Chapter 12 verse 12. We'll get to that later. The idea of him proving that he wants to remind them, I am telling you the truth. And therefore, when they long for him, mourn for him, have zeal for him, he's knowing this, you're accepting the truth. I'm bringing you the truth. And there are false teachers bringing you something false.

So he's very comforted. I'm encouraged by the fact of the news that I got from Titus regarding your feelings about me. That's what this means. And because of that I rejoice still more. Even though I was comforted just by the fact that I was in Macedonia and I was a mess and here's what happens. Here comes God ministering to me, the God who comforts the depressed, the downcast and he comforted me by the coming of Titus. And you had comforted him. But all the comfort comes from God. So I just want to make this point. Paul is the sent-one for much, much more than comfort. But he's also coming to comfort the Corinthians. And any time someone comes into your life and brings real comfort, they're an instrument of God's comfort. That's what the Bible would teach us. Matter of fact, he goes on, go back to verse 1 of this book, he goes back to the concepts of what it means to be a church. Look at these words, "To the Church of God that is at Corinth." Now, Paul and Timothy together, as we often see leaders together working as a group, which is never a solo endeavor. And then it says to the church. Now church is translated, but sometimes you've been around church long enough you've heard the Greek word for church, which is only helpful to hear because it's a compound word, "Ecclesia." Ecclesia is the word, but it's a compound word. "Ec" "out of" and "Klesia" is the noun "called," to be called out.

Now called out, a lot of people have made applications of this that go further than it should because to be called out is someone calling out for people to come together. Just like we're here at a particular time, we meet together, we have hundreds of people in this room because we have called this meeting and the church comes together to assemble. That's why sometimes the word ecclesia is translated "assembly," because people are coming to assemble. And I just need to make that clear for all watching online, I hope you're traveling on a business or something or sick in bed because church is not supposed to be done through the Internet. It's not supposed to be done through podcasting. It's not supposed to be done on YouTube. Church is to be done as the church assembles. That's what the word means, the assembly. We call a time, we come together and it's all life on life. They didn't know the technology of the Internet, of course, they didn't even have the option. And nor should we



make it an option for us unless we're sick in bed on our back or traveling for business or whatever we're doing when we HAVE to use that. So we are assembling together as a church. Just like Paul, even as missionary journeys does not go alone. He goes with people like Timothy who he calls his brother because, not because they're biologically related, but because they're tight. They're together. It's always a group effort. Why? One reason is because you shouldn't isolate as Christians, and the more you isolate the more you're vulnerable to the kind of downcast and discouragement that Paul had from time to time when because of circumstances he was alone. And that's a problem.

He says, "The Church of God that is in Corinth with all the saints." And just for completeness sake, let's make sure you former Roman Catholics don't mistake the word "saint." Does that mean all those really super godly people in your church, or if you grew up with a definition in the Roman Catholic Church well, some person who has been applied to be a saint and because of time and recorded miracles, and all the impact they've had in their holiness of life, we're now going to canonize them as saints. And then we can make statues and put them on the, you know, the dashboard of cabs in New York or whatever. We say, now we have a saint. That's not what a saint is. Saint, by the way, just from our etymology, because it's fun on Sunday morning sometimes, saint comes from the word "Sanctus." Sanctus is Latin. Latin word sanctus. And in Spanish we get words like "San" and "Santa," Santa Ana, San Juan. All those words represent the word "holy." And we get the English word "saint" from that. The word in Greek is different. "Hagios." We translate hagios into Latin, sanctus. And sanctus becomes a root for all kinds of English words but what does it mean? It doesn't mean someone's been voted on in a meeting in the Vatican. What a saint is, is someone who is set apart. Set apart is the basic concept of the word. Even though saint in your mind may reference something holy. Well, it has that meaning too. But the idea of a saint means that someone now has been adopted into the family of God and you're no longer out there in the world. You're now in relationship with God. You're one of his children. To be set apart, to be a saint.

Now you should start to be more saintly when you become a saint. But every Christian, you have some 13-year-old in the church who is going two miles on foot to go and worship and hear the word of God taught at the church of Corinth. And they're still a saint because they're set apart, because they put their trust in Jesus Christ and they've been adopted through the imputed righteousness of Christ. They become part of the family of God. That's what a saint is. And I love the all-encompassing word, "all" here, "all the saints," all the people in the church and all "who are in the whole of Achaia," no matter how far they're coming to hear the word of God here at the church of Corinth, all of them. And again, all of this is communal. All of this is connection. All of this is assembly. All of this is person-in-person, life-on-life as people like to say, shoulder-to-shoulder, face-to-face kind of Christianity. And the problem is if you want to talk about discouragement, disillusionment, you want to talk about being downcast or discouraged or depressed you're going to find this. You want to get there fast, just get yourself isolated and you'll get there pretty quick. And when bad times happen, then you're tempted to isolate. You cannot isolate. Just by the whole introduction in the first verse, I'm reminded that you cannot shut Christians out of your life. So don't do it. Number one on your outline. "Don't Shut Christians Out." Because as soon as you shut Christians out, not



only are you vulnerable to discouragement, if you are discouraged or circumstances make you discouraged, you're going to spiral.

