

# Take one and Pass it on

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I'd like us to think for a little while this morning about this verse 4 that we read in 2 Corinthians chapter 1. Who comforted us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

In other words, we're looking a little more in depth at what we're looking at with the children previously. You take and receive from the Lord that which he desires you to pass on.

Who comforted us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

Now this of course appears to us part of God's gracious design. Not only to work for us as he has done with the work of redemption and salvation.

But also to work through such fallen and weak creatures as we are. Creatures of the dust. It would be the easiest thing in the world for God just to snap his fingers or to descend in a divine mist and convert all those that were meant to be converted.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] And to change the world the way that he wanted it to without involving us at all. We would just be sort of like pawns in his hand. Instead of which he has chosen to work through in the pinnacle of his creation which is mankind made in his image.

He has chosen to make us, if we can say it reverently, fellow workers with him. To use the weaknesses and the strengths that he has given us to administer to those who are likewise in a weakness or strength just as we are.

And that which he desires us to do, he has already set the example of himself. The Lord Jesus Christ who came down of course from heaven where he was God the Son from all eternity.

And became constricted in the womb of the Virgin. Became this tiny little, you know, prenatal embryo. And then of course the full grown child in the womb.

And then was born and then lived his life within all the constraints and limitations and sufferings to which human beings are exposed. He was tempted in every way like as we are, yet without sin.

[ 2 : 2 3 ] And then offered up his life as the perfect sacrifice upon the cross. Suffering in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine. Because he had not only the physical torment of the cross.

But also the spiritual experience of enduring the punishment of hell for all those who would be saved. So we read in Hebrews, for example, chapter 2, verse 18.

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to suffer them that are tempted. This is the example that the Lord Jesus sets for us.

God himself sharing in the sufferings of mankind, of fallen men, although he himself isn't fallen. And enduring what they endure so that he is able not only to show sympathy or to say nice words.

But fully to empathize with in the sense of sharing in that which they also go through. I think I've mentioned in the past how when we come to the book of Revelation.

[ 3 : 29 ] And we read in chapter 2, when the Lord addresses the seven churches. I won't go through all seven of them, just two or three examples will suffice. Where the Lord says unto the angel of the church at Ephesus write, these things saith he.

That holdeth the seven stars in his right hand and so on. I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience. How thou canst not bear them that are evil, hast tried them, say the apostles are not, hast found them liars, hast borne, hast patience.

And for my name's sake hast laboured and hast not fainted. And again at verse 9, to the church at Smyrna. I know thy works and tribulation and poverty, but thou art rich and so on.

And again at verse 12, the angel of the church in Prydomos. I know thy works where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is. Verse 19 again, likewise, church in Thyatira. I know thy works.

Now the word that is translated there as know doesn't just mean I happen to know intellectually. I know it in my mind. I'm aware of the information. That's not what it means. Rather, I know in the sense of I experience with you.

[ 4 : 36 ] I go through it with you. All your works. I know thy works. This is what he says to each of the churches. Their tribulations, their sufferings. And also the ways that they have failed.

It's basically saying, when you are failing, when you are saying, I was there. I saw it. I went through it with you. I know what you did. I know the good you've done. I know the bad you've done because I was right there with you in it.

I didn't make you sin. I didn't share with sin. But I experienced the effects of your sin because I was there. I know. And this is the sense in which the word know is conveyed in Revelation.

They are addressing the churches. It's a sense of bearing with them, sharing with them, experiencing it all in them and with them. As the Lord says, you know, in Isaiah, I think it's 43.

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee. And through the floods, they will not overwhelm you. When the fire comes in, you won't be burned up by it because I am with you.

[ 5 : 39 ] I know. I experience it with you. So this is the God who comforted us in all our tribulation. That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

So one of the reasons the Lord gives us the strengthening and the comfort in the times of trouble and problems, in all our tribulation, and nobody gets a free life in this world.

Nobody goes through this world without tribulation. We suffer it ourselves and we feel the pain when those near to us suffer it and endure it.

