

# Sermon Series – The Gift Exchange

## #2 Give God your hurt and receive God's healing

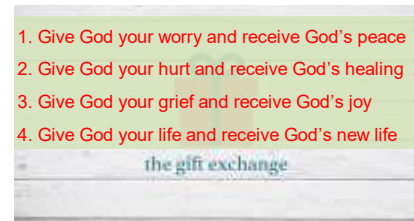
2 Corinthians 1:3-7

When my kids finished Primary school one of their favourite movies was *Thunderpants*. It's the story of a boy named Patrick who has an unfortunately high capacity for **flatulence** and aspired to be an astronaut. It's a laugh-out-loud kids' comedy. But it also raised the opportunity for conversation with our kids about **how to cope with the worst days of our lives**.



At the **end of each day**, Patrick would declare aloud to the universe, "this has been the best day of my life... ever!" OR alternatively he would say, "this has been the **worst** day of my life... ever!"

We are exploring in this series promises of God to the "children" of God – if you **give to God your blank, God will give to you blank**. We're not talking about an exchange that's like a day-to-day commercial transaction. Instead, think of the gift exchanges you've witnessed over Christmas within families. At such gatherings, gifts are shared with those who are loved, accepted and assured of their place in the family. In a similar sense, the Bible presents a variety of gift exchanges for those adopted into God's "family" by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> We have assurance in Christ<sup>2</sup> that God is eager to grant us gifts that bless. The Bible urges us to give and receive what God promises.



For example, last week we looked at the gift exchange of our **worry** and God's **peace**. In today's gift exchange, if we give God our **hurt**, our troubles, the Bible promises that God will eagerly grant us comfort and help.

**Two caveats** before I continue:

- i. Firstly, I'm **not** talking here about **why some people get healed** when we pray, and others appear not to. That sermon is for another day.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Ephesians 1:5

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 3:1

- ii. Secondly, I'm **not** talking about healing for **long-term suffering** from the likes of domestic violence, or military occupation, or terminal illness. These and similar conditions of life require professional care, advocacy, and compassionate support, not a sermon.

**Instead, today I'm talking about** when we face unexpected trouble on **any ordinary day**. You know those days in 2021 – you woke up, you set about your normal day, and then, at some point in that day you **received very bad news**:

- a **tragedy** in the family, a close friend's **marriage breakup**, a loved one **losing their job**, and so on [you fill in the blank]. Or
- perhaps the **calamity affected you** personally - a **bad prognosis** from a medical test, an **accident** or injury, a **love** that was lost, or a **failure** at work that was your fault, or [you fill in the blank].

We're talking about those days when **even your coffee needed a coffee!**



**The Apostle Paul was no armchair expert** on this topic. Check out **Paul's list** of "worst days of his life ...ever!" in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27. Paul writes...

I ...[was] put in prison..., whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times [I received] ...thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was punished by stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea ... I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people ...as well as from [others]. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from [those] who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

(2 Corinthians 11:23-27 NLT)

This undoubtedly Spirit-filled Christian knew what it meant to **have many a bad day**. That's a lesson right there in itself for us all.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Mark 10:30 (It wasn't just John Lennon who said there'd be days like these!) The Bible does not promise indemnity from suffering in this life for those who follow Jesus, but it does make promises to those who suffer.

But more than this, earlier in the same Epistle Paul reveals **how to get through** our worst days through the gift God promises. **Paul writes:**

...God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with God's comfort through Christ. Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

(2 Corinthians 1:3-7 NLT)

## 1. Give God your trouble, receive God's comfort

**Paul says, give your troubles and** hurt to God, and the God who comforts will be there in amidst your pain, your loneliness, your brokenness. Paul says, "When I hurt, I know the God who comforts".

In fact, you'll see **the word "comfort"** some 9 times in just 7 verses of Scripture! On any of the worst days of **his own** life, the darkest days, with the deepest valleys, he was able to get through because **he worshipped the "God who comforts"**.

Colin Kruse, in his commentary, points out the rare use of a single Greek word in verse 3 which appears to be like one of Paul's names for God – "God, the comforter". This should not surprise us since this is how Jesus spoke to his disciples about the Holy Spirit whom he would send to be with them.<sup>4</sup>

For some of us, **this is the hardest thing** to imitate from Paul's life –

- i. Firstly, we don't even think about God as "comforter" – we think of God as "almighty" as "judge" or "creator" or "Father". Some of us approach God as a dispenser of solutions for various troubles. But Paul knows God as "Comforter". That is, God's presence with him is the comfort he needs.

