

BETTER TOGETHER – COMFORT ONE ANOTHER

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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Text: II Corinthians 1:1-6

We are better together! We weren't created to "go it alone" – flying solo! But rather – God created us for community. And God demonstrates that - in so many different ways. In fact, we can learn a lot just by watching geese.

One of the things I really like to see, as I drive into through farmland into town, is to look into the beautiful sky and see geese flying in formation. Have any seen of them recently? Here's just a couple of pictures I found on the internet – but I don't think they do it justice. It really is amazing to see a great big "V" shape of geese all flying to warmer climates.

Some of you might remember hearing about why the geese fly that way. God created them in such an amazing way – and we really can learn something from them! I learned four lessons we can learn by reading a letter by Chuck Swindoll.

First, they fly in the V-formation to help the whole flock. By flying that way, the geese create an upward air current for one another. Each flap of the wings literally creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. And by doing that, it has been said, that the whole flock gets 71% greater flying range. They could fly solo – but they won't get as far as they do when they fly together.

Next, these geese rotate their leadership. When the one lead goose gets tired of leading the flock, it changes places with one of the geese on the wing of the V-formation – and then they fly and lead the flock.

The geese in the rear of the formation are the ones that do the honking. Some say they do that to say to all the flock – we're back here, we're following you and all is well. I like to call these honking geese the encouragers. Perhaps they are the ones who are saying, "keep it up! We're doing great! We'll get there soon!"

And then, one more thing I love about the geese, is that they care for one another. When one goose gets sick or wounded, two fall out the formation with it and follow it down to help protect it. They then stay with it until it's able to fly again!¹

These geese know it is better together! It's their natural instinct of geese to work together – to help each other – and to care for one another. God designed them that way.

And I believe God has designed the church to be that kind of community. We need each other – and we are better together. Way back to the Garden of Eden, God recognized it was not good for man to be alone, so He created a helpmate – and a community began! And as the church was born, it was clear that it is better to be in community.

Instead of trying to fly solo in your faith – we need a community of faith flying with you – to encourage you and build you up – a community to serve God together, with one mind united

in purpose. And I think that is why there are some 59 commands in the New Testament that emphasize “one another”. We’ve been looking at several of those, throughout this sermon series. And today we come Paul’s encouraging words to comfort one another.

Turn in your Bibles to II Corinthians, in the New Testament. And while you are doing that let me just tell you a bit about this letter. Paul established the church in Corinth, which was made up of mostly Gentiles. While he was on his third missionary journey, he wrote some letters back to the church. The first letter – what we know as First Corinthians was a plea for the church to be united and to not blend in with the immoral culture. Another letter he wrote was what we know as Second Corinthians. It is a very personal letter, where Paul bears his soul and his love for Christ and concern for the church.

So, right off the bat, in chapter one, Paul shares about some of the struggles he has faced. As I read verses 3-11, take note of how many times he mentions the troubles and suffering.

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴ He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. ⁵ For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with His comfort through Christ. ⁶ Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. ⁷ We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us. ⁸ We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. ⁹ In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ And He did rescue us from mortal danger, and He will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. ¹¹ And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.

Did you count a lot of references to troubles and suffering? I think I counted 8 or 9 times just in those 8 verses! I think it could easily be said that for the people in Corinth – as well people in our day – are living in troubling times. In fact, all of us have trouble from time to time. Just being a citizen of this broken world, we find ourselves having to face trials and troubles at some point. And even the Apostle Paul – the great leader of the church – struggled even to the point of despair and being unable to endure.

But – there is good news! We aren’t left to struggle on our own, to fly solo, if you will. Look at our text again; there’s another word that is repeated a lot in this passage. And you know if a word is repeated many times in Scripture – you need to sit up and take notice. Let’s look just at verses 3-7:

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴ He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. ⁵ For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. ⁶ Even when we

are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. ⁷ We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

Nine times in just those 4 verses, Paul uses the word comfort! Yes – we are facing troubles everywhere – but the good news is that we have a God who is the Father of all mercies and the source of all comfort – who comforts us in all our troubles! Notice those words ALL comfort and ALL troubles. No matter what you are suffering, God is an amazing Comforter! No matter what the pain or trouble - God is the God of all comfort who will give you strength and keep you going!

