

THE WAITING ROOM

Title: Part 5 – “Why Me? Why This? Why Now?”

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Come on praise Him today if you believe those words! Give Him a shout of praise if you are thankful that He is your firm foundation! As we continue in this moment of worship and prepare our hearts for God’s Word I want to read our text today from 2 Corinthians, chapter 1. The Apostle Paul writes this:

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. ⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Come on, could anyone in the House today use some comfort? Let’s ask God to open our hearts and minds, would you pray with me?

[PRAYER TIME]

Hey, before you grab a seat high five 5 people and tell them “The God of all comfort is here!” While everyone in the house is saying “Hi,” as always we welcome our online family joining us later in the week. We are FOR you, so let us know how we can pray for you or serve you. AND if you are anywhere in the Bay Area we hope you will join us in person soon.

SO, rewind with me 27 years! I’m talking about 1999. Everyone was worried about Y2K. Anyone remember the hysteria over Y2K? 1999 was the year the Matrix was released. Britney Spears exploded onto the scene. AND I was twenty years old. I had spent a couple years wandering through the automotive industry, but was now beginning to sense God’s call on my life for fulltime ministry. So, I left and took a job as a lowly intern at my home church working with middle school students. AND as you can imagine, I was as green! Or I guess today we might say I was a newb.

BUT one afternoon a call came in from the local high school that a student had stepped in front of traffic and taken his own life. So, the youth pastor grabs me and says, “You’re

coming.” So, we drive over to be—and I'm using air quotes here— “grief counselors.” I was only a couple years removed from high school myself and I walked into a room full of devastated teenagers who are looking at me like I'm supposed to have something. Some word that fixes this and makes it right.

I had nothing.

AND can I be honest with you. That feeling never fully goes away. Like I'm knocking on 50's door here in a couple years, I've been an ordained minister for 25, and when I get invited into people's worst moments, and I'm expected to walk in with answers, most of the time, I still don't have them. Because I've got the same questions they do. There's no verse that makes a casket OK. There's no clever Christian thing you say that makes the heartbreak go away.

You've been there too, right? A friend's marriage detonates, and you're sitting across from them at Panera, and they're crying into a coffee, and you have absolutely no idea what to say. So, you just... sit there feeling useless. Wishing you were better at this.

I know that's kind of a dark intro, but I want you to hold onto that tension as we dive into this today. Because by the end of our time, I want to convince you that sitting there, feeling useless, might have been one of the most important things you could have done. And I want to show you why, YOU specifically with your specific scars, might be the most qualified person in the room to comfort someone else.

BEFORE we unpack 2 Corinthians 1, if you are just walking into this let me get us all back into the flow of what's going on. We are in week 5 of a collection of messages called, “The Waiting Room,” that has been wrestling with one question: **what do you do when there's nothing you can do but wait?** When you're stuck in a situation or season and there's no way forward, no way out, and it just is what it is. What do you do?

SO, we've visited some different waiting rooms like the doctor's office, that was week one—we learned don't interpret God's silence as His absence. Then we spent a couple hours at the auto repair shop where we learned that as followers of Jesus we can receive the very thing we'd rather return as a gift with a purpose and a promise. Week three was dark, we were B-47 waiting at the DMV! We learned about contentment and that the epicenter of what's driving you crazy is the epicenter of what God's up to in your life. And then last week, the hard plastic chair outside the principal's office as you wait with your child. We discovered you have to stay under the weight of the wait and let it finish its work, because that's the only way anybody's ever matured.

Each week we have pointed our souls back to this truth that has anchored us. Hopefully you know it by now. Say it with me:

Even now, God is not absent; He is present. He is not apathetic; He is attentive. He is not angry; He is filled with affection for me.

Let's read it again... NOW one more time without looking... That is the assurance we all need in the middle of the Waiting Rooms of life, amen?

AND I've got one more waiting room for us today. I saved this one for last on purpose, because it's the room where everything we've talked about finally goes somewhere. Today, we are going to spend some time in the ER waiting room at two in the morning.

How many of you have spent some time in the ER just waiting? I don't know about your experience but for me it's the vending machine that takes your dollar and gives you nothing. It's the TV bolted up in the corner playing an infomercial nobody asked for. It's either freezing cold or feels like a tropical rain forest it's so hot and humid. Then there are the chairs, the ones with the wooden arms and the vinyl that squeaks. There's the fluorescent lights that make everybody look a little bit dead already. There's a check-in window with a person behind it who has seen it all and stopped flinching or caring a long time ago. And there's a clock on the wall, and I swear the ER is the one place on earth where you can watch a clock physically refuse to move.

