

A

L I T T L E

B O O K

of

C O M F O R T

BOYD AND RITA BAILEY



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To
*James and Jean Isbill,
Jack and Geri McEntee,
Karen Melby,
and
Stan and Amy Reiff—
who all know Christ in the
fellowship of His sufferings.*

Introduction

Additional pain may be necessary to
bring relief to our current pain.

Lily, our eight-year-old granddaughter, writhed in pain. Tears flowed as she frantically sought relief from an intrusive, needle-sized splinter. With an ambush-like attack, the nemesis had invaded the soft, tender area of her palm just below the thumb. Her mom comforted her—a personified God hug—and calmly and lovingly assured her firstborn all would be okay while also gingerly explaining how extraction brings relief, but only after additional pain.

Childhood does not often have a context for how to process pain. The thought of someone digging into her sensitive skin caused our precious baby to howl in fear, and tears flooded like a raging river after a heavy rain. Aunts, uncles, grandparents all stood around, sympathetic but feeling helpless.

Pain hurts.

How many of us have splinters embedded in our souls? Your hurt may be buried deep in the recesses of your memories, but on occasion it raises its ugly head because you discover it was buried alive. Your pain was forgotten through denial, but ongoing forgiveness in the power of the Spirit is

the only remedy to remove the pain that past sins inflicted on your heart. You may never hear the words, “Will you forgive me?” but you can still forgive and, by God’s grace, not be controlled by someone else’s past shaming.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

Like a physical wound, a festering emotional hurt lingers with infection just below the surface: puffy, red, and swollen, intently waiting for love’s lance to bring relief. The pus of pride infects the blood of our emotions as it flows through our hurting heart with venomous effect. Only the antivenin of humility can counteract pride’s deadly outcome. Humility recognizes and admits that the struggle over unresolved conflict corrodes relationships and clouds our judgment. Only when we go to our offender or the one we have offended and seek reconciliation can we clear our consciences.

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24).

Or maybe your wound is fresh. If so, take courage and forgive fast so the hurt doesn’t fester and lie dormant in resentment, ready to attack with you unaware. When you are hurt or offended, the amount of time it takes you to

thank God and forgive is an indicator of how close your walk is with Christ.

Some people die in bitterness. For others, it takes years, months, weeks, or days. For the more mature in their faith, it takes hours; for saints, seconds; and for those who walk closest to Christ, thanksgiving and forgiveness are simultaneous to the offense. By God's grace, keep no record of wrongs and you will be free to love others as your heavenly Father loves you.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

I pray these 90 writings will help you, with the support of others and the Holy Spirit, process your daily pains in a way that repairs your soul. Learn to rest in your sweet Savior's care.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

A Fellow Struggler and Overcomer in Christ,
Boyd Bailey
Roswell, Georgia

Sorrow Removed

He will swallow up death forever.

The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces;
he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.

The LORD has spoken.

Isaiah 25:8

Sorrow is the fruit of sin in a fallen world at liberty to inflict pain. No one is immune to sorrow. Sorrow is created by sin, death, divorce, selfishness, poverty, rejection, loss, and fear. Sorrow is all around, and it circles its prey like vultures around a carcass, ready to pick away at the meat of your soul. Sorrow does not discriminate based on your race, gender, social class, or stage of life. It causes a weepy heart and a weary mind over a lifetime.

Your sorrow may be overwhelming to the point of anguish and despair. The hurt is about to drive you crazy, and you feel you can't handle it. You have lost perspective, God seems a million miles away, and your situation has gone from bad to worse. You have hit a brick wall, life seems to be crumbling around you, and you have nowhere to turn.

But there is a rescuer for your drowning soul.

*Rescue me from the mire,
do not let me sink;*

*deliver me from those who hate me,
from the deep waters (Psalm 69:14).*

Jesus will save you. Ask Him to dive in and rescue you from thrashing about in the deep waters of your sorrows. Sorrow is not foreign to Him; He was a man acquainted with grief, inflicted with multiple sorrows. He is a sympathetic Savior waiting to soothe your pain and gently wipe away your tears.

Take the medication of God's grace and administer larger doses in the beginning to stop the spread of sorrow's infection. He wants you to experience His abundant life in Christ, and He wipes away your tears not only in heaven, but on earth. Let God remove your points of sorrow one by one, as if they are trees downed by a storm's horrific winds. Sorrow is temporary with God; His joy is permanent.

*He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain
(Isaiah 53:3).*

The Results of Worry

Can any one of you by worrying add
a single hour to your life?

