


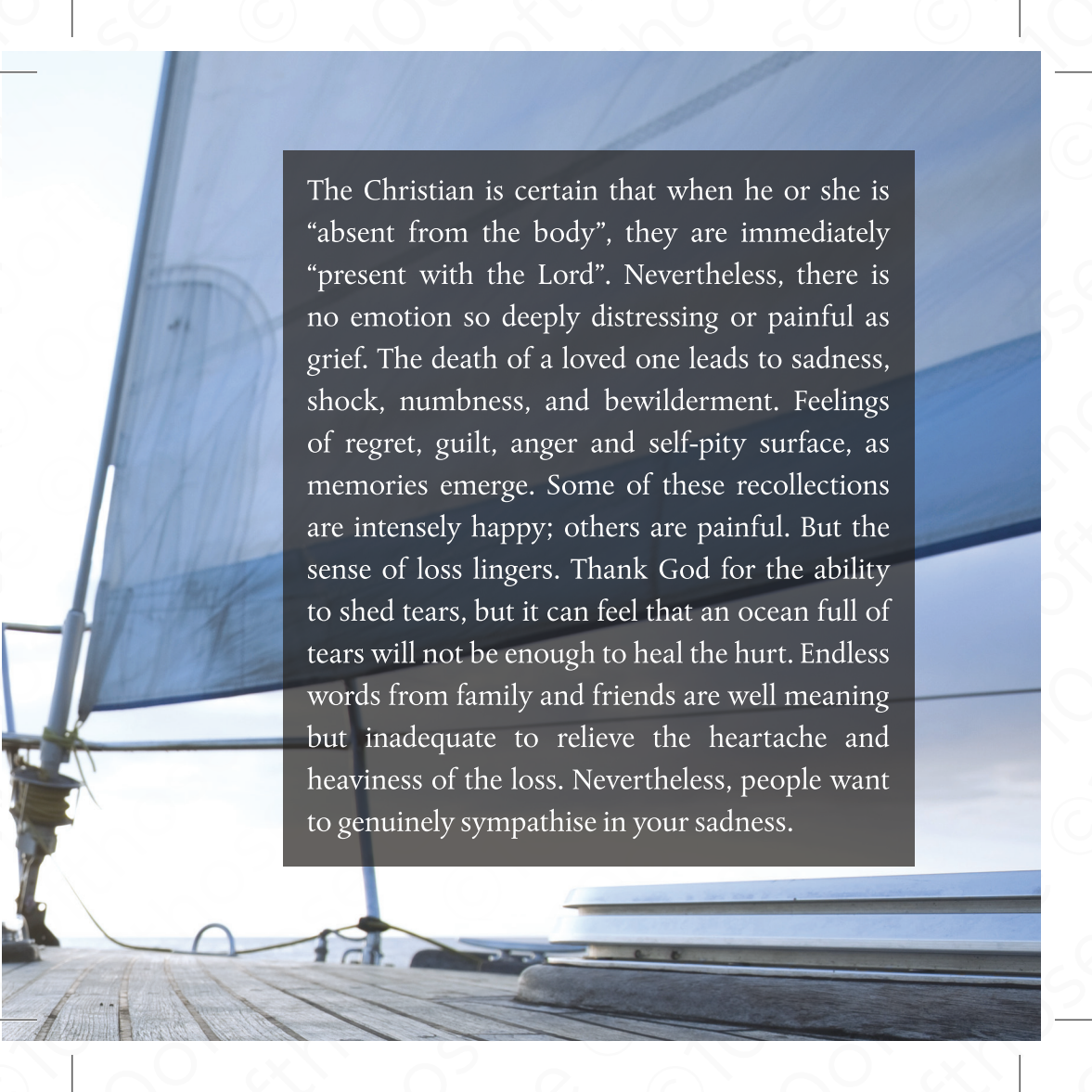
COMFORT

IN TIMES OF SORROW



Imagine you are standing on a seashore. A sailing ship is at your side spreading her white sails to the morning breeze as she sets sail for the ocean. The ship looks beautiful and strong. You watch her until eventually she seems like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky meet each other. Someone at your side says, “There, she’s gone.” But where has she gone? Gone from your sight, that’s all. She is just as large in mast and hull as she was when she left the shore. She is still carrying her load of living weights to its destination. Just at the moment when someone says, “She’s gone” another voice on a distant shore shouts, “She’s here!”¹ Death is similar. Earth’s loss is eternity’s gain. Each one of us has an endless existence, first in this world, and then in the next.