We are conscious of it. And even if we have, if we have a long happy life, then of course the part of the price of a long life is that as we get into old age, things don't work as well as they used to.

Our strength begins to go. Our functions begin to go. We decline in health and ability. Other people have to do more for us. The alternative to that, the other end of the spectrum, is that we die young in the peak of fitness and health and glory and everything else.

[ 6 : 53 ] And everybody says, oh, what a waste, what a pity, what a shame. And it is a shame and a waste that tries to give it the only way to avoid age and increasing decrepitude is if we leave early from this life.

Who wants to do that? So whether we go early, whether we go late, whether we simply are loved ones or family members or people who are taken from us or who go through particular sufferings or illness or disappointment or discouragement or unemployment or whatever it may be.

Everybody is subject to tribulation in this fallen world. There is nobody, no matter how rich or famous or beautiful they might appear to be, no matter how much everything might seem to fall into their lap.

We just don't know their lives. We don't know what's going on behind the scenes and in their hearts and behind closed doors. Nobody is without tribulation in this world.

And if we were without tribulation, what earthly use would we be to anyone? How can we possibly support or help or be with anyone in their sufferings when everything in our life has just been sunshine?

[ 8 : 05 ] Everything in our life has just been fine and beautiful stuff. How can we possibly be a help to anyone else? But the Lord himself, who knows what it is to suffer, who endured all that he suffered on the cross and in this life, thousands of years before ever we were conceived or born, he himself has already been through it.

Who comforted us in all our tribulation. Not just that. All our tribulation. That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.

It's not just so that you can feel better. You know, it's as if the Lord were to put, you know, millions and millions of pounds into the hands of one of his faithful, humble servants.

Somebody who he knew is a really good Christian who would help others and so on. Why does he give them so much? He would give them that so that they can distribute it to others. So that they can help and be a benefit and a blessing for others.

That's why the Lord gives us the gifts that he gives. And we might think, well, wouldn't it be nice to have millions of pounds? I wish the Lord would do that for me. But the Lord has given you other gifts. He's given you other abilities.

[ 9 : 15 ] He's given you other experiences. And while you might think, oh, well, I haven't really been given in. There's nothing I can share with anyone. What is it you have been through in your life?

And do you really imagine that what you have been through and maybe the sufferings or difficulties that you have faced or maybe the discouragements or maybe perhaps times of even shame that you may have faced.

That these were all simply personal to you. That these were for nothing. They were just a waste. Do you imagine you're the only person in the entire world who went through these kind of things?

Well, yes, humanly speaking, there are times when we probably do feel that. We do feel that this has never happened to anybody else except me. I'm the only one to whom these things happen.

Well, at the time, that may feel like it. But there will come times when somebody else will be going through something either very similar or almost identical.

[ 10 : 14 ] And then your experience, your sufferings, your sorrows, perhaps even your shame, becomes not a burden. But if we may say it without flippancy, a gift.

A gift which then can be shared. That you're able to get alongside somebody going through. Say, actually, I do know how you feel.

I say, oh, no, you don't because you haven't been through this. Your life is perfect. It's all together. You're fine. You don't know what I'm going through. Well, yes, actually, I do. And then comes the risky part.

Then comes the unpacking and offloading of that which maybe you've kept locked away for years. That which you can then give to this other person.

Yes, this is exactly what I went through. I did this. I suffered that. And this is how it happened to me. And yes, it was awful. It was agony. It was unbearable. But there is life after it.

[ 11 : 12 ] I'm still here. The Lord got me through it. And he will get you through it too. I do know how you feel. I have been there. He has given you the gifts, the blessings, the strengthenings, the support that he may or may not be conscious of.

Even at the time. But with hindsight, which is a tremendous gift, of course, we are able to see how the Lord brought us through. We are able to see how he alone sustained us.

And that we can communicate. Human sympathy can only go so far. Even if we have gone through the same experience that somebody else has gone through.