Now what's interesting about this word comfort. The Greek word used here, in different tenses, is the word Paraklete. Paraklete is the word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit – our Comforter. That's God – the Father of all mercies – the Holy Spirit, source of all comfort.

In Greek, para = alongside and kaleo = to call² Thus comfort is given by someone called alongside to help - much like a nurse is called to a patient's bedside to help. Which is exactly what the Holy Spirit does. He comes alongside us – ALWAYS – to carry us through, giving us the strength to endure. He is the source of all comfort – for any and ALL struggles and suffering we go through.

All of us need comfort! But how does He do that? Tony Evans helped me a lot in understanding this passage. He says – “One of the primary ways God comforts us is by bringing comforters into your life. Other people whose job assignment is to bring comfort to you. He uses the family of God to comfort.

When we come alongside each other, we bear each other's burdens, we admonish and teach each other, and pray for and encourage each other. We serve with each other and spur one another on to good deeds. And yes – we come alongside and comfort each other.

God works through us as we reach out to give comfort to one another. As David McClasand says in Our Daily Bread: *“As the Lord wraps His loving arms around us, we are able to embrace others with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. God comforts us so that we can comfort others.”*⁴

II Corinthians says that God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. We are to give others the same comfort God has given us. Warren Wiersbe says it this way: *“God's comfort is not given; it is loaned and you are expected to pass it on to others. God seeks a chain reaction comfort – we are supposed to PASS IT ON!”*⁵

And Pastor Tony Evans further explains: *“The reason God allows you to go through some affliction is that He knows that there is going to be someone whose path you cross who is going through what you either are going through or have been through. He wants someone who can relate what they are going through and be a comforter. God comforts them because God comforted you. But if you are a Christian that is only concerned about my blessing, my healing,*

my deliverance – God knows that He cannot use you to be a blessing to someone else. He wants us to be a conduit of His comfort and love!”⁶

You see we are just better together when we share the comfort God has given us – and comfort one another. We need each other! When we see how you handle the struggles and suffering you have to go through – and your faith in God - we are stronger. When we come together, we refuel each other. Your smile can be lifts another – your hug might just be what gives another the hope to keep going – your encouragement can bring new life to another – your comfort gives another hope.

In verse 8 of our text, Paul says he was really struggling – not knowing if he could endure – but the church helped him by praying for him (in verse 11). And he was helped to know that he needed to stop relying on himself but rely on God. That’s what happens when we comfort and pray for one another – we can make a difference in people’s lives and faith. It can keep people going when they don’t think they can on any further.

Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old child whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing... I just helped him cry."⁷

That little boy knew what it means to comfort one another. Just like those two geese that come down to the ground with their fellow injured goose – and stay with him until it can fly again. We are better together when we reach out to show God’s love and comfort to one another. When the storms come, the wind pushing against you – you need to know that you are surrounded by a community of faith that will support you -and will help you to stand up.

Let’s be a comforting church where everyone is either being comforted or being a comforter – that’s where Christianity gets real and God shows up! Become a comforter because you have been comforted.

Let’s Pray:

PRAYER

INVITATION

RESOURCES

¹Chuck Swindoll, October 1991,
<https://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-illustrations/3785/geese/>

²Tony Evans, “Comfort One Another”, 2015. <https://youtu.be/DB9NPwZgNFE>

³IBID.

⁴David C. McCasland – Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI.

⁵Warren Wierssbe

⁶Tony Evans, “Comfort One Another”

The Most Caring Child – http://www.midnightangel308.com/most_child.htm