Comfort for the Mourning

Charles F. Stanley - In Touch Ministries
For everything, a season, and in everything, prayer.
BETWEEN DEATH & HOPE

“Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Never have two words held a more powerful truth: God knows the depths of pain death causes. Jesus’ friend Lazarus had passed away days before, while He was out of town. The family was angry with Him for not coming sooner—surely He could have done something to stop death from taking their loved one too soon.

But “stopping death” wasn’t part of the plan for Lazarus. Jesus was going to perform a greater miracle than simply healing him. Lazarus was going to go through death and come out the other side alive. Still, in that moment between the death and the resurrection of His friend, Jesus wept. Knowing all the wonderful things He knew, understanding that it was temporary, He still felt the loss of his friend and the pain of separation.

It’s one thing to know that God’s got everything handled; it’s something else to actually walk through the valley of death. This booklet full of Dr. Stanley’s teachings has been designed to accompany you in times of sorrow. Whether you find yourself grieving the passing of a loved one or the loss of a dream, we hope this booklet gives you comfort and hope as you pray through the seasons of mourning in your life.

From your friends at
In Touch Ministries

**PSALM 16**

Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in You.

I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have no good besides You.”

As for the saints who are in the earth, they are the majestic ones in whom is all my delight.

The sorrows of those who have bartered for another god will be multiplied; I shall not pour out their drink offerings of blood, nor will I take their names upon my lips.

The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You support my lot.

The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.

I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; indeed, my mind instructs me in the night.

I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely.

For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.
The God of All Comfort

Many people today are crying out for comfort but don’t know where to find it or how to receive it. Times of grief and loss can leave them feeling confused, depressed, or disillusioned. Instead of prayerfully turning to God, who is the only source of true and lasting comfort, they may have given up on Him.

Desiring relief from pain and hardship is only natural, but the best way to find our way back to peace and joy is by seeking the Lord and receiving His encouragement.

In Isaiah 40, the Lord comforts His people by reminding them of His promises, attributes, and love:

- **ALTHOUGH SITUATIONS CONSTANTLY CHANGE, THE WORD OF GOD STANDS FOREVER** (v. 8).
- **LIKE A SHEPHERD, THE LORD TENDS, GATHERS, CARRIES, AND GENTLY LEADS HIS PEOPLE** (v. 11).
- **THE GREATNESS OF GOD’S POWER AND KNOWLEDGE ARE DISPLAYED IN HIS CREATION** (vv. 12-13).
- **HE IS SOVEREIGN OVER ALL THE EVENTS ON EARTH** (vv. 21-23).
- **HE GIVES STRENGTH TO THOSE WHO ARE WEARY** (vv. 29-31).

Although the apostle Paul endured great hardship and pain, he also experienced God’s amazing comfort in the midst of his suffering. In the short passage of 2 Corinthians 1:1-7, he uses the word comfort 10 times and describes the Lord as “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction” (vv. 3-4).

**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt. 5:4).**
The New Testament word for comfort means “to encourage” or “come alongside.” When Jesus was nearing the end of His earthly ministry, He promised to send another Comforter who would be like Him (John 14:16, 26). At the moment of our salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us and walk alongside us through life’s challenges. He’s always there when we need Him to lighten our load, quiet our fears, lift our spirits, ease our pain, or invigorate us when we don’t think we can take another step. He has all the power of almighty God because He is the third member of the Trinity. Every aspect of our lives is included in the Spirit’s ministry. Although we may not feel His presence, He’s always there teaching, guiding, leading, strengthening, and encouraging us.

**WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF OUR COMFORT?**

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is the Comforter. He not only has the power to change our circumstances, but He can also give us the strength to endure them. He’s put a limit on what He allows us to suffer and promises that He will not let us be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). Furthermore, He’s promised to work out everything for our good if we love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). And when we are hurting, He gives us God’s genuine, lasting comfort.

The LORD is near to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Ps. 34:18).

**GOD’S WORD**

No matter what form our mourning takes, we can take refuge in God’s Word. But that is often the last thing we want to do when we’re feeling overwhelmed. Too often we’d rather seek out our friends, but their knowledge and ability to comfort are limited. In contrast, eternal truth, knowledge, and wisdom are found in the Scripture.

When we begin our days by reading the Word, we’ll be spiritually energized for whatever circumstances we may face. But if we neglect the Bible, our grief will hit us like a crushing weight.
My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

PSALM 73:26

I love the LORD, because He hears my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.

PSALM 116:1-2

This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me.

PSALM 119:50

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

REVELATION 21:4

OUR HEAVENLY HOME

Whenever loved ones die, we grieve. But if they were believers, we also celebrate because they are with Jesus. One day, we’ll see them again in heaven. Believers can have peace, knowing that death is the means by which we are ushered into heaven. However, those who have not accepted Christ as Savior have good reason to fear death: They will face an eternity of suffering and separation if they do not look to God to save them.

Although God has not revealed everything about heaven to us, Scripture provides insights that give us hope beyond this earthly existence. For those of us who have lost loved ones, this may give us comfort—or press upon us the urgency of sharing the gospel with those who have yet to become a part of God’s family. Here’s what we know:

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS THERE.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), Jesus often spoke about His Father “who is in heaven” (5:16). Instead of speculating on where heaven is, we can simply say that it’s wherever God is. Our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is there.
When Jesus ascended into the clouds in Acts 1:11, two angels told the disciples, “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” He ascended to His Father and is now “seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). From there, He intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34).

**HEAVEN IS A PREPARED PLACE.**

It’s not some ethereal fog in which we float around, but a place specially prepared for God’s children. Jesus said, “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). According to Revelation 21:27, “Nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

**OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN.**

An old gospel song says, “This world is not my home. I’m just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.” This earth is only our temporary home so we must be careful not to become too attached to the things of this world. Having a right understanding of heaven changes our perspective and priorities in this life, prompting us to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.