We are not them. We cannot say, oh yes, I am in your shoes. But if we have something else to give. Not just our personal experience.

But something additional. Something divine. Something not in this world. Something, in other words, that only the Lord can give. We can say, I have received this from the Lord.

[ 12 : 36 ] I would want you to have it too. This is what helped me. This is what got me through. It is the Lord who comforted us in all our tribulation. That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.

By the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. Now this sense of tribulation. One of the literal understandings of it.

How it is written in the original Greek. Is a sense of burden. Of a weight pressing down on you. This was one of the punishments sometimes. They used as brutal executions in the past.

To gradually load the victim with more and more heavy weights. Until they were eventually crushed. Now this is the sense of a weight bearing down on you. Like this tribulation and trouble.

But the Lord comforts, brings us through, strengthens us. Comfort is not just sympathy. It's not just there, there, it will be alright. But there is the sense with comfort of it's two kind of words here in the original.

[ 13 : 40 ] There's the con, or con. We have an M in English. But equally an N is equally appropriate. Conforta, or comfort. The forte bit is an old word from Latin or Greek that means strength or bravery.

So the forte, if you think of a piano, right? A piano which the proper, correct name for a piano is piano forte. And the key thing for giving it its name is not the keys that you play.

It's the pedals which enable you either to soften the notes, quietening them, piano, quiet. Or to make them louder. If you use the other pedal.

Forte to make them loud. So that in the same instrument you can have both loud and soft. You can have piano, soft and forte loud. So this forte, this loud, it's in the same sense of brave, the same sense of strong.

And the con, if you think of, you know, consent, confluence, you know, congratulation. Something you do together. Where there is consent, it is agreement given together.

[ 14 : 50 ] Where there is a confluence, it is two rivers flowing into one. Where there is consanguinity, it's like blood. It's the same. Where there is con, there is joint work, joint labor, joint consent coming together.

So where you have strength, conforta, it is strength together. So comfort, literally, is a joint building up of strength.

It is God giving us of his strength to build us up. The forte, the bravery, the strength that 40 implies here.

And the con 40, it's a sense of building up strength together. It's not just sympathy and nice words. It's an active, like when Jesus says, remember to the seven churches, I know, I am in there with you, building up this strength.

But it's not even simply that. There's always layers of truth, layers of depth in what the Lord desires to give us. This comfort is not merely either a sense of endurance to grit your teeth and get through it.

[16:05] Okay, we've got to sit and knuckle down. We've got to suffer. We've got to come through it. The suffering that is, yes, endurance. But it's not, again, to go back to the originals, it's not just endurance.

It's also the sense of victory on the other side. It's a sense of triumph at the end. Yes, a long, hard military campaign. But victory at the end.

A long slog of a marathon for the athlete. But victory at the end. It's a sense of triumph is built into this comfort, this joint strength.

Who comforted us in all our tribulations. You see, it doesn't matter what the problem is. It doesn't matter what the difficulty or the shame or the burden or the pressing weight that you just can't lift off yourself.

You can't get free from. He is able to lift that weight. He is able to take that cross. He is able to lift you up. You can't do it.

[17:07] But He will do it with you. He will lift it for you. Come, for that strength together. He gives you of His strength. Who comforted us in all our tribulations.

You see, I don't know what personally may be troubling your life just now. I don't know what will be in your heart. I don't know what anxieties you may have about loved ones or family members or about illness or financial worries or about job security or whatever it may be.

I don't know all these things. But the Lord knows all these things. And He knows the things that trouble you. And He doesn't want you to have to bear it alone.

He doesn't expect you to have to bear it alone. You and I, we were never intended. We were never designed to walk through this life by ourselves. We were never designed to just stumble on the dark.

We were meant to have the light of the world, the guidance. We were meant to have the Lord with us in our lives. He intended always to be there for His creatures, for His children.

[18:18] He intended always to be a support for them. The vast majority of human beings in the world go through life without that support. But that is not how the Lord intended things to be.