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. John 15:26

- ii. The second reason this is hard for us is that we find it **difficult to “talk”** to God in prayer. Paul wants us to give our trouble and hurt to God that we might receive comfort in exchange. We find it hard to be open with loved ones. They say, “How are you?” and we say, **“I’m fine”!** How will we be able to give over our hurt, our fear, even our anger, which God desires to take on board in exchange for blessings.

We must learn that **prayer is relational, not transactional**. We see this in the honest pouring out of emotions by the Psalmist. David often rails at God, cries to God, expresses fear and doubt to God. The New Testament urges us to **boldly enter** into the very presence of God through Christ, and to find **grace and help** in our time of need.<sup>5</sup>

From a practical point of view, prayers to God can be practiced in a myriad of valid ways; we should not feel that our style of praying honestly and openly must comply with a certain tradition or church culture. For some, walking along a beach alone might be a good setting to openly “speak” with God and share our hurts, fears, and regrets. For others it may be kneeling in a cathedral, engaging in a form of Christian meditation, or closing the door of your own private space. Whether silent, sung or spoken, whether extemporaneous or formal or verses of Scripture, don’t be constricted. Instead, start to become familiar with prayer as a means of being relational with God, whom the Scriptures say, through Christ, we can address intimately.<sup>6</sup>

We can give over our troubles<sup>7</sup> and the hurt that comes with it, and God will be our comfort.

Australian journalist, Leigh Sales, wrote *Any Ordinary Day* – interviews with various people who were blindsided on just a normal day of their week by a terrible, unpredictable calamity.



**Louisa Hope**, survivor of the *Lindt Café* hostage siege in Sydney in 2014, blindsided the author. Sales, an agnostic herself, was **blown away** by how



<sup>5</sup> Heb. 4:16

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Romans 8:15

<sup>7</sup> The Greek word behind “troubles” (vs. 3) is applicable to all variety of trials and inconveniences in life

Hope's humble faith in a crisis.<sup>8</sup> "How did faith in God help you in that terrible moment?" Sales asked. Louisa, a Christian, spoke of how she prayed moment to moment and was able to look to the needs of others in the crisis. Hope said to Sales, "This is the reality of the grace of God. It's indeed a mystery, but **when one lives in relationship with God**, that's just part of how every day goes."

You see, prior to the hostage crisis, Hope speaks of how she had been diagnosed with MS, turned 40, and been divorced by her husband.<sup>9</sup> – Louisa had already learned to lean in on God's comfort through prayer, and the help of her Christian community for many years.

Like the Apostle Paul, Louisa had come to know God as the God of "**all**" **comfort** – for all circumstances, all troubles, all trials.<sup>10</sup>

We too can come know God, not as the fixer, but as "**Comforter**". We too can learn to experience this **gift exchange** of our hurt for God's divine comfort and help on our very bad days.

## 2. Give comfort to others, as we received from God

Did you notice that there are **two gift exchanges** in this passage of Scripture?

The **second gift exchange** (and the two go hand in hand) is that **when God gives** us comfort, we can give **comfort** to others.

God comforts us in all our troubles **so that we can comfort others**

(2 Cor. 1:3)

When asked about **life after** the *Lindt Cafe* siege, Louisa Hope said:

"...my life purpose [now] is to serve God by loving and bringing encouragement to people wherever I can..."

Today Louisa speaks to groups far and wide about her ordeal and her faith, including in our *Common Grace* network. She acknowledges the help and comfort her church community provided practically and spiritually. But most of all, she knows through what she's learned that she can offer comfort to others who suffer bad days – even as bad as those she experienced.

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<sup>8</sup> A mentally ill, armed man, took hostages in the café and killed 2 people before police stormed the siege.

<sup>9</sup> All of which Leigh Sales thought should give her a leave pass for any further troubles in life!

<sup>10</sup> "troubles" in 2 Cor. 1 means all variety of calamities or inconveniences in life

Our Bible reading today encourages us in the same way. Give God your troubles, your hurt, and in exchange receive God's comfort, God's healing. But then, as receivers of God's comfort, we can learn to be comforters to others who hurt. God wants to shape us into comfort-givers as a result of knowing God's comfort.

In Romans 15:5 Paul writes:

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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