¹ Based on a Victor Hugo idea.




The Christian is certain that when he or she is “absent from the body”, they are immediately “present with the Lord”. Nevertheless, there is no emotion so deeply distressing or painful as grief. The death of a loved one leads to sadness, shock, numbness, and bewilderment. Feelings of regret, guilt, anger and self-pity surface, as memories emerge. Some of these recollections are intensely happy; others are painful. But the sense of loss lingers. Thank God for the ability to shed tears, but it can feel that an ocean full of tears will not be enough to heal the hurt. Endless words from family and friends are well meaning but inadequate to relieve the heartache and heaviness of the loss. Nevertheless, people want to genuinely sympathise in your sadness.

THERE IS COMFORT

Who then can help us at such a time? Where can genuine comfort be found? Not in social life, nor in solitude; not in the stars or spiritism, but in the Saviour. The Bible says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us...” God cares for us, can cope with us and will comfort us in our deepest distress, if we turn to Him and trust Him. God, in the Bible, promises:

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.”

(Isaiah 43:2-3)



There is comfort in knowing that God has Himself suffered grief over the death of a loved one, and therefore understands how we feel, and sympathises in all our sorrows. God's one and only Son, the Lord Jesus, came from heaven to suffer the horrible death of execution on a Roman cross. Jesus was born for that episode in His life. It was during the hours on the cross that Jesus actually paid the price of our sin. He died the death of us all, for He was carrying the penalty of all our wrongdoing, to buy forgiveness for us, if only we will trust Him. God is just, and must punish wrongdoing, but Christ has died in our place and taken the judgment which should be ours. Such is God's love to each of us.

There is comfort in knowing that Jesus has overcome death by rising again from the dead. He is the One who has come back from the dead and has told us of life after death. Death has been defeated. It is not the end. For all who are trusting in Christ as their personal Saviour, it is the doorway to eternal life in heaven.

There is comfort in knowing that God promises to never leave us once we have put our trust in Him.

There is comfort in knowing that God is willing to forgive us for all our wrongdoing, if by faith we call upon Him. Death is not the end. God the Maker of heaven and earth, the Giver of life, has told us in His Word, the Bible, that there is life after death:

“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

(Psalm 16:11)

“Jesus said...‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies.’”

(John 11:25)

“...our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

(2 Timothy 1:10)

In some ways it could be a daunting thought that God knows the secrets of the hearts and lives of all men and women. After death, each individual will stand before Him, and then it will be impossible to hide anything from Him. Lord Hailsham, a previous Lord Chancellor, said, “When I die and stand before God in judgement, I will plead guilty and cast myself upon the mercy of the court.” How wise of him! The Bible teaches that there is both heaven and hell: a place of bliss and a place of banishment. They are for eternity. None of us deserves heaven; we are simply not good enough. However, we need not be frightened. Psalm 23 has classic Bible words:

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

(Psalm 23:4)

It is possible to be absolutely certain of a place in heaven, through trusting the Lord Jesus.

Our sins (wrong thinking, speaking and doing) separate us from God. The Bible teaches that it is our sin which is the sting of death. Wondering how our lives will be looked on and how we will fare when it comes to life after death can be troubling issues. Deep down we know that it is not true that we've "never done anything wrong". All of us have sinned. How will all this affect us? How can one be sure of heaven? Jesus came to pay the price of our wrong attitudes and actions. The Bible says,

"There is... no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

(Romans 8:1)

A family was having a picnic in the Yorkshire Dales, when suddenly the seven-year-old girl began to panic. A bee was flying near her and she, tightly shutting her eyes, was petrified. Quickly her father stood up and swiped away the bee. As he did, it stuck to him, stung him, shook itself and flew away free.