Matthew 6:27

The results of worry aren't redeeming, productive, or helpful, and its ultimate sideways energy sidetracks us from our heavenly Father's loving comfort. Worry doesn't assist today, and it only complicates tomorrow. It's a dark alley in a loud, confused city. It's an untrodden trail off the beaten path of God's will. Worry has a way of putting a wrench into the works of Christ, and it's a subtle and not-so-subtle way to place our efforts ahead of God's.

Worry can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. We can work ourselves into a frantic state of self-reliance, so much so that we begin to believe and live out lies. We predict the worst-case scenario is imminent and then act in ways that move us in that direction. Worry leads to a victim mindset. We simmer in pity, talking like a victim, and then we become a victim. Worry whispers questions like "What if you lose your job?" and "What if you have a disease?" and "What if he leaves you?"

Worry's results wreak havoc.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful (Colossians 3:15).

Praise the Lord for remedies to worry! Shifting our focus from self to our Savior is a foolproof way for faith to preempt false thinking. Self is like a jealous lover who wants to be the center of attention, but Christ alone deserves this highest

status of affection. When our idols of security, money, control, and comfort bow to Jesus, worry runs away rejected. Worship embraces hope as courage for the heart, and courage and hope are fraternal twins that birth in us a living faith.

Furthermore, your humility in confessing your ongoing need for Christ leads to spiritual sustainability in Him. Healthy soul care requires you to invite your heavenly Father to care for your anxious heart and nervous emotions. Submission to our Sovereign God precludes a position for your pride to perch.

Yes, Jesus's spoken words in Scripture soothe your soul and bring peace to your war of worry. The result of trust is peace and calm.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Tears of Comfort

Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

John 11:35-36

A nonverbal language of love is communicated through compassionate tears because empathy engages the heart at levels that verbal exchanges may not be able to penetrate.

When emotion responds to emotion, grieving souls sense they are cared for and understood. Tears quietly convey that I feel your pain—I hurt because you hurt.

Comfort is the first step in seeking to serve another's pain, so refrain from truth-telling until the heart receives proper care. Fear and anger must be flushed from a hurting heart before facts can be appropriately comprehended and applied to the situation. People trust and receive from a context of love and acceptance, and tears become a conduit for Christ's care.

This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you (2 Kings 20:5).

Desperation feeds at the table of aloneness. But security and peace preoccupy the person comforted by a community, so we mourn with those who mourn so they are not alone. Starting with a patient spouse or friend, the mourning spills over to sincere souls who believe in Jesus to bring wholeness and healing. Tears shed in love terminate isolation and invite intimacy.

Does your husband, wife, or child need a response of compassion, rather than a reaction of passion? Does your team at work need you first to listen and understand, instead of feeling they must always meet an automatic demand based on your own agenda? Yes, truth sets us free, but the

mind comprehends after the heart has been heard. Tears prepare the way for truth's arrival.

How is *your* heart? Do you have a safe environment to lay bare your soul? Self-reliance and self-condemnation are obstacles to intimacy with your heavenly Father and with those who love you the most. Dismiss driven discipline; instead, practice vulnerable dependency. Replace shame with security in your Savior and trusting transparency with a caring community. Your tears open your heart to emotional and spiritual healing, so free your soul to speak with moist eyes to your Master, Jesus, as He lovingly weeps with you.

*I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they
have no comforter (Ecclesiastes 4:1).*

Who can I weep with and comfort in Christ? What in my heart needs healing comfort?

Responding to Senseless Violence

Why should my face not look sad when the city
where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and
its gates have been destroyed by fire?

Nehemiah 2:3

I sit here stunned, deeply saddened by the senseless violence of an evil man who massacred my fellow human beings at an outdoor concert. Some who died knew the Lord, and others did not, but all met their Maker on the most unexpected day. My heart quivers and quails at the thought of the defenseless and innocent being riddled by bullets. My anger, grief, and loss are distant compared to that of the families and friends the victims left behind. I weep. I pray. I hug my family. But what else is God calling me to do?

Nehemiah came face-to-face with the intense suffering of families and friends in his homeland. One of his brothers had just informed him of the chaotic and defenseless condition of the Jewish exiles who had returned to Jerusalem, only to find it in ruins. No security. No leadership. No hope. Only the prospect of fear and famine. Nehemiah lived in ease, peace, and affluence, but his countryman battled affliction, poverty, and sorrow. The innocents' exposure to evil and injustice moved Nehemiah to return to his people and provide a hopeful, practical plan.