AND you're there because something went sideways fast, right? A fever that spiked. A fall. A phone call from the highway patrol. A chest pain that didn't feel right. You didn't plan your night around this. You just suddenly found yourself under those lights, filling out a clipboard with shaking hands, waiting on a set of doors you're not allowed through, where people you've never met are making decisions about someone you love.

But here's what I want you to notice about this waiting room, because it's different from the other four. Look around. It's 2 a.m. and it's packed! There's a guy still in his work uniform, hasn't even been home yet. A woman is clutching a little kid's jacket, but there is no kid. Somebody's grandmother is staring at a wall, her purse in her lap like she's guarding it out of habit. There's a young couple, and one of them is doing that thing where they keep standing up and sitting back down because they don't know what to do with their body. Right?

AND none of you know each other! None of you would've picked each other. On any normal day your lives would never intersect. But right now, at two in the morning, you're all in the same room, under the same ugly lights, waiting on news that none of you can control. My point is: **nobody waits alone in this room.**

And that's the message today. Because the other four waiting rooms, you kind of sit in by yourself. BUT this one is communal. And the Apostle Paul is about to tell us that the whole point of what God does in your waiting—the entire reason—is so that eventually

you become the person who can sit down next to a stranger in that room and actually help.

If you are looking for a message title I'm calling this:

"Why Me? Why This? Why Now?"

Anyone ever said those things in a waiting room before? For four weeks we've talked about what God is doing IN YOU while you wait. Today, is about what He wants to do THROUGH YOU! So, let me walk you through three things Paul says about that, and I promise you, by the third one, your waiting room might take on a whole new meaning.

Here we go, write this down:

1. Let God comfort what He won't cancel.

Some of you are like, "I'd rather write down let God cancel what is not comfortable." BUT look at how the Apostle Paul opens our main text today, this is verse 3 of 2 Corinthians 1. He says:

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all COMFORT,

Now, here is what I find fascinating about this. This is the same letter, not a different one, but the same exact letter where Paul tells us about his thorn in the flesh.

Remember the thorn from week two? Whatever it was, it was painful, humiliating, wouldn't go away, and Paul begged God three times to yank it out and God said no?

So, this is the same guy, and this is the same letter. And that's crazy, right? He writes about his thorn and then in a couple more pages calls God "the Father of compassion" and "the God of all comfort." AND this is where some of you want to raise your hand and go, "Yeah, Brian, that's actually my whole problem. How is He the God of compassion when I'm living through stuff that feels about as far from compassionate as it gets?"

If you are asking ME that question, I'm going to dodge that and change the subject. BUT the good news is the Apostle Paul tackles it head on. He knows what his audience is thinking because, remember, he was living it! He's writing this under house arrest, chained to a guard, writing the "God of all comfort" from inside a situation God has flatly refused to change. He, of all people, has earned the right to be bitter here. And he isn't.

SO, watch what he actually claims. Verse 4:

⁴ who comforts us in ALL our troubles,

Not “some” but ALL. And here's the part I don't want you to miss. That includes the troubles He fixes **AND** the troubles He leaves right where they are.

I want to camp here for a moment because this matters more than almost anything else we have talked about over the past 5 weeks. The people who wrote your New Testament—Paul especially—were not lounging on a beach somewhere, umbrella drinks in hand, deciding what to blog about to grow their brand. These were people who got beaten. Imprisoned. Shipwrecked. Run out of towns. Most of them died badly for what they believed. And **THOSE** are the people who looked out at a world full of real pain, and a God they insisted was good, **AND** they held both of those in the same two hands and did not let go of either one!

That's the faith we inherited: **not a faith with no wounds, but a faith that wouldn't let go of God in spite of them!**

Do you understand what that means for you and I? It means the tension you feel, “How can God be good when this is happening...” that is not a new problem you have to solve before you're allowed to believe. The very people who gave us the faith felt that exact tension in their own bodies, harder than you ever will, and they came out the other side still believing. Which means there's a way through this that doesn't require you to abandon a good and compassionate God or deny the painful realities of our fallen world. They found a way and we can too.

SO, let me ask you something along these lines. When you're in a hard season, you can define whatever hard is for you, but when life gets painful do you pray for comfort? Be honest. No, you don't! Nobody prays for comfort, what do you pray for? For the problem to go away! For a miracle! You want the scan to come back clean, the marriage to turn, the check to clear. And listen—you're allowed to pray that. Pray it loud. Pray it all day. God's a big boy; He can handle your asking.

BUT there's a thing Paul's figured out that most of us haven't. God is the God of all comfort in the circumstances He changes **AND** in the circumstances He won't! Either way. That's the one thing on the table no matter which way your wait breaks! He might not cancel the trouble **BUT** He will comfort you in it! That's not a consolation prize; that's the actual promise!