According to Philippians 3:20-21, “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.” These earthly bodies are not fit for life in heaven.

Therefore, when Christ returns for us, He’s going to transform them into bodies like His. Although we don’t know exactly what we’ll look like, we can be sure that our new heavenly bodies will be far more glorious and healthy than the ones we have now.

**THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO ARE SAVED ARE RECORDED IN HEAVEN AS CITIZENS OF HIS KINGDOM.**

When Jesus sent out 70 disciples to heal and proclaim the kingdom of God, they came back saying, “Even the demons are subject to us in Your name” (Luke 10:17). But as impressive as this display of power was, Jesus told them, “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (v. 20). Whenever anyone turns from sin and believes in Jesus for salvation, that person’s name is forever recorded in heaven. Spiritually, believers are already in heaven.
God views us in light of our relationship with His Son who took our sins upon Himself and gave us His perfect record of righteousness. He has “made us alive together with Christ ... raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:5-6). In God’s mind it’s as if we are already there. As a further guarantee of our spiritual position in heaven, we who have believed in Christ have been “sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:13-14).

No matter what we face now, our eternal hope is secure, and in God’s presence everything will be perfect. When life is tough, we can find hope in knowing what the Lord has in store for us in heaven. Although our desires may not be fulfilled in this life, in eternity all our longings will be satisfied. Knowing our heavenly position also increases our desire to live a godly life now because that is our destiny. Once we enter heaven, we will be freed from sin completely and be absolutely holy.

**OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN.**

Jesus warned His followers not to accumulate earthly goods that do not last, but to “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:20–21). Our security is not found in money or property. Anything that can be bought can also be lost, and nothing we accumulate will come with us when we die. The only thing that will last is our relationship with Christ. And our heavenly treasures are our good deeds, obedience, holiness, and actions of love, kindness, and forgiveness.

**OUR INHERITANCE AND REWARDS ARE IN HEAVEN.**

Salvation is by faith not works, but once we’re saved, we do good works because we’re God’s children. And when we get to heaven, we will be rewarded for what we have done. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told those who were persecuted, insulted, and
slandered because of Him, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great” (Matt. 5:12). Peter also says that we have “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4).

**OUR SAVED LOVED ONES AND FRIENDS ARE THERE.**

When a believer dies, he or she goes immediately into the presence of the Lord in heaven (2 Cor. 5:8). However, one day Jesus will return for His church, and He’s going to bring with Him those who have died in Christ (1 Thess. 4:13–17). They will be resurrected first: “Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (v. 17). What a grand reunion that will be when we are all gathered together in our heavenly home!

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**THE TRAGEDY OF SUICIDE**

Sometimes people suffer from such devastating grief, loss, rejection, and/or pain that they consider taking their own lives. Chances are you know of someone who has either thought about suicide or has succeeded in doing so. Perhaps you have considered it. Depression is often the root cause and may require medical intervention. Yet despite doctors’ advice and medication, countless people are still living on the edge of life and death, overwhelmed by despair, hopelessness, loneliness, and even physical pain. And so, we must also fortify our minds with God’s Word, because without that foundation, we are powerless to handle all that life throws at us.

**HOW CAN CHRISTIANS HELP THOSE WHO ARE CONSIDERING SUICIDE?**

Because so many people struggle with suicidal thoughts, we as believers need to know what to say in order to help those who are considering this option. If they have invited Jesus into their lives as Lord and Savior, then you can remind them that He has forgiven all their sins and is their friend and partner in life. God knows all about their circumstances and is willing to walk with them step-by-step through their pain, suffering, disappointment, or loneliness. God may even lead them to other people, like a friend, pastor, doctor, or Christian counselor to support them during their hardship. The Lord often uses other people to renew our hope and uplift our spirits, so assure them it is okay to reach out for help.
IS SUICIDE THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

There is an unforgivable sin, but it’s not suicide. Matthew 12:32 says, “Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” Since the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts a person of sin, reveals the truth of the gospel, and helps him believe in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, anyone who continually rejects His promptings cannot be saved. That is the unforgivable sin—not suicide. A Christian who kills himself will still go to heaven. He will lose some eternal rewards because of his action, but his salvation remains eternally secure.

OUR ETERNAL DESTINY

Since our eternal destinies are determined while we live on earth, everyone needs to prepare now for the day of their death. Going to church, reading the Bible, and praying are all important, but these alone are not enough. Even our good works amount to nothing if we have not accepted Christ’s payment for our sins. Each person must ask Jesus for forgiveness and accept His offer of salvation. This simple act of faith guarantees that, when we die, we’ll instantly enter into the Lord’s presence where we will rejoice for all eternity. Don’t put off this crucial decision any longer; nothing is more important than your eternal destiny.

A PRAYER FOR BLESSING

DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We thank You for walking with us through our grief. We know that it is not Your will for people to die but to experience everlasting life instead (John 3:16). You watched Your own Son suffer and die in order to make that possible. As the prophet said, “by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5, NIV). Heal us today, Lord. Tend our wounds with the comforting balm of Your love and care. We praise You for Your promise to end suffering and the peace only You can provide. We look forward to Your imminent return and the fulfillment of all Your promises. “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). Amen.
IF YOU’D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, VISIT INTOUCH.ORG/BELIEVE. YOU CAN ALSO CONTACT US AT INTOUCH.ORG/CONTACT OR CALL 1-800-789-1473.
BLESSED BE GOD & FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE FATHER OF MERCIES AND GOD OF ALL COMFORTS, WHO COMFORTS US IN ALL OUR AFFLICION. 2 COR. 1:3-4