

Today
refresh, refocus, renew

OUR ONLY
COMFORT

A *Today* Devotional Series for Hard Times



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Our Only Comfort

Our world today is filled with turmoil. But not only our world—our personal lives are also full of stress, sorrow, and grief. Sometimes we wonder if we can make it through the day!

The Bible has much to say about suffering and grief. Often in its pages we are encouraged to “Fear not” when we become terrified, and to “Take refuge in the Lord” when overcome with sorrow. Many people have found comfort in the opening words of an old confession, called the Heidelberg Catechism. This confession was first used in 1563 as a teaching tool in churches in Germany, but soon other churches and believers found comfort in its teachings as well.

The confession begins by asking this question:

What is your only comfort in life and in death?

The answer affirms:

*That I am not my own,
But belong—
body and soul,
in life and in death—
to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.*

*He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.
He also watches over me in such a way
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven:
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.*

*Because I belong to him,
Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.*

The editors of the *Today* devotional know that the topic of suffering fills the minds of many—even the most faithful of believers. And so we have culled from our archives this 1-week devotional series entitled “Our Only Comfort.” It is our prayer that these readings may encourage you in your struggles and provide hope, comfort, and a way to live in and through the hard times of sorrow and grief.

— WRITTEN BY ELEANOR LAMSMA, MANAGING EDITOR OF *TODAY*

Hope for Troubled Hearts

— WRITTEN BY RUTH BOVEN

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.”

JOHN 14:1

The Bible does not ignore trouble. From the garden in Genesis to the final battle in Revelation, trouble is part of the picture. Even here, during the Last Supper Jesus and his disciples share, there has been trouble. Jesus has spoken of Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial. While the intimate picture John paints of Jesus' last hours with his disciples is beautiful in many ways, it is not a perfect picture. And for this we can be glad, for our lives are not perfect pictures either.

A familiar spiritual song that came out of the period of slavery in the United States says, “Nobody knows the trouble I've seen.” Not one of us gets through life without encountering difficulty and pain. Sometimes our trouble is so deep, our pain so profound, that it's hard to have hope. If this describes your life, know that Jesus' words are for you. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.”

Please notice that Jesus is not saying we should simply ignore or minimize our troubles. No. Jesus' instructions are simple: Trust the Father; trust me. That is what's needed. That is what brings hope to a troubled heart. Trust the one who holds your future.

Trouble does not have the final word. Trust Jesus, who has given his life to secure for you an eternal home and who offers hope for your troubled heart today.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for Jesus and for the hope he offers. Help me to trust that you hold my future and that Jesus is preparing a place for me. In his name, Amen.

The Valley of Shadows

— WRITTEN BY THEA LEUNK

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me.**

PSALM 23:4

Sheep are difficult animals to care for. They are totally dependent on the shepherd for food, guidance, and protection. Even at night, someone has to watch over the sleeping sheep in case predators attack or something else frightens them and they panic. In the chaos, lambs can be badly hurt and adult sheep injured. The work of a good shepherd never ends.

This psalm is about the Lord as a shepherd who faithfully tends his sheep. Jesus is the good shepherd ([John 10:11](#)), the great shepherd ([Hebrews 13:20-21](#)), and the chief shepherd ([1 Peter 5:4](#)).

As Jesus is our shepherd, so we are his sheep—not dumb, frightened animals, but obedient followers wise enough to follow the one who will lead us in the right ways to the right places. Our shepherd knows the “green pastures” and “still waters” that will restore us. We will reach these places only by following him obediently.

Death casts a frightening shadow over us because we are entirely helpless in its presence. We can struggle with other enemies—pain, disease, injury—but in the end our strength and courage cannot overcome death. Only one person can walk with us through that shadowy valley and bring us safely to the other side. Jesus, the perfect shepherd, promises to guide and protect us and bring us into his home forever.

When you recognize the good shepherd, follow him!

Prayer

Good Shepherd, help me always to trust in your watchful care and mercy. Help me to faithfully follow you. In your name, Amen.

The Peace of Jesus

— WRITTEN BY TOM GROELSEMA

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

JOHN 14:27

Our world needs peace. And people need peace. There is so much conflict going on between people groups, nations, political parties, religious groups, churches, and even individual Christians. There's internal conflict in the form of anxiety and stress. Where can we find peace?

Jesus gives us the answer. He said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” Lasting peace comes from Jesus. His peace is deep and provides comfort to our hurting souls. His peace brings wholeness. It's like solving a puzzle. Jesus' peace takes the scattered pieces and puts them in order. The result is peace in a variety of ways.

First of all, we have peace with God when we come to realize that his Son Jesus covered all of our sins. That leads to peace within as we know we have a Father who loves us as his child. Then, finally, there's peace with others as we learn to serve and be gracious and forgiving.

Jesus' peace is unique, much different from the world's kind of peace. He said, “I do not give to you as the world gives.” The world seeks peace, but it only touches the surface of our lives. It may lead to a temporary end of conflict, but it cannot cure the source of that conflict—sinful human hearts.

Jesus is the great peacemaker. Do you know the peace Jesus brings? His peace gives us hope in times of stress and trouble. It's an inward peace, not dependant on outer circumstances. It's the peace we can feel in the midst of our pain. Jesus talks about that kind of peace when he says, “My peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Trust in him today.

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for the lasting peace your blood provides. May I enjoy peace with God and learn to live at peace with others. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Amen.

Safe and Sound

— WRITTEN BY THEA LEUNK

I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

PSALM 91:2

If you know how big and scary and difficult the world is, this psalm is for you. These are words of comfort: God is our shelter; God will cover us with his feathers spread wide, and under God's wings we will find refuge.