And once you write that down, let me prove this to you by going to First Kings Chapter 19, you can find that in your device. Just type it in, First Kings Chapter 19. In First Kings Chapter 19, I want to prove to you that even godly people can feel like the Apostle Paul. But I want to show you some of the contributing factors here. If you know anything about your Old Testament, you might remember First Kings Chapter 18 and Chapter 18 was a high point in the life of a prophet who is always considered a very godly man and of course he is. His name is Elijah. And Elijah, a very godly man, has just taken down single-handedly as God's representative all the prophets of Baal. And you remember the story, I hope you remember the story, but what a moment. I mean, you wanted masculinity, muscular Christianity, if you will, from our perspective. And that was it. He was there facing them down, even mocking the prophets of Baal. And God powerfully vindicates his spokespersonship as a prophet. Amazing. Well, then Chapter 19 comes around and Jezebel, the wonderful, beautiful wife of Ahab. Wink, wink, Sunday school grads got that. A horrible woman. She goes after Elijah. She wants to kill him. So now he's got a bounty on his head, and he knows he's a hunted man. And it says in verse 3, "He was afraid." First Kings 19 he was afraid, just like Paul in Second Corinthians 7. That certainly is part of what it means. I mean, that's part of what leads us to the kinds of discouragement, disillusionment, frustration, the despondency we can have, it's fears on the inside.

"He was afraid, and he rose and he ran for his life and he came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah." And here's the real big problem. It's one thing to run for your life and maybe he could have stood up to Jezebel the way he stood up to the prophets of Baal. But even worse, let's just say we'll give him that. Okay. David ran. I understand that there's a time maybe to get out of town if your face is on all the wanted posters in town. But here's the big problem. It says at the bottom of verse 3, he "left his servant there." He's like Paul with Timothy. But he says, you know, Timothy, why don't you stay here? Verse 4, "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness," I'm just thinking on foot or maybe he's got an animal, how far can you go in a day into the wilderness? You can go a long way. You can walk a long way into that California desert in a day. Just think about that. And he's all alone. He "came and he sat down by a broom tree." Not even a great place to sit down next to but I guess if that's all you got, there he is getting a little shade in the heat of a desert. "And then he asked that he might die." There's our hero from Chapter 18, he'd just like the die, please. And he's saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life for I'm no better than my fathers"

Now in Chapter 18 his fathers if they could watch him showdown the prophets of Baal, they'd be like, wow, you know, my great, great grandson's quite a guy. But now Elijah's going I'm no different than anybody else. God, I'm going to die, the queen of this wicked nation in Israel is going to kill me. That's what he's thinking. That's what he's feeling. And what does he want? He's despairing even of life itself. I just want to show you the bottom of verse 3 and the top of verse 4 he's isolating himself. And I'm just going to tell you this. You're going to play into Satan's hands if you, when you hit bad times, difficult times, you're grieving, you're mourning, you're frustrated, if you check out from church. If I see you at the gas station and I say, man, I



haven't seen you at church for months, and you go, "Yeah, well, that's because I've been going through a really hard time. I've been really down lately." I'll be going, "Well, that's great. You should quit church altogether." No! Just the opposite. You're doing the wrong thing to pull away. You say, "Well, I don't feel like going." Well you need to go. Are you going to your small group? "No, I'm not going. I don't want to cry through the whole small group." This is when you need your small group more than ever. You need to stop pulling away and isolating yourself. Unless you want to be like Elijah, when really you shouldn't be there at all, despairing of life. But you're going to despair of life. Just get by yourself.

Now is your time to get away by yourself. Sure there is. Jesus, before dawn would go and pray to his Father. But then he'd come down that mountain and he'd face his day. He did that long before dawn. But there's not a time for you to run away. Run away from the instrumentality of God's comfort. You get God's comfort when you're with God's people and you better not isolate. I said this two weeks ago, you better commit yourself in this year to be in church. And you ought not just be shoulder to shoulder. You ought to be face-to-face in small groups and sub-congregations. I'm not doing that just to boost this church's numbers. I'm just telling you, you need to be in church for your OWN good. Do you want to have the comfort of God, experience the "Father of all mercies and the God of all comfort?" You can't pull away when you don't feel like being here. When you don't feel like being here is the time you probably need to be here the most. That's just a general axiom that I know is true because I've seen it so many times. When I see people complain, "I'm not coming anymore because I am down, I lost my job. Okay, stay away because we're all happy here. We don't want you harshing us all out. Stop. This is where you need to be. You need to be in church. And you know what? I don't think your small group is going to care if you're going to cry the whole time. It's okay and you're not anyway. Stop being so dramatic. Let's just get with people who love God. And you know what? God will use the instrumentality of Christians to start to comfort you. They will be sent by the will of God into your life. But you've got to step into this and you've got to lean into this. Hurting people, they'll be tempted to isolate. It happens all the time. If you isolate yourself then you're in bad shape.

