



Call: (Psalm 18:1-3)

I love you, LORD God, and you make me strong.

You are my mighty rock, my fortress, my protector, the rock where I am safe, my shield, my powerful weapon, and my place of shelter.

I praise you, LORD!

I prayed, and you rescued me from my enemies.

Hymn: STF 58 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bekyy2PG1Cc>

Lord, I come before your throne of
grace;
I find rest in Your presence
And fulness of joy.
In worship and wonder
I behold Your face,
Singing what a faithful God have I.

Chorus
What a faithful God have I,
What a faithful God.
What a faithful God have I,
Faithful in every way.

Lord of mercy, You have heard my cry;
Through the storm You're the beacon
My song in the night.
In the shelter of Your wings,
Hear my heart's reply,
Singing what a faithful God have I.
Chorus

Lord all sovereign, granting peace
from heaven,
Let me comfort those who suffer
With the comfort You have given.
I will tell of Your great love for as long
as I live,
Singing what a faithful God have I.
Chorus

Robert & Dawn Critchley

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Prayer: Loving God, this is the day you have made and we thank you for it.

We thank you for the many blessings you have given us, homes, friends and families.

We thank you for the vastness of the universe and the diversity of the natural world.

We thank you for the opportunities and pleasures this day will bring.

We thank you for the love of Christ encircling us, the Spirit guiding us and your eternal purpose constantly inspiring us.

We bring you our praise, gladly and reverently, declaring your greatness, acknowledging your faithfulness, and marvelling at your holiness.

You are ever at work in our lives, striving to help and strengthen, to heal and comfort, to forgive and restore.

Loving God, forgive us that we sometimes lose sight of your great love and have been forgetful of you. We have failed to appreciate your many blessings.

We know we have failed in so much; we have not given you due recognition, we have not lived as your people.

Have mercy on us, forgive our wrongdoings, renew our faith and restore us to your side, so that through you we can live more faithfully as your servants. AMEN

Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 “Praise to the God of All Comfort”

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 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. 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.

Hymn: STF 655 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrNoQisGbDw>

We cannot measure how you heal
or answer every sufferer's prayer,
yet we believe your grace responds
where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
survive to hold and heal and warn,
to carry all through death to life
and cradle children yet unborn.

So some have come who need your help,
and some have come to make amends,
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
to mend the body, mind and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain
and make your broken people whole.

The pain that will not go away,
the guilt that clings from things long past,
the fear of what the future holds,
are present as if meant to last.
But present too is love which tends
the hurt we never hoped to find,
the private agonies inside,
the memories that haunt the mind.

John L Bell (born 1949) and Graham Maule
(1958-2019)
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Message

“Prayer for comfort”

There is no doubt what the topic of Paul’s prayer is in his opener to the second letter he writes to the church in Corinth. The word comfort appears in one form or another 9 times in this prayer.

So, what is it that Paul is praying for?

A clue is in the title of this prayer “Praise to the God of all comfort.”

The word comfort literally means, with- *com* and, strength or courage- *fort* or *fortis*. The Latin word *fortis* means brave.

And why is comfort the topic for Paul’s prayer?

The church in Corinth was newly established but suffering from outside influences and temptations. In his first letter Paul had written to the people in the church at Corinth quite severely about specific issues of marriage and morality. He then learnt that false teachers had visited and were undermining his teaching. Other idols were being worshipped; immoral living was still endemic. Followers of the Christian life struggled with their new lifestyle and faith, and suffered criticism and even persecution. Paul appears to be practising what he is preaching – he has compassion for the people of Corinth, and writes to bring them comfort and to encourage them to comfort one another.

And what authority does Paul have to bring this prayer?

In the opening verses to this letter, Paul gives his credentials, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,” and he is more than qualified to speak with authority, despite the efforts of those false teachers who were twisting the truth.

What other qualifications did Paul have for writing about the need for comfort?

Paul had not only been a zealous persecutor of Christians, and so was witness to the severe discomfort meted out to followers of Jesus, but he was now not only a follower, but also a teacher and preacher himself, and so was on the receiving end of real suffering. He and Silas had been imprisoned in Philippi, in a heavily guarded dungeon, in chains. Paul had spoken often of the thorn in his side, reference perhaps to some physical affliction that caused him pain and suffering, but did not impede his ministry. He was also aware of false teachers speaking against and undermining his ministry.

Paul writes from a position of not just sympathy for his readers, rather from a position of empathy. He doesn't just feel sorry for them. He has personally experienced situations similar to what that they are possibly facing.

If this is a prayer for comfort, then why is it entitled a “Praise to the God of all comfort”?

What is there to praise God about in suffering?

The answer lies in the title Paul uses for God – the Father of compassion and God of all comfort.

God our Father is a God of compassion. God is not some distant deity, who feels sorry for us when we are struggling or suffering. He is there with us in our difficulties. He himself suffered terribly when Jesus, His Son, the “Suffering Servant,” endured humiliation, torture and pain, and died a criminal's death on a cross for our sakes.