Birds do that by instinct; they see a threat and spread their wings, forming a canopy of protection. Their offspring run for cover and huddle there until the danger passes.

Reflecting on the relationship between God and ourselves, the psalmist says that God will protect us like that. We can find refuge under his wings. Surely God will shield and protect us.

But it also happens that sometimes a threat doesn't pass us by, and we don't feel protected at all. God does not promise that pain and tragedy will magically flow around us, but that ultimately nothing can separate us from the reach of his arms—from his love.

We live “in the shelter of the Most High,” we rest and find comfort “in the shadow of the Almighty.” We do not fear because the all-powerful God of heaven and earth is here with us, walking alongside and in front of us and behind us, as a mother hen who will never abandon her young.

We're safe in God's care, and he is always with us. There's no better place to be.

Prayer

Lord God, protect and shelter me, I pray. Gather me under your wings and shield me. Be my refuge in every storm of life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Through Tears, Comfort

— WRITTEN BY ROB TOORNSTRA

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

MATTHEW 5:4

Grief is universal. We have all tasted the bitter pain of saying good-bye to a loved one who has died. Maybe you have shed tears at the funeral of your spouse, or you have endured the unimaginable pain of burying a child. That walk through the valley of the shadow of death may have taken place last month or many years ago, but the ache never goes away.

Unfortunately people don't always know what to do with those who mourn. Well-meaning folks may try to minimize the pain by using trite phrases or empty words. We might sentimentalize death, or deny the finality of it. Jesus cautions us that denying our pain is a dead-end road that offers little comfort.

In Jesus' kingdom, mourning is a reminder of comfort. Jesus himself, when confronted with the reality of the grave, wept (see [John 11](#)). He mourned. He grieved. And he grieves with us in the loss of a spouse, child, or other loved one. He stands alongside us in our pain, and he sheds tears with us.

But that's not all. Jesus came not only to shed tears; he came to shed his blood. He faced death squarely, submitted himself to it, and conquered it.

Because he triumphed over death, we can be assured that one day we will live in a world without disease, mourning, or cemeteries. Knowing that Jesus has overpowered death offers us comfort when we mourn. We grieve, but we have hope ([1 Thessalonians 4:13-14](#)).

Prayer

O God, the sting of death is bitter and strong. Yet it is not final! Comfort all who mourn; assure them that death is swallowed up in your victory. Amen.

Quiet Comfort

— WRITTEN BY THEA LEUNK

**I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.**

PSALM 131:2

Many psalms are about battles, doubts, and trouble. Many others are about thanksgiving, joy, and praise to God in worship. But this psalm has a much different tone. It is more quiet and reflective.

Instead of portraying a king celebrating a victory or a priest leading worship in the temple, this psalm pictures a young child consoled and comforted by its mother. Think of a child who fell and skinned a knee and now, having been soothed and comforted, is able to fall asleep in its mother's arms. In a way like that child, the psalmist is humble and at peace, not haughty or concerned with great matters, able to rest and trust in God's comforting care.

God's promises and care are indeed what calm and quiet our souls, like a toddler safe in the comfort of its mother's embrace. The promise here is that when I fall down and get hurt, or even cry out my frustration in a tantrum, God will be there to pick me up and say, "There, there, it's alright. I love you, and will always take care of you."

I experience that quiet comfort when I read this psalm and picture myself in the lap of my heavenly Father, soothed, comforted, and at peace like a little child.

I experience that quiet comfort when I read Jesus' words: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" ([John 14:27](#)).

In what ways does God comfort you?

Prayer

Lord, calm my thoughts and quiet my soul. Jesus, help me to rest and be at peace with you. Amen.

Suffering Versus Glory

— WRITTEN BY HENRY KRANENBURG

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

ROMANS 8:18

Claiming what this verse says is easier for some than for others. It depends on what kind of suffering you have experienced or are currently enduring.

Paul is being realistic. Whether it's trying to make sense of ourselves, fighting off sin, struggling in relationships, bearing wounds of brokenness, being limited by health, enduring the pain of depression or a host of other situations, suffering is real for Christians as well as non-Christians.

Paul wants us to gain perspective, so he invites us to compare our suffering to the glory that will be revealed in us. But Paul does not define that glory as life without adversity, as if we won't have health issues or financial needs or marital struggles or the like. Our goal is not so much to beat suffering as it is to live fully and completely as children of God.

God reminds us that we have his Spirit—always. And the Spirit will help us in all situations, even interceding for us when we struggle to pray. Even in the worst of times, we are not alone. I find great comfort in that.

When I suffer, I need that reminder. I may want an easier life, but what I need most is to know that God is continually with me and at work in me. That gives me strength to face the challenges, knowing I am not alone.

I pray that you also experience that comfort and strength.

Prayer

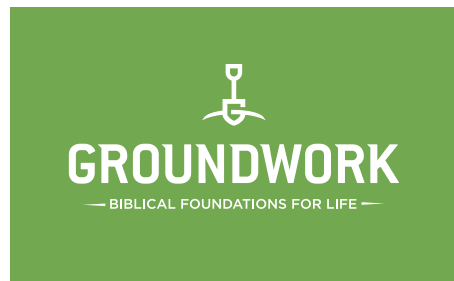
Heavenly Father, in times of struggle and suffering, assure me of your strengthening presence in my life and remind me of what that means for the future. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

About *Today*

Today is a daily devotional that helps God's people refresh, refocus, and renew their faith. Printed bi-monthly and published daily online, it reaches hundreds of thousands of readers in North America and abroad via email, mobile app, social media, and the print booklet.

Originally called "The Family Altar," the *Today* daily devotional was first published in 1950 and has been serving the spiritual formation needs of individuals and families for over 70 years!

Today is one of a family of programs from:



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