Matter of fact, just jot this down for the sake of knowing how bad it can be. Lamentations Chapter 1 verses 16 and 17. Lamentations Chapter 1 verses 16 and 17. Lamentations should give it away. This is a bad time in Israel's history. And here's what he says, "For these things, I weep." He's talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and my "eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit." Worse was him sitting there, Jeremiah, by himself. In the next verse he talks about people in Jerusalem who are scattered, and he says they "stretch out their hands, but there is none to comfort her." The people are alone. Being alone is not the place you need to be when you're hurting. And I know you don't feel like having people over. You don't feel like going to your small group. You don't feel like going to church on a Thursday night. You need to get involved. And by God's grace, a church like ours is open every day of the week and you need to get involved in one way or another and God will start to minister to you the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."

And as long as we brought it up, Paul despaired of life. Elijah despaired of life. Moses, Jonah, Job. I just want to address that for a second. Over 5,000 people in California killed



themselves. I'm not talking about people who accidentally overdose, I'm talking about people who intentionally killed themselves. It's growing. In Orange County the numbers are up by 25%. COVID didn't help, but it's on the rise. People being so despairing that they want to kill themselves. And I just told you Christians are not exempt from feeling that way. But I just need to tell you you're playing right into the enemy's hands. I quoted this not long ago, John Chapter 8 verse 44, and Jesus reminds us that Satan is a murderer. The whole point in the Garden in Genesis 3 is to get God to turn on them. God, the author of life to turn on people. And as Jesus says, that's what Satan wants to do. He'd love to have you dead. He'd love to have you dead at your own hand. You cannot play into the hand of the enemy and you will certainly hear that voice, so to speak, when you're alone and isolated. Do not isolate.

One thing I always marvel at is the things that we see in the demoniacs in the gospels that reflect what's going on in our culture. I think of Mark Chapter 5 verse 5. The demoniac who is described there was busy cutting himself with stones. Even self-harm, think about this. This is the kind of thing in a social media active culture where people are alone in the corners with their screens. All that isolation is not helpful for us. And what we need to do is to realize the antidote to that is to get together and to be in the physical presence of people, in particular, the instruments of God's comfort, which are God's people. Self-harm or isolation. I got to read this one to you. The Gadarenes demoniac in Luke 8 verse 29, it says, "He would break the bonds." when they tried to shackle this guy, "and he was driven by the demon into the desert." That's just a great reminder even of looking at Elijah's life and going, I wonder what kind of temptation it was to leave your servant behind and to march into the desert a whole day's journey and sit down by a tree and ask God to kill you. Now you're playing right into the hands, John 8:44, of the enemy. You're thinking about self-harm, self-hurt, self-demise and all of that, right? It just comes from the enemy. The enemy likes to isolate you to get you to do the stuff he wants. You don't isolate, don't isolate and don't worry. Bring a box of Kleenex with you if you have to. And you're going to have to come and be a part of the people of God if you want the comfort of God.

Verse 2 Chapter 1. Let's look at this again. This traditional salutation should all but be traditional in our thinking because it's filled with the core tenets of Christianity. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," which is all applied, by the way, by the Spirit of God, the third person of the Godhead. And I want to tell you this: you need to make sure in your life this is true of you. Everyone's a participant who is breathing air on this planet this morning of God's common grace. But that's not what Paul has in mind when he talks about grace to you. Grace to YOU is God's redemptive grace. And that's what defines us as Christians, that we recognize that God has extended grace to us and that we've been granted peace. What kind of peace are we talking about? That I have peace with God. It starts there. And if I really want peace in my own heart, I want my heart to be encouraged, I like not to be down, depressed and thinking of my life ending. And I want to think about facing my life with courage and strength. Well, I need to start with whether am I really connected to God and have the maximal redemptive grace applied to my life and I really have peace with God. You better figure that out for sure.