That is not how the Lord intended their lives to be. That is what it has become through sin. And with the devil's constant attempt to keep everyone in ignorance of the gospel.

To make sure the Bible is kept away from people. To make sure that there isn't even any Christian cultural heritage. Let alone any knowledge of the Lord. Keep people in the dark. They cannot put their trust in that of which they have not heard.

That is what Paul writes of course to the Romans. How shall they hear? Except somebody tells them. Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. This is Romans 10.

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? Now of course a preacher doesn't just mean a minister or a lay preacher in the program.

[ 19 : 19 ] It means that with which our lives proclaim. Our lives preach. You know like where Paul says in verse 12 here in our chapter.

We have had our, by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world. And conversation we think of nowadays as just meaning speech. We think of two people talking together. That's a conversation.

They are the versing of the words. They are conversing. Again there's that prefix together. Conversation. But it's not just speech. It was conversation. Conversation literally in the original sense means their life, their walk, their witness, their activity.

How they go about their lives. That is the way in which most often we preach or not to others. It is by the witness, testimony and example of our lives.

And so likewise people cannot know anything of Christ if they are not introduced to Him. If they don't see Him in action. If they don't see Him in the lives and the actions of those who are meant to be His.

[ 20 : 22 ] They won't see Him at all. And the devil intends that. He intends to keep people in the dark. But the Lord intends that nobody should have to walk through this world in the dark.

Nobody should have to do it alone. You were never intended to have to do it alone. He always intended to be there with us. Who comforted us in all our tribulations.

And this world is a veil of tears. It is besmirched by sin. It is painted, darkened by sin. And so that's the reason why everything is as wrong and skewed as it is.

But He doesn't intend it to be that way. He intends that to be put right. Where there's darkness He intends to bring the light. Where there's that which is crooked He intends to make it straight. Just as you know the prophecy that John comes to fulfil.

That where there's pits and valleys that be filled in and made smooth. Where there's madness that be brought low and made flat. So that the way, the highway is prepared for the King.

[ 21 : 28 ] That every obstacle be removed out of the way. And only the Lord is able to do that. You and I, we can't do it. We can't even do it for ourselves, let alone for somebody else.

But this is the Lord, the God of all comfort. Who comforted us in all our tribulation. That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble. By the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

As we said to the children earlier. Take one and pass it on. Receive from the Lord. And pass on to somebody else. You know, this is a central theme of these opening verses.

Because comfort and consolation may mean very similar things. And if you look from verse 3. How often this word appears. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. Who comforted us in our tribulation. That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble. By the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

[ 22 : 28 ] That's five times in two verses already. But as the sufferings of Christ have abandoned us. So are consolation. Six. Are abounded in Christ. Similar idea.

Similar word. Consolation and comfort. And whether we be afflicted. It is for your consolation. Seven. And salvation. Which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we suffer.

Or whether we be comforted. Eight. It is for your consolation. Nine. And salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast. Knowing that as you are partakers of the suffering. So shall ye be also of the consolation.

Ten. Ten times. In this wee handful of verses. God wants to drive home the message of comfort. Mutual strengthening.

Building up. Forty. Bravery. Strength. Loud bravery. Now building up together. And this sense of not only teeth gritting endurance.

[ 23 : 25 ] But of triumph. Of victory. At the end. That's what the Lord intends us to have. When you think about this. You know. Other places in scripture.

About the silver being refined and defined. You know. Like in Malachi. And Peter makes reference to it too. You know. The trial of your faith. Being much more precious. Than a gold that perisheth.

And so on. This all the Lord intends. That through our difficulties. Through our suffering. We gain the power to comfort others.

Who are likewise going through it. And to transmit to them. The knowledge. The understanding. That we weren't able to do it ourselves. I didn't just get through this friend.

Because I'm such a great guy. I got through it. Because the Lord helped me. And that's where they might say. Oh well that's alright for you. You believe in that. You know. That's great.

[ 24 : 22 ] But I don't have any of that. I wish I had your faith. Well you can have. Because it's not about the quality of your faith. It's about the quality of the saviour. Who comes and delivers and saves.

