

Be happy: Comfort in the midst of mourning

Message for Sunday, October 6, 2019
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 5:4 “Happy are those who mourn; they will be comforted.”

Children’s Message: *I prepared two masks: one with a happy face, the other with a sad face.*

We like to be happy, don’t we? We like our faces to look like this (*put on happy mask*). When things are going well, we have friends to be with, our parents love us—then we’re happy.

But sometimes things happen in life that make us sad (*put on sad mask*). What would make you sad? (Ideas: friend moved away; family member is sick or dies; we don’t feel well.)

Jesus said that when we’re sad, he can help us. He will comfort us. Even if you lose a friend, Jesus will be your friend forever. Even if something bad happens, Jesus stays with you, so you’re not alone.

Message: “Be happy: Comfort in the midst of mourning”

Last week I said that the word “blessed” means the same as “happy,” and that’s how some Bible versions translate these verses. Let’s look today at the next thing Jesus says.

Matthew 5:4, Good News Bible:

“Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

When we think of mourning, probably the first thing we think of is someone has died, and the loved ones are mourning that person. But we can mourn other things, too:

- You lose your job. You mourn the loss of income, the loss of doing something productive, the loss of relationships with all the people at work.
- You move to a new place. You mourn the loss of a home that you loved, and the great neighbours, and all your friends in that place.
- You have a chronic illness or pain, or a debilitating injury. You mourn the loss of health, the loss of ability to do things, the loss of freedom to go places.

Anytime you lose something, there will be mourning.

All of us face difficulties and problems, and many of them will involve mourning. Some of them are easy to handle, others are more difficult. Some have a clear reason behind them, while others are beyond understanding.

Nowhere in the Bible will you find an explanation for suffering. One of the biggest wastes of time and energy is asking, “Why did this happen?” What’s most important isn’t the “Why?” but the “How?” How will I respond to this situation? And for that question, the Bible has a clear answer. Jesus teaches us how to handle suffering.

“Happy are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

How can I be happy after a loss, after a broken heart? By receiving the comfort of God.

Let’s look at that, step by step. You know how I always end my messages with “Next Steps”? Well, this whole message is the next steps to take when you are mourning.

1) Be aware that God is with me

When we’re hurting, it’s common to think God has forgotten us. Sometimes the heartache is so great that we feel abandoned. It seems like God doesn’t care. You may begin to wonder if there really is a God.

God is actually very close to you.

Psalms 34:18, New International Version:

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Not just that, but God cares deeply about you.

Nahum 1:7, New International Version:

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him.

These promises, these truths about God, are wonderful. Knowing that we are not alone, that God cares, is a great comfort. But there’s more. We need to move beyond the pain.

2) Let go of the hurt

We can choose live in the past, and hang on to whatever it is that we lost. Keep the loss and the

pain alive. Some people feel guilty if they stop mourning; it's like they stopped being faithful to their loved one. When I see memorial notices in the newspaper for someone who died years ago, I wonder if that's what is happening. The tradition some decades in the past, was for the loved one to wear black for the next year, as a sign of mourning. But after that, it was time to move on. There's a lot of wisdom in that tradition.

Some people hang on to their hurt, especially the kind of hurt someone did to them. They keep rewinding that movie in their mind and they watch it over and over again. There's a big difference between mourning and moaning. Mourning is natural, normal grief. Moaning is when we keep the pain alive, rather than letting it heal.

What if your loss was caused by someone else, either deliberately or through recklessness? The natural response is to feel angry. But if you hang on to that anger, it becomes a poison inside you. By hanging on to it, you allow the person to keep hurting you over and over. Here's a better idea: take that powerful emotion and do something good with it. An example of this is M.A.D.D.—Mothers Against Drunk Driving. This was started by women who were justifiably angry at people who kill their loved ones. But rather than stay angry, they turned that anger into something good.

We can live in the past, dwelling on what we lost; or we can live in the present and give thanks for what we still have, and even look forward to what is yet to come.