Matter of fact, jot this down, Second Corinthians Chapter 13. Paul ends the book this way in verse 5, he says, you ought to "examine yourselves, to see if you're of the faith." After all of this instruction he says, I wonder what you going to do with everything I taught. Well, I know this, you're not going to do much with it if you haven't made sure that you're in the faith. "Examine yourself, to see if you are in the faith." If you pass the test you'll know Christ is in you. If you fail the test, well, then you'll know Christ is not in you. How in the world can you have the comfort of God if you don't even have the right relationship with God? Number two, just jot it down this way. You need to "Make Sure You're Right with God." And just because you're in church on a Sunday morning does not mean you're right with God. You know that, right? Matter of fact, I know many of you would even confess you don't mind going to church but you don't really want to be submitted to God. You're not going to submit to him. Even the word "submission" people struggle with. But here's the thing. We have no trouble with that if we're truly converted. If you know what the grace of God is, you have no problem saying he's not only my redeemer but he's also my king. You have no problem with that.

Let me show you. Go to Ephesians Chapter 1. Ephesians Chapter 1 reminds us of what the grace of God is all about. As a matter of fact, the thing you're going to be most enamored with in eternity according to this passage is his glorious grace. Look at verse 6. We'll deal with the stumbling block of verse 5 for many of you but look at verse 6. You shouldn't stumble over verse 5 but we'll leave that for a second. And in verse 6 all of this is, "to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." You can't do this without Christ. "In the beloved," is his Son, Christ. And just because you think, wow, a lot of the Muslims are monotheistic, we're praying to the same God, if you don't honor the Son the way you honor the Father well then you don't have the grace of God. And there's only "one name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." And it isn't going to work in Buddhism or Hinduism. And if you think that's arrogant to say it, I didn't say it. The Bible says it. And it's the only book God ever wrote. We should listen to what he says. You need to be right with the living God by knowing that the only way you're going to get the redemptive grace of God is through his beloved Son.

Matter of fact, keep reading, "In him," verse 7, "we have redemption through his blood." And there are people in platforms all over Southern California today saying this is not how you get the grace of God. They're saying that the whole concept of the Father crushing his own Son is not at all what is found in the Bible. They call that cosmic child abuse. They say you can't tell me that your salvation rests on the Father murdering his own Son. And I'm saying that's exactly what the Bible says. His blood on the cross dying on that cross is the whole foundation of my redemption. Redemption is a good word. I'm purchased out of the problem that I'm in. And the problem is the wages of sin. I'm a sinner. And because of that, here's the law, the law of sin and death. There's the connection. And I can't separate death from sin. But here's the thing that can separate it. The death of Christ on a cross. And according to Isaiah 53, it is the Father who was pleased to crush the Son, putting him to death that he might offer his soul as a guilt offering. And that is a bloody sacrifice. And it is the Father bringing that about on his Son. Of course the Jews were involved. Of course the Gentiles and the Romans were involved. Of course he was executed on a Roman execution rack. Yes, that's true. But



this was all orchestrated as it was preached in the book of Acts, according to the predetermined plan of God.

And the whole point of you being redeemed is based on Christ dying for you. And if you understand that, that is all about the grace of God, the glorious grace of God that starts like that hymn, John Newton's hymn, that you're going to say, I know I'm a wretch before God. And that's what makes his grace so amazing. And if you don't see grace as amazing, most people can't sing that song and mean it because they don't think they're a wretch. They may think they're a sinner, but then they shrug their shoulders, well, everyone's a sinner, nobody's perfect. But for those of us who know the amazing grace of God, it's been extended to us and we realize it for what it is. We know we need punishment for our sin but we don't want to have it. None of us wants to have it. But by the blood of Christ on the cross I've been redeemed. I've been taken out of my bad situation and been made a child of God. Look at it. "He lavished it on us," verse 8, "in all wisdom and insight." He knew all about me. He knew all about his plan, "making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose, which he set forth in his Son," in the Messiah, in Christ, as a, "plan for the fullness of times." They looked forward to it in the Old Testament, we 2,000 years later look back to it as a "plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and on earth. In him we've obtained an inheritance," I know I am right with the living God because of the death of Christ on a cross and my trust in it, "having been predestined," I know that's a scary word for you, "according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."

The reason that's not a problem for you, if you understand the amazing grace of God, is because verse 13 has been your real-time experience and we don't deny that. Verse 13, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation," the good news of you being saved, "and believed in him, then you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." That picture of you in real-time hearing a message and rightly responding to it is absolutely real. That's a real thing. But when you grab on to the grace of God, you look back on it and have no problem saying, well, I couldn't do this without God. I mean, you see that from Chapter 2 in Ephesians. We "were dead in our transgressions and sins." So you can stumble over being called before the foundation of the world, being predestined for adoption as sons, as verse 5 says. But real understanding of the grace of God extended to you is something, first of all, we in real-time experience, we reach out to and respond to a message. That's a real decision that you make. And yet the reality is once you make the decision, you go back and you say that's amazing, I couldn't have made it without God. And God is the one who gets all glory for this. God gets all the credit for this. And that may bother you but let's deal with that sermon another time.