Turning to his daughter and reassuring her said, “You’re all right now. A bee can only sting once, and I have taken the sting.” Similarly, Christ in His death on the cross took the sting of death – our sin – on Himself as He died. We can be safe for eternity, because of Jesus. Not only did He die once and for all, but rose again from the dead once and for all. He has conquered death. The living Christ promises His presence in life, through death and for all eternity. This is how the Bible describes heaven:

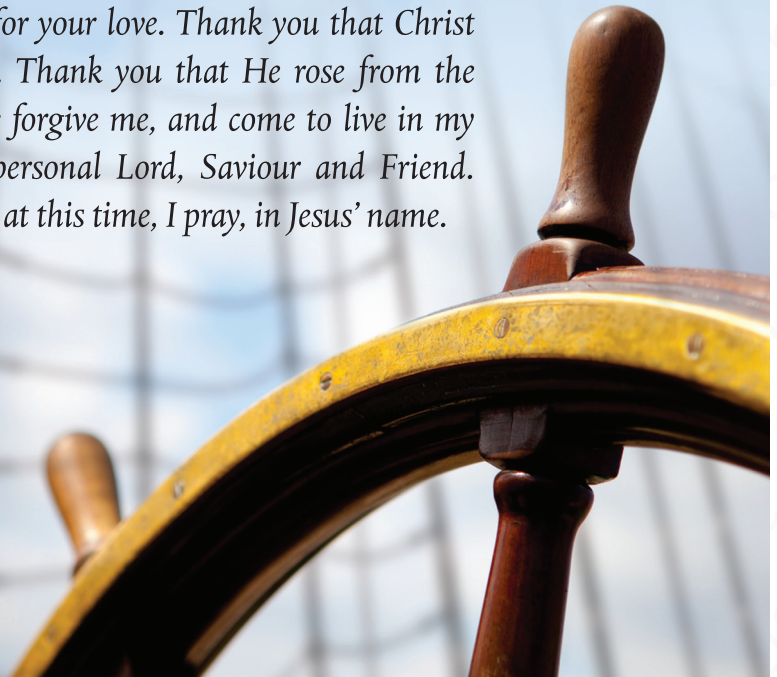
“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

(Revelation 21:1,3,4)

It is normal and natural to grieve. However, even at this time of sorrow, God can draw near to you to strengthen and help you. Simply ask Him in prayer. Ask Him to become your Friend and Comforter, your Lord and Saviour. He will be with you through every season of your life. His presence will sustain you in difficult and joyful times. He is not merely a crutch in tough times, but a constant Friend. When eventually death comes to you, its devastating power will have been broken because of the Lord Jesus. A well-known gospel preacher was returning with his children from the funeral service of his wife. He wondered what to say to comfort his motherless children. Just then, a huge moving lorry passed them, casting its shadow over the car. Inspiration came, and the father asked his children, "Children, would you rather be run over by a truck or by its shadow?" The answer was clear. Then he said, "Did you know that two thousand years ago the lorry of death ran over the Lord Jesus in order that only its shadow might run over us?"

You may find these words helpful to pray, asking God to bring you into a living relationship with Himself.

Dear God, thank you that you understand all my feelings. You know that there is so much in life that I regret, and I am sorry for all that is wrong. Thank you for your love. Thank you that Christ died for me. Thank you that He rose from the dead. Please forgive me, and come to live in my life as my personal Lord, Saviour and Friend. Comfort me at this time, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.



CONCLUSION

In times of sorrow, it is good to know that God, who made heaven and earth, has spoken to all humanity through His Word, the Bible. I would recommend systematically reading a chapter or so of the Bible, day by day. Perhaps you could start with the Gospel of John. You will see how Jesus deals with the issue of suffering and death particularly in chapters 11 and 21. You will read how He teaches by His own life and example what life is all about, and how we can know a close friendship with God. As with any other book though, I recommend starting at the beginning of John's Gospel and reading through to the end. As you read ask God to reveal Himself to you. However, I have selected from various parts of the Bible, passages which I trust will be of help at this difficult time.



Psalm 25:14-21

“The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.”

Lamentations 3:18-24

So I say, “My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD.” I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”

Matthew 6:25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Psalm 36:5-9

Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

John 3:16-21

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

John 11:25-26

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Psalm 23:1-6

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

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