*He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight (Psalm 72:14).*

How can we help? God may call us to serve those far away who were struck down by senseless violence—certainly family and friends. Mourning, comfort, counseling, and Christ's gospel are much needed now and for years to come. And for all of us, we can be more circumspect about how

to help our community prevent sinful atrocities or to help bring healing to those suffering from sinful actions—their own or another's. Someone's sadness is our opportunity to offer gladness.

Maybe your role becomes like that of the king who resourced Nehemiah to carry out his cause for justice and reinventing his community. Your generous investment of time, expertise, and money can make a difference in your world. Invest in mentoring to keep boys and girls from becoming another statistic of broken men and women. Initiate a movement of prayer in your church, asking the Holy Spirit to breathe on believers with a fresh fire of faith and repentance. The cross was sad, senseless violence that became God's plan of salvation—and it still is today!

Having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).

How can I give, serve, and pray for those who are victims of violence?

A God Hug

Shout for joy, you heavens;
rejoice, you earth;
burst into song, you mountains!
For the LORD comforts his people
and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

Isaiah 49:13

A God hug is a timely gift. His hugs soothe, comfort, and calm. He is never late in offering His affection or too busy to stand still and embrace His human creation. The Spirit gently caresses burdened shoulders and rubs out raw pain in the backs of believers. His compassion has never failed; His mercy is fresh every day. Like a cool cream alleviates an itchy rash, so His balm of grace relieves a rash of worries. A God hug holds on tight until healing occurs.

Furthermore, a God hug does not happen on the run, but while we stand still. “Slow down, My child,” He says. “Hush, I have this. Be still. Let Me hold you. Rest in My arms.” So we learn to stay stationary by faith and trust the right activities will get done in the right time. When we schedule appointments to be loved by the Lord, we receive strength for the journey. Otherwise, we exhaust our ability to encourage without the infusion of Christ’s courage. His hugs hearten.

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 (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Affection from the Almighty makes us attractive to those who need our compassion and care, and our hugs from Jesus compel us to hug others with unconditional love. For example, we may receive an unexpected financial blessing, so we are able to show generosity to another's cash challenge. An insight from Scripture or a kind word from a friend could be passed on to someone who needs our encouragement. God comforts us, so we can comfort others.

Shout for joy in praise to your Creator for His comfort and compassion. Brag on His name and extol Him for His divine affection. Like the father of the prodigal son who came home, your Father in heaven can't wait to embrace you in your shame, stress, or success. He runs to greet you with warm acceptance, so throw yourself into His arms. Cast your cares on Christ and abandon your life to the Lord. Yes, enjoy His sweet embrace!

*I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead
of sorrow (Jeremiah 31:13).*

The Fruit of Pain

Someone may be chastened on a bed of pain
with constant distress in their bones,
so that their body finds food repulsive
and their soul loathes the choicest meal...
Let their flesh be renewed like a child's.

Job 33:19-20,25

A variety of spiritual fruit can be produced out of pain. One is the clear understanding of what breaks the heart of God, because sin may surface through the sifting of suffering that invites genuine contrition, confession, and repentance. The pain can be a symptom of a wound either self-inflicted or inflicted from an unfair situation or an insensitive person, but whether sin has entered the heart from the inside or out, it requires attention. Without it, the soul will erode. Distress that draws us to God instead purifies our hearts.

Another spiritual fruit from pain is instruction from the Lord. Pain is an opportunity for God to instruct His children in a better way. A human being on his back is much more teachable than an individual running to and fro in frantic activity. We look up to heaven when we lie down faceup, leveled by the forces of physical and/or emotional upheaval. Yes, our loving heavenly Father whispers intimate instruction to His loved ones who listen to His voice.

Pain gives insight into God.

[Jesus said to His disciples,] “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matthew 26:38).

Our heavenly Father’s comfort is yet another outcome of suffering under the yoke of pain. As we cry out in desperate dependence on Him, He assures us of His presence—perhaps through our Savior’s silent reassurance: His speaking through another sincere saint, His calming us with a change in circumstance, or His soothing our soul with Scripture. The Lord is not limited in His long arm of care and comfort. Our pain is His opportunity to apply His healing balm of love.

See pain as a pass-through for the grace of God in your life. Your challenges become a conduit to care for other hurting hearts. Your energy is not consumed by your cares alone, but out of the depths of personal hurt you are able to bring the Spirit of your empathizing Savior, Jesus, to others. You consume the fruit of pain with your hungry heart, and your fruitful spirit feeds others who feel out of favor with God.

Enjoy Christ’s sweet comfort, and comfort other hurting hearts.

He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed (Genesis 5:29).