Right now, all I'm saying is I hope that you've experienced that grace so that you can say, I know I am now sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, the guarantee of our inheritance, not my righteousness, not my good deeds, but "the guarantee of our inheritance," is the Spirit of God, the act of redemption, "until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." What kind of glory? We already know this from verse 6, the "glorious grace" of God. I hope the grace to you has been extended to you and that you've grabbed it by the experience in real-time in verse 13, by hearing the message of the gospel. And if you sit here today and say, well, I



want the benefits of God, I just don't want to have God calling the shots for me, you don't understand the grace of God, because all of us who understand the grace of God say that's no problem. Of course. I mean such grace, so marvelous, so grand, it demands my life, my soul, my all. These hymn writers had it right. This is true. It demands everything from me. We become servants. We say we've only done that which we ought to have done when we do everything he asks us to do and none of us can even do that. But we're ready to do what God asks. That's the grace of God.

Now go to Chapter 2 of Ephesians and you'll see the peace of God. What are we talking about? Verse 17 of Chapter 2. Christ came and he "preached peace," we'll see what that means in a second, "to you who are far off and peace to those who are near." Now, again, in the context of Ephesians, we got Jews and we got Gentiles and the Jews seem "near" because they had the oracles of God in the Torah, in the Old Testament prophets and writings, and they were there reading it, they had the light of the Scriptures and they were "near." And then there were the Gentiles, the Greeks and the Romans, they were "far." But both near and far it says, "Through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father." If you want to find peace with God, that's it. I now have, because of the Spirit's application of the redemption of the Son in the plan of the Father, I now have access to the Father, and I'm now at peace with the Father. "So then you're no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with," the rest of the set-apart ones, the rest of, "the saints and members of the household of God." That's peace. Knowing that I'm right with the living God. And if you want God's comfort well then you better draw nearer to God. And you ought to make sure you have the real grace of God and the real peace of God. It starts vertically. All of this starts vertically.

As long as peace gives me some reference to the concept of comfort, let me give you one last reference to write down from the benediction of the second letter to the Thessalonians. Second Thessalonians Chapter 3, Second Thessalonians Chapter 3. Just jot down the reference. I'll read it to you. Verse 16, he says, it's a prayer, "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all." May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. If I want peace in my heart when life is tumultuous, if I want to be held together with peace, a peace that Christ gives me, that's not like the world gives. It's not being buried in sand or a weighted blanket as much as you like yours. If I want peace that transcends circumstances then I'm going to have to get it from God, the God of peace. But it starts with making sure you're right vertically with God. And there are people in this room, I'm sure of it, just by the mass size of this group who aren't right with the living God. You know about God, you know facts about God, you've been toying around with concepts about God. When it comes down to it, if I said if Christ were to walk from the back room and tell you to move to the outback of Australia and be a missionary, you'd say, "Ah, it's not for me."

But real people, by that I mean real regenerate people, they have no problem with that. Is it hard? It may be hard, but it's not a hard decision because we understand the great grace and the peace that we have with God and therefore we're his. If you want the benefits of being comforted by the God of the universe that's so much better than any of these Band-Aids the world wants to stick on you when you're feeling discouraged, then we need to make sure



we're right with God, make sure that the peace and the grace that Paul is talking about in this salutation that's not just a throwaway line. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Just make sure that's true for you. And I would be remiss starting a brand-new book. How many sermons? I don't know how many sermons are going to be in the book of Second Corinthians, but we'd be remiss if I didn't say are you sure you've experienced and you have in your life the real transcendent grace, the amazing grace where you can call yourself a wretch and say, I'm better than I deserve. And you know what? For all of that, by the way, if I greet you in the lobby and I say, how are you? And you say, I'm better than I deserve, you ought to be ready for me to respond in a way like, yeah, you're right, you deserve to be in hell and you'd be okay with that, right? So stop being trite if you don't mean it. Right? Because that's the truth. And you should say you're right, I'm a wretch, that is where I belong. Because real grace, think about this, is saying I know I'm a sinner who deserves God's punishment.

It's not just now my house is bigger than when I was 30, right? It's knowing for sure that I'm right with God, not because of MY righteousness, but because of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ on a cross. I just want to make sure that you're right with God. Let me plead with you as it says in Second Corinthians 5. We'll get there, Lord willing. Let me beseech you as though God were making his appeal through me, be reconciled to God, get peace with God. That's what it means to be reconciled, being right with him. And then you can lean in and draw near to God. He'll draw near to you. And you want his comfort. He'll bring you comfort. But you got to have a relationship with the living God. More could be said on that, but I think you get my point.