So, let God comfort what He won't cancel. **AND** number 2:

2. Receive comfort as a delivery, not a destination.

So, God comforts us, now follow the sentence because Paul does not stop where we'd stop. Verse 4 again:

⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, SO THAT

Everyone say, "So that." That's a purpose clause. The comfort's going somewhere. It's got a forwarding address. AND if you're like me, you're really hoping the sentence finishes, "so that you can finally get some relief." Or "so that you can get out of this." Here's how it actually finishes:

~~*who comforts us in all our troubles,~~ **SO THAT** we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Read that again slowly... SO THAT we can comfort those in any trouble... with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Paul is reorientating us. The comfort God pours into you was never meant to stop in you. You're not the destination. You're the delivery route. God comforts you so that you can turn around and hand that exact comfort to somebody else who's right now sitting where you used to sit.

I wrote it in my notes this way:

God comforts us so that we can comfort others.

That's it. That's why. When you couldn't figure out why God let you go through what you went through this is the first crack of light Scripture gives us. God comforts us to comfort others. Turn to somebody next to you say, "God comforts us to comfort others."

Now let me add one word to it, because I think it's the word that actually explains how any of this works. It's not just that God comforts us to comfort others. It's:

God comforts us THROUGH others to comfort others.

The way God usually—USUALLY—comforts people is not with some sudden angelic visit. We do see that happening in Scripture, but usually God comforts us THROUGH another person. AND it's usually somebody who's been right where we are. AND Paul says God does that so that you can go be that person for the next one. That's how His comfort works and moves.

And honestly, this should take some pressure off! Because a lot of us are waiting on God to comfort us in some dramatic, supernatural, goosebumps-down-the-arms kind of way and meanwhile He keeps sending us PEOPLE. Like a friend who showed up with dinner and didn't try to fix anything. The older person at church who pulled you aside and said, "I know how it feels." The text from someone you have not talked to in months that comes at exactly the right moment. That was all God. You wanted an angel and instead He sent a person. AND He's going to do the same thing in reverse; He's going to prompt YOU to be somebody's comfort. They will be praying for a miracle and God sends them you.

In fact, are you ready for this? Ask the person next to you if they are ready for this. In these five verses from Paul, the word “comfort” shows up 10 times! Don’t start counting in your Bible, just take my word for it. Ten times in five verses! AND the Greek word literally means: **to call alongside, to pull up a chair, to come sit next to.**

But here's the part that might mess with your theology. That same root word Paul uses here for comfort is one of the names Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit. Jesus uses it in John's Gospel, the Comforter, the One called alongside. Which means when you sit down next to a hurting person and you bring them the comfort you got from God; you are literally doing the work of the Holy Spirit! You're not just being nice. You're being the Comforter's hands! You've been drafted into the Spirit's own job description!

That means when you sat in that waiting room with your crying friend, even though you didn't know what to say, that was holy ground! Amen? God comforts us THROUGH others to comfort others.

Alright, put verse 3 & 4 up and then I'll give you the last takeaway from verse 5, remember Paul says:

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Last one:

3. Let your worst season qualify you.

From the guy who had the thorn in the flesh that God would not remove, who was beaten, shipwrecked, bitten by a deadly snake... verse 5:

⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

In other words, whatever you've suffered, Jesus, in some way, suffered it too. He was betrayed by people close to Him. He spent a night in agony begging His Father to change the plan. He knew what it was to look at a future He didn't want and have to walk into it anyway. Hebrews says we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize because He's been in the chair. There's no waiting room you can sit in where He's going to lean over and go, “Wow, yeah, I've got nothing for this one.”

AND here's what that means for you, practically:

Your capacity to comfort is determined by the degree to which you've suffered.

Amen? Let me prove it to you. You've been in a genuinely dark place at some point. And people tried to help. They sent the texts. "Thinking of you." "Praying for you." "Everything happens for a reason..." By the way, whoever taught you that, please stop. BUT you know they meant well by all those things. You do. But you're sitting there thinking, "You have no idea. You have no clue what this actually feels like."

BUT then somebody walks in who's been there. Not read about it or listened to a podcast. Been there and come back. And they don't even have to say much. They just show up and something in you exhales, because for the first time you're eyeball to eyeball with a person who actually gets it. It's not sympathy anymore, it's empathy. It's something with weight to it. Because when that person says "it's going to be OK" it means something. They're not saying it because it's the polite thing to say, or because they read it in a devotional. They're saying it because they stood where you're standing, and they're still here. Their "you're going to make it" has a scar on it. You believe them, because they paid for the right to say it.