Isaiah 43:18-19, Good News Bible:

The Lord says, "Do not cling to events of the past or dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I am going to do."

Let go of your hurt. Give it to God to look after, and in its place receive God's comfort.

3) Receive God's comfort

People try all kinds of things to get comfort when they are suffering: get drunk, take pills, go shopping, sleep all day, and more techniques, all trying to get rid of the hurt in their lives. Those things may work, but only for a short while.

Jesus promises us a better way:

"Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted."

How? How do we receive God's comfort?

a) Read the Bible

When we feel lost, the Scriptures are God's gift to guide us back to hope. In the midst of our darkness, it's a light that shows us God's love.

Psalms 119:105, New Living Translation:

Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path."

The Psalms are especially a good place to start.

Psalms 119:25, 52, Living Bible:

I am completely discouraged. ... Revive me by Your Word. Your Word has been my comfort.

b) God's People

We need one another. Here's a quote I like:

A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you've forgotten the words.

Sometimes you are the solution to the problem the person sitting next to you has. Why don't you turn to the person next to you and say, "Did you know that I am a solution to your problem?" Go ahead and do that.

Now I know that sounds like a contradiction because you thought the person next to you was the cause of your problem. 😊

Seriously, here's the verse I want us to look at.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4, New Living Translation:

All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of every mercy and the God who comforts us. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

If you're hurting today, you are not alone in your hurt. You may think your problem is unique. The truth is that thousands of people over history have faced the same problem you have right now. Chances are there's someone here in this room who

has been where you are. That's one of the reasons Jesus created the church, so that we can be a comfort to one another.

We see in that passage in Corinthians that it's a two-way street. If you have gone through troubles in your life—*who hasn't?*—then you have a ministry to help others. God never wastes a hurt. You can say to someone, "I know what it's like to lose a child." "I know what it's like to go through divorce." "I know what it's like to grow up in a family where there's abuse." You can walk with that person and bring comfort to them, because they know they are not alone.

You really *can* be the answer to someone's problem!

c) The Holy Spirit is our comforter

God himself is the greatest comforter. When Jesus walked on the earth, people found in him such hope, such love, such comfort. It was a combination of his words and his actions and more: his very presence. Just being with him brought peace to people.

When Jesus was preparing the disciples for his departure, knowing they would be devastated with him gone, he made a promise to them, something like this: "I'm going back to heaven soon, but I'm going to come back in another form so I can be with you forever." That form is the Holy Spirit. One of the names given to the Holy Spirit in the Bible is "the Comforter."

John 14:16, Living Bible:

"I will ask the Father and he will give you another Comforter, and he will never leave you."

The word "comfort" is made of two Latin words: *com* means "with" and *fort* means "strength." To comfort someone means to be *with* that person and give them *strength*. We can both receive comfort and give comfort.

Receive God's comfort. Know that God is with you, that God cares about you. Let go of the hurt that you're holding on to. Give it to God and let him give you his comfort—*his strength*—in return.

All of us will face tragedies in our lives, some of us more than others. Maybe you're going through that right now. The question is: what will you hold onto when that time comes? Where will you find hope, strength, comfort? God says to you, "I know your pain. I know your loss, I know the torment that you've endured, I know the heartache, I know the anger boiling inside you. If you will allow me, I can help you through that. You're not alone. I am here with you, and there are some people who can walk with you."

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank-you for Jesus. Thank-you for the message of hope and love that he brought wherever he went: not just his words, not just his miracles of healing, but also his very presence.

Thank-you that didn't end when Jesus returned to heaven. When we say "Yes" to you, when we surrender our lives to follow you, you give us your Holy Spirit to live in us. Your very presence is our comfort, our strength, our hope.

I know there are people here who are mourning the loss of a loved one or some other kind of loss. O Lord, hold them close to you. Let them know how very much you care. And let us be a comfort to one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.