Verse 3. Here's the beginning of his argument. Let's just look at it. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort." It's a great opening line. It starts with these words, "blessed be." "Blessed be the God and Father." Now, in the Old Testament, I often talk about the word because it shows up a lot in the Psalms, and when we would preach to the Psalms between series, I throw out these Psalms, you know, Israel's Greatest Hits we call them, and lots of times we encounter the word "blessed." And I sometimes talk about the Hebrew word which the root of it means that we are bowing down and it is a kind of a subjected, humble and bowing before God. I know he's the provider. I'm the recipient. In a sense there's concept of grace there and worship at least deference that I'm bowing down. But that's not the word in the New Testament, even though it's translated "blessed." The idea here goes even further, which I guess is implied in the Hebrew word "Baruch." But here's this word, and I only bring this Greek word up, a lot of Greek this morning, because we use this word as a transliterated word. I used it in some teaching this week. Let's start with the word "evangelism." Okay? Evangelism, we use that word when we talk about that being a transliterated word. The last part of it, we talk about the "euangelion." There's the Greek word. "εὐ" this particle epsilon upsilon, "εὐ" in English, is followed by the word "Aggelos." "Aggelos," that's the message. But the noun, when we talk about an "aggelos," we're talking about not a baseball team, but we're talking about angels, messengers. And we say the message they bring, or that we bring, the message of the gospel, is a good message. We call that the good news. The message is good.

Okay, this is the same concept, but instead of the word "message," it's the word "Logos," or "Eulogeo." We transliterate that word "eulogy." If you go to a funeral, you have people who eulogize the deceased. They eulogize them. What does that mean? They come up and they say good words about the deceased. He was a good father, a good husband and a good worker and a good golf partner or whatever. We eulogize them, we say good things about them. That's this word. This word is the word we transliterate "eulogize." And we're supposed to eulogize or say good things about God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because he's the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." And all I'm saying is that translates into saying that's like bow down and recognize humbly that he's the provider of what? In this context of mercy and comfort. But I'm saying that, I'm expressing gratitude for that. And I like the way this is stated. It's stated as just a blanket statement. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort." Because this is true whether or not you've had any of it this week or not. And so let's just state it that way, just kind of as indicative. It's the reality, even though I make it an imperative.

Thanks. Number three, "Thank God for Providing Comfort." Whether you've had any of this week or not, I'm going to say let's just thank him that he is the God of all comfort, that he is the God who shows mercy to his creation. We want that mercy and we want that comfort. But I want us to start just by giving thanks. And unless you became a Christian in the middle of this sermon, I'm assuming you can look back and see that God has granted you comfort in the past, you've seen his mercy by encouraging you, by giving you this "Parakaleo," which, by the way, I've never defined the word, but let's do it now. As long as we're talking Greek. Parakaleo. Right? Or "parakletos." This word here, this noun, "comfort. The word "para" means "next to." And you know the word "Kaleō." We use that a lot here is the word "to call." Right? Like we're calling like "Ekklesia," right? The "Klesis" that we're calling together a group. Well, parakaleo is being called in alongside of. Comfort is when we're buoyed and we're strengthened in the inside of who we are. And that we would say is comfort. The same word sometimes translated in the Bible, encouragement, the word encouragement, the word comfort both come from this Greek word here, parakletos, and that is that I'm having this inner strength by being buoyed and supported and standing up straight. And God is pulling me together when I feel like my life is falling apart then I'm pulled together, I'm comforted. And it says, that's God. But you should thank him for doing that. We should just be thankful to him and we should eulogize God for that.

And let's just think about this. I'll give you some footholds here. And I thought about how am I going to do this to make you think about it in the past. I'll give you four psalms and I want you to think about the ways in which God has done this. And the first one we've already kind of touched on but let me give you a psalm for it. Psalm 69 verse 20. Psalm 69:20, which is simply a cry of being forsaken and not having it but when you have it, it's the opposite. And that is, I need someone to comfort me. He says, "Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I'm in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none." Okay. What we need are comforters and God's agency, the instrumentality of God's comfort are people like Titus to Paul, like Paul to the Corinthians, like Jim or Bob or Brenda in your life. They are called in. So I want to ask you this. Has God brought you comfort in the past



through people? Now let's just jot that down, right? And there's a psalm for you. At least it's the cry of not having that. But you know when you have it, it's just the opposite.