That's the fellowship of suffering. There's a bond between people who've hurt in the same place that goes past small talk, past theology, past how long you've known each other. Amen? AND watch how far Paul is willing to push this, because verse 6 is a little startling if you actually stop to understand it. He says:

⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

Paul is telling the Corinthians that his suffering—the beatings, the shipwrecks, the thorn, the jail—some of that was FOR them! Not just for him and what God was doing there, BUT FOR them! He's saying, "The stuff I've been through? God was stockpiling comfort in me that I'm now handing to you. My distress had your name on part of it."

Come on, that's a stunning thing to believe about your own pain. That some of what you've walked through wasn't only about you. That God was, in the middle of your worst season, quietly loading you up with something a specific person is going to need later, a person you maybe haven't even met yet! That your suffering has been drawing interest. And one day it will pay dividends, but not to you. For them!

Your own experience testifies to the truth of this. Because nobody with a tidy, wrinkle-free life can walk into that ER at 2 a.m. and sit with the woman holding the empty jacket.

But YOU can! Because you've held the empty jacket. You're uniquely qualified. And "uniquely" means nobody else can do it quite the way you can.

I was studying for this message and came across some research done by the University of Michigan back in 2003. A woman named Stephanie Brown led it and what they did was follow 423 older couples for five years. They were trying to figure out what helps people live longer—is it **GETTING** support from others, or **GIVING** it? Well, it turns out that after following these couples for 5 years that the people who regularly gave support to others (they helped their neighbors, showed up for people in need) those people were dramatically less likely to die! More than twice as protected as the people who gave nothing and only received support. Their conclusion to the study was that the act of giving is what adds life.

SO, when the Bible says God comforts you so you can comfort others, come on, that's not God assigning you extra homework on top of your pain. That's God handing you the very thing that's going to breathe life back into you! Comforting somebody else is one of the ways God resurrects the person doing the comforting! You think you're limping into that room to help somebody else, and you walk out more alive than when you came in! God heals TWO people in that exchange and lets you think you were just doing them a favor! Come on praise Him if you have ever received something when you thought you were the one giving something!

Five weeks ago, we started with a question: **what do you do when there's nothing you can do but wait?** And this whole time the enemy's been whispering the same three lies. You'll never be happy again. Nothing good can come from this. There's no point in going on. I want to say this as clearly as I know how: every one of those is a lie! You've been comforted so you can comfort. You've waited so you can walk somebody else through the wait. That thing you went through wasn't wasted. It was training!

You can do one of two things with a sorrow. You can bury it, stuff it down, pretend it didn't happen, waste it. OR you can leverage it. You can leverage it on behalf of the people you're now uniquely qualified to reach. The people you can look dead in the eye and say, "I've been exactly where you are, I understand it in my bones, and I'm here to tell you there is life on the other side of this."

Bury it or leverage it. Those are the options. And only one of them turns your worst season into somebody else's rescue and actually gives YOU life in the process.

Here's how Paul says it. This is the promise I want to leave in your hands, from another letter he wrote from another waiting room—a jail cell. Philippians 1:6:

⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

Church, God has started something in you. And He is not a God who leaves projects half-built! The waiting room isn't where your story stalls out! It's where He does the work! And part of that good work is a few seasons in a waiting room we'd never sign up for.

Think back over these five weeks. The doctor's office, where we learned God isn't absent even if He seems silent. The repair shop, where we learned to receive the thing we'd return. The DMV, where we found out the center of what's driving us crazy is the epicenter of what He's doing. The chair outside the principal's office, where we decided to stay under the weight and let it finish its work. And now the ER, where it all finally makes sense, because this is the room where you stop being the one who needs help and start being the help!

Five rooms! One God! Who was in every single one of them the whole time, doing something you couldn't see from your chair! Your difficulty didn't catch God off guard. It caught YOU off guard. He's not scrambling! He's building! And on the other side, you walk out uniquely qualified to carry the exact comfort you received straight to the next person who needs it!

SO, two things before we pray and close this out:

If you've never really said yes to Jesus, I want you to notice where all of this comfort starts. Verse 3 says it starts with "the Father of compassion." It starts with Him. Everything we've talked about runs on being connected to the God who actually meets you in the waiting. And that connection is one honest prayer away. If that's stirring in you, don't sit on it. Today can be the day the whole thing starts by surrendering your life to Jesus.

And if you're a believer, here's your assignment, and it's not complicated. This week, God's going to put somebody in front of you who's sitting in a waiting room you've already graduated from. I believe you'll recognize it, and when it happens—and it won't be convenient—but when you recognize it don't give the person a Christian cliché and run. STOP! Pull up a chair. Look them in the eye and tell them the truest thing you know: "I've been there AND there is life on the other side. Would you mind if I prayed for you?"

That's the fellowship of suffering AND that's what you have been prepared for the whole time.

Because EVEN NOW, say it with me church, even now **God is not absent; He is present. He is not apathetic; He is attentive. He is not angry; He is filled with affection for you.** Let's pray.