Those who will have him. Those who will receive him. In Hebrews. Again going back to it. We read not only that he himself. Has suffered. Being tempted.

But he's able to suffer them. That are tempted. But we also read in chapter 6. From verse 10. For God is not unrighteous. To forget your work.

And labour of love. Which ye have showed. Toward his name. And that ye have ministered to the saints. And do minister. And we desire that every one of you. Do show the same diligence.

To the foolish ones of hope. To the end. That ye be not slothful. But followers of them. Who through faith. And patience. And patience. Inheaded the promises. For when God made promise to Abram.

[ 25 : 15 ] Because he did swear by no greater. He swore by himself. Saying surely blessing. I will bless thee. And multiplying. I will multiply thee. And so after he had patiently endured.

He obtained the promise. That verse. After he had patiently endured. He emerged 15 there. I remember writing that down. Years ago.

Long before I was converted. Going through struggles. As every teenager does. And reading this in the Bible. And thinking. Well is God really there for me. But I wrote down that verse.

After he had patiently endured. He obtained the promise. And that is true for Abraham. And all the long suffering. Of affliction. And childlessness. And all that he went through.

And all the long waiting. For God to fulfill his word. And his faith must have been tried. Time and time again. But when he had faithfully endured. He obtained the promise.

[ 26 : 11 ] You see. We live in a society. That wants everything to be instant. We think in terms of. You know. The Lord being almost like. An auto bike. A cash machine. You push you in the buttons. And yet.

You say your right prayer. And out comes your money. And out comes your prize. At the end of the day. You pray for it. You ask it. You press the buttons. And then you get the answer. Bang. Just like that. But. In fact.

The Lord is not so much like. An auto bank. A cash machine. It's more like a savings bank. Where your prayers go in. For the savings bank. Once you put your money. In a savings bank. You know. Well in the old days.

They would stamp your book. I don't know what they do nowadays. Probably give you some. Little print out chitty. Or whatever. You've got no record of it. In your hand at all. But anyway. It's going into your bank. You put in your pennies. You scrape together your pounds.

You put them in. And the total's going up. And it's going up. And it's going up. And whether. Whether it's for a holiday. Or whether it's for some other thing. You want to use it. You're able eventually. To use that lump sum.

[ 27 : 05 ] That is there. Because of all the little pennies. That they've got in. And because of all the little times. Of going and handing over. Your precious scraped together money. And put it over. It just disappears.

You don't have it in your pocket anymore. It disappears. You're not in the bank. But it's still there. It's still there. And it will be taken out. And it will be used. And it will be used. With interest.

The Lord is not unmindful. He is not unrighteous. To forget. Your work. And labour of love. Which you have shown. Toward his name. And that you have ministered.

To the saints. And do minister. After he. Abraham had patiently endured. He obtained the promise. And so will everyone. Who holds fast to the Lord. Yes.

Your prayers may seem to be. Just disappearing. Into the void. But with the Lord. Nothing is lost. We've often made reference. In the past. To how. When the Lord had fed the five thousand.

[ 28 : 00 ] How he instructed the disciples. To gather up the broken pieces. Yes. There were twelve baskets filled. Twelve baskets. Twelve disciples. Oh. You've got a full basket. In each great. But leave that aside.

Leave aside that. And focus on the fact. That the Lord said. That nothing be lost. That would have been. The easiest thing. In the world. For Christ. Just to say. Well. Give me a couple of broken pieces. I'll just pre-open it again.

You get another load. Of loaves and fishes. I can multiply this. Any time I want. Just leave the stuff on the ground. The birds can get it. It doesn't matter too much. No. He intends that. Nothing be lost.

Of all the loaves and fishes. That he had divinely multiplied. It wasn't just so. It could be thrown around. And fed everybody he wants. That's great. No. Every bit is precious.

Every bit is the result. Of Christ's divine work. Gather it up. Let nothing be lost. But all the pennies of prayer. Into the savings bank. Of God's grace.