Number two or Letter "B," Psalm 86 verses 16 and 17. Psalm 86 verses 16 and 17. Here's what the psalmist cries out, "Turned to me and be gracious to me," give me strength. It says, "Show me a sign of your favor ... because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me." I want you to show that in my circumstances. And maybe you can look in the past and you've seen circumstances that have comforted you. Right? When you heard you had cancer your heart was freaked out. You were falling to pieces. But then, God, through all the stuff you did, the therapy, whatever, you came out of that and you got a clear scan and the circumstance was a favorable one. God showed you favor in the circumstance and that has encouraged you. So have people, has anybody in your life been an encouragement to you, been an instrument of God's comfort? How about any circumstance that you lost a job and you thought you were not going to be able to pay the rent and all of a sudden now you get a job just at the right time? Whatever the circumstance, the favorable circumstance, well that be something that can motivate your eulogy to God, your good words to God?

How about this one? Psalm 119 verses 49 through 52, Psalm 119 verses 49 through 52. And if you know the Bible, you know Psalm 119 is all about the Bible. Every verse except for like two mentions the Scripture with some synonym. And in this particular passage talks about how the Word of God encourages us, specifically the promises found in the Word of God. Let me read this to you. Here the psalmist says, who I think is David, "Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope." And you turn me to the Bible and I look to "This is my comfort in all of my affliction, that your promise gives me life." And I feel like I'm back together. I can face the day. I'm not like Elijah under a broom tree. It says this, "When I think of your rules from old, I take comfort in them, O Lord." Think about that. Have you ever had a time in the Word that just that time in the Word turned everything around? And the promises of God, the hope of God, the narrative of God, something in Scripture has ministered to you. As it says in the book of Romans the encouragement, the parakaleo of the Scriptures has strengthened you. Well, you should bless God for that, eulogize God for that. Here's one I know you know the verse, but you probably don't think of this right off the top of your head, and that's Psalm 23 verse 4. Psalm 23 verse 4. You know Psalm 23. Well, verse 4 says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you're with me." Do you know the next line? "For your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Now, I know sometimes when I'm teaching through Psalm 23, I talk about that being a weapon, a defensive weapon against the wolves and the bears and the lions. And it's true. They can use those weapons for that. But you also know that the rod in particular, if not the staff, can be used as a disciplinary tool of the shepherd to the sheep. Sheep are kind of dumb. They stray. But these elements, these instruments, these implements of the shepherd are used to discipline. And I only think of that because I know Hebrews Chapter 12 talks about the encouragement we should derive when God corrects us. So let's think of that. Has God ever encouraged you through people, circumstances or his Word, the promises of his Word? Has he ever encouraged you just through correction? Now that's going to take a little maturity even to sort that out. But you ought to eulogize God for that. The Bible says that we



ought to be encouraged that we're not illegitimate children going on without God's discipline. Now, in the moment, it's hard for us to thank God for being a God of all comfort when we're disciplined, because all discipline, according to Hebrews 12, it's unpleasant, but afterwards "it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." That's a great phrase to talk about how we can be encouraged by the fact that God corrected me, he didn't let me keep going down that path.

And if you just take some time this week and you just start to say well, God, I want to praise you for being the God of all comfort. I'm going to look in my past and see how since I've been a Christian, you've utilized people, circumstances, promises and correction to strengthen me. Then I'm just saying start praising God for that. And when we start praising God for being a God of mercy where you should have just fallen off the cliff but he didn't let you, and the God of all comfort, the God of encouragement, you can start to say maybe in the next thing I'm going to go through, or the thing I'm going through right now and I feel like I don't want to keep going, God, I trust that you can get me through this. He is the God of all comfort, and we should think to ourselves God can do this. And mercy is not a bad way for us just to stop for a minute and camp on that for just a second. Mercy. Do you remember in Matthew 18, the servant had run up this ridiculous debt and then the master, comes and he says, please, he begs for mercy. And mercy is I know I owe you this and you should throw me in the debtor's prison, but don't. And the master has compassion on his servant and forgives him his whole debt. That's mercy. And if you think about what we deserve and say, "better than I deserve," because, yeah, you deserve hell, that's mercy that you're not in hell. And all of us experience mercy. But in particular, there are times when God's mercy shows through that it's such a sense of like a warm blanket that we have this sense of the reality of God doing for us a kindness because he's a compassionate God and as Psalm 103 says, "Like a father has compassion to his children, so he has compassion on us." He removes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. God is a good God and the forgiveness of your sins should certainly remind you of the mercies of God, of the comfort that we should derive just by knowing God.