The word compassion means to suffer together. Again, that word *com*, meaning with, and passion, from the Latin word *pati*, meaning suffering. The connection of suffering together with another moves us beyond sympathy, beyond just feeling sorry for someone, into the realm of empathy, knowing from past personal experience what struggles are being faced.

Praising God acknowledges that He is the source of all comfort because He has compassion. This is a starting point for us. God has compassion and so can give us comfort.

Compassion is the feeling that arises within us when we are confronted with someone else's suffering and feel moved to relieve that suffering. God sees our suffering and as a result offers us comfort.

What does that offer of comfort mean?

There will be times in all our lives when we struggle, that's a fact of life. However, knowing, and rejoicing in a God of compassion helps us to endure that suffering and thus receive the divine comfort of our compassionate Father.

Endurance is another theme that Paul often writes about, using his own personal experiences as an example. Endurance is not some grim bleak acceptance of our struggles, rather it is facing up to our difficulties, and triumphing over them.

This does not mean that all our struggles and difficulties will disappear. God giving comfort is a God standing alongside us, giving us strength to face our difficulties, encouragement and hope to deal with our troubles.

When we have received that comfort from the Father of compassion, then what is our response?

Over my 30 plus years as a doctor, I was privileged to be with people as they reached the end of their life, and to support their grieving families. However, it wasn't until I had witnessed the death of my own mother some 12 years into my time as a GP that I was able to fully understand the emotional pain of watching someone you love die. Beforehand I could explain the physical processes, I could speak about the likely emotional response, but it was only after that time that I could truly say, “I know what you are going through.”

At the time of my mother's illness, she and our whole family were aware of the Father of compassion looking over her. It didn't diminish her suffering in the physical sense, however it gave her and us a sense of real peace and increased her ability to face the ongoing struggle, until that time, that we all knew was near, when she departed this earth to be in glory with her heavenly Father.

Thinking about it now, even in her pain and suffering, my mother gained comfort from her Father of compassion, and was able to share that comfort with us as we sat at her bedside.

Paul tells his readers that, having received comfort from God in our own struggles, we are then given the power to comfort others.

Going back to that word comfort, meaning "with – strength", it is more than sympathy, more than consoling. It is more than an emotion or a passive feeling. It has an active meaning, meeting people where they are, encouraging, strengthening. It is a way of giving someone new hope, a new way forward, or seeing new possibilities.

And where does this all come from? It comes from the Father of compassion, the God of all comfort.

When you face life's struggles, remember God is compassion. He suffers with you. Gain comfort from Him. He meets you where you are and helps you endure those difficulties, so that you can be strengthened, and receive new hope and see new possibilities.

When you receive that comfort that God offers you, share it, so that others can gain the comfort that God has given you.

Let us pray: Father of compassion, we so often feel we have to face life's struggles alone. Help us to see that you are there with us, and help us to receive the comfort that brings strength and new hope. Thank you that whatever we are going through, you are there suffering with us, but also strengthening and encouraging us. Father of all mercies, God of all comfort, we thank you. AMEN

Hymn: STF 632 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_kafMzE4Bs

I've had questions without answers,
I've known sorrow, I have known pain.
But there's one thing that I'll cling to;
you are faithful, Jesus, you're true.
When hope is lost, I'll call you Saviour.
When pain surrounds, I'll call you healer.
When silence falls, you'll be the song within my heart.

In the lone hour of my sorrow,
through the darkest night of my soul,
you surround me and sustain me;
my defender, for evermore.
Chorus

I will praise you, I will praise you,
when the tears fall, still I will sing to you.
I will praise you, Jesus, praise you,
through the suffering still I will sing.
Chorus

Tim Hughes (born 1978)
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Prayers for others: (based on STF 504) "May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day." We pray for those who struggle with poor mental health, where anxiety or depression means living in isolation and loneliness. We ask that your love surround those who suffer.

"May the word of God dwell richly." We pray for our politicians and leaders, that they speak words of wisdom and justice for all, that they will lead as you would have them lead, through your strength and not through their own strength.

“May the peace of God my Father rule my life in everything.” Lord there are times when we do not feel at peace. We pray for all who are suffering illness, hunger, poverty, war. Give them a sense of peace, and help us to help others.

“May the love of Jesus fill me.” Jesus, you shower us with your love, you fill us with your love. Help us to show and share that love in our everyday encounters, at home or in the street.

“May I run the race before me, strong and brave to face the foe.” Loving God, thank you that even when we face difficulties when can be assured of your steady guiding presence, ahead of us leading the way. In the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. AMEN

Hymn: STF 156 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMuq5z1uaMo>

From the breaking of the dawn
to the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
that will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For Your covenant is sure,
and on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word.

When I stumble and I sin,
condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
that in freedom I might live,
so I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
you remember sins no more.
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.

When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
and I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
you will guide me with your hand
as I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
every work begun in me,
so I'll stand on every promise of your word.

Hope that lifts me from despair,
love that casts out every fear
as I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
for the Comforter has come,
and I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word.

Keith Getty (born 1974) and Stuart Townend (born 1963)

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Blessing: May God write a message on your heart, bless and direct you, then send you out – living letters of the Word. AMEN