[ 28 : 55 ] It will come out. And it will be used. For your benefit. In the fullness of time. God will answer. And it doesn't mean necessarily. We'll get exactly the answer we thought.

Or exactly the answer we wanted. But time and time again. The Lord's children have caused to look back. And say well actually. I'm pretty glad. I didn't get the thing that I thought I wanted.

I didn't get the thing I was asking for there. God had said yes to that prayer. What a disaster that would have been. Good job that he said no then. Because he had something better.

In mind. And the same is true. Of whatsoever we are going through. Either right now. Or have gone through in the past.

You are not intended. To go through whatever it is. Alone. You never were. Mankind was never designed that way. God's intention.

[ 29 : 52 ] From the very first. Was to walk with them. Not only in the garden. And the crew of the day. But to walk with them. And right through. All the trials and difficulties of life. To face with them.

All the problems and struggles. That would come their way. To be their strength. Their shield. And protector. That's what he said to Abraham. Remember in Genesis 15. I am your shield.

And your exceeding great reward. The Lord's intention. Is to be with us. To give us that joint strength.

Not that we have strengthened ourselves. But he gains to work with the likes of us. He chooses for whatever reason. To work through the likes of us.

So that other fallen sinners like us. Will see not a divine angel coming down from heaven. Oh well. Who can argue with that? Rather that this is a God of reality.

[ 30 : 50 ] He's a God of the nitty gritty. Of the here and now. Of all the clods and sods and dirt of this world. A God who is prepared to get his hands dirty.

And to take care of those who are down in the dirt. It's not the well. Who need the physician. But those who are sick. It's not those who are riding high.

Who need a deliverer. But those who are cast down. And God in his mercy. Sends to them so often not angels from heaven. But fellow men and women. Who are down in the dirt just like that.

And who having been down in the dirt. Know what it's like. And having been brought through that. Are able to see. Actually I know who can help you. I know what the Lord has done for me.

They may reject that. They may say. No I don't want anything to do with your God. I'll just tally on. Feeling sorry for myself. Down in the dirt here. But there is a solution.

[ 31 : 45 ] And there is a redeemer. And there is a saviour. And there is a means of relief. And deliverance. And blessing. And the Lord for whatever divine reason.

Has chosen to work through the likes of us. But he doesn't send us out and say. Go and feed these people. Go and help these people. I'm not giving you anything to do it with. I'm not giving you a single thing.

Make it out of nothing. See what you're made of. No. He gives us first. That which he requires us to give to others. He doesn't say to the disciples. Go and feed those 5,000 people.

I'll find it in here. But I'll be saying. What have you got? Bring it here. He blessed it. He distributed it to the disciples. And they gave it to the people. Take one and pass it on. Who comforteth us.

In all our tribulation. That we may be able to comfort them. Which are in any trouble. By the comfort wherewith we are. We ourselves are comforted of God.

[ 32 : 44 ] We see tribulation naturally. As disaster. It is only disaster if we are left in it. It is trial.

It is testing. It is affliction. It is experience. It is all that we are going through. I would rather not be going through. But we are going through it.

But we are not going through it alone. And we are not going through it for nothing. Because with God nothing is wasted. Put thou my tears into thy bottle.

Are they not in my book? This is a God for whom every sigh is recorded. For whom every tear is buckled. For whom every crust of bread is gathered back up.

And not one sparrow falls to the ground. But that is father. The very hairs of your head. Have all been numbered. There is nothing lost with the Lord.

[ 33 : 44 ] And nothing is for nothing. That means whatever you are going through. Or have been going through. It is not just a hassle. It is not just a burden. But if I can say it without any flippancy.

Or shallowness. It is a gift of God. It is a gift which he intends to be with you through it all. To strengthen and comfort you in the midst of it.

But not just for nothing. But so that in the fullness of time. You may be able to pass on that gift. And comfort others.

Who are likewise going through it. As yet perhaps without the Lord. Who is with you first. Let's pray.