And if you want to add to that, talk about the ultimate comfort when he shows his grace in a magnified way. And I'm not just talking about our salvific grace, but the grace that we get, like the prodigal son in Luke 15, who when he comes back the dad doesn't say, yeah, you've squandered the wealth, you're going to the debtor's prison until you pay it all back. But he forgives him, he embraces him even though he says to his father, "Father ... I'm not even worthy to be called your son." But then the father says, "What? Well, let's get a ring on his finger. Let's get sandals on his feet. Let's put a robe on him, let's kill the fattened calf and let's have a feast because my son has returned. He was lost. Now he's found. He was dead. Now he's alive." The God who in your past has lavished on you the grace and the mercy of not giving you what you deserve and giving you all the blessings you don't deserve, that ought to be enough for you to say I should bless the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." And you know what that's going to do? It is going to set you up if you continue to do what we should do and that is gathering together through the instruments that God uses to comfort us, to say we can get this.



Now it's good to be in a new year because at the end of the year we're always reading the prophets of the Old Testament and that can be pretty heavy stuff. When you read the prophets, so many of them, all the different prophets talking about, many of them, to Israel and to Judah talking about the fall and the punishment they're going to have, either by the Assyrians in the North or the Babylonians in the south. And you can't read through this very long without being really discouraged about how bad it's going to be for them. But then like every third or fourth chapter, what do you have? You have this another little ray of hope. It's a ray of hope about what's coming. And this is kind of what I'm setting us up for. I want us to know God is going to get you through this thing you're in the middle of. The next thing that discourages you and wipes you out, makes you feel like you can't do it, God's going to get you through it. And the hope of the prophets keeps being this, like Zachariah Chapter 1 is a great chapter. It talks about God is going to bring comfort to you. It's going to be bad now but it's going to be great then.

Let me just turn you to one and we'll close with this, Isaiah 66, the last chapter of Isaiah. And as long as I brought up weighted blankets, makes me think of little babies that need to be swaddled. Right? I talk about I don't want to be pinned down to the mattress, but maybe I do. I need and I'm sure I'm going to get one after this sermon. Someone is going to give me a 40-pound, 50, 60-pound blanket. But babies, I know like this, right? I know when I try to hold on to a baby and a little baby and even if this is my grandchild, and I know there's something about handing that baby back to mom. And moms have a great way of calming this baby who is freaking out. And one thing they often do after I hand them back with blankets flying around every day, they swaddle them up just right. They tighten them up. They speak to them tenderly. And that baby just calms down. That's just that moms are good at that, their little babies. Look near the bottom of this chapter, Isaiah 66 verse 13, "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort for you." Remember, Isaiah is talking about all the bad things that are going to happen in Israel. It's going to be bad. But "as one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." You're going to be back standing up. It's going to be fine. "You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice." Talk about a baby look at this line, "Your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the Lord shall be known to his servants." And you know the enemies, they're going to get theirs. But you just need to know God's going to comfort you.

The word that Jesus gave in the Upper Room Discourse to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, he calls them the parakaleos, the parakaleos. That's the word "comfort." Most translations translate that "the helper." That's one way to translate that. You can translate it "the comforter" or "the encourager." That's the word in Scripture that he's going to come alongside of you and not just kind of stand by you. I mean, think of this verse, God who is enthroned in heaven, wherever that is, and Christ is at his right hand. The person who wants to get in your mess this week as you turn to him, understanding grace and peace, connecting with his people, he wants to get in your heart and comfort and swaddle you like a parent, like a mother does a child so you can get through this. You're not falling apart. Elijah's not going to fall apart. Job, you're not going to fall apart. Moses, you're not going to fall apart, Paul, you're not going to fall apart. I'll close with this line. And I stopped in the middle of the verse or the middle of the sentence here. After Paul said, you know we felt like we had the "sentence



of death," he goes on to say, "But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." It isn't going to be being buried in sand or, you know, human-sized pillows or, you know, whatever it is, some ringtone that tells you you're great. What you need is the parakaleos. You need God himself to comfort you, the Father of Mercy is the God of all comfort. And we're going to learn more about that in the next two weeks so get ready. We're going to unpack this even further.

Let's pray. God, we know the instrumentality is people. We know even as we start this season of the year a lot of people say, yeah, I'm going to be in church and I get in church, but then all these temptations to isolate are going to come. Let us see through the strategy of the enemy. Let us not be ignorant of his schemes. And one of them is to isolate us. When we're having hard times let us say, wow, I got to go to church twice as much now because I need to be with God's people, the instruments of comfort. The God of comfort wants to comfort me and I'm going to find that. And for those of us who sit here today thinking, no, I'm in the best period of my Christian life, may they realize they're the Titus for the Paul, they're the Paul for the Corinthians. They're going to be an instrument of comfort and let them take an interest in those who are brokenhearted in this church because you take an interest in them. God, let our church be a place where we see a lot of that happening, where people are being strengthened every single week, every single weeknight, every day on this campus as people draw together to worship you, serve you and testify to your mercy and your grace.

In Jesus name. Amen.