

“God’s Comfort”

Deuteronomy 32:11-12, Isaiah 49:14-16 & 66:13a, Hosea 13:8a,
Psalm 94:18-19 & 22:9, Matthew 14:14b & 23:37, Revelation 21:4

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When you are hurting who do you go to for comfort? Isaiah proclaims the words of God. **Isaiah 66:13a NRSV “As a mother comforts her child, so I comfort you;”**. There are numerous scriptures that refer to God as our mother. Often God blesses us through people, through our mothers. God is the supreme and perfect mother. If we could experience all the good aspects from every mother, then we would perceive a snippet of the goodness of God, our perfect mother.

A few disclaimers. God is above and beyond gender, so all comparisons with a human are woefully adequate. No earthly mother is perfect, so all of us have been hurt by our mom. God never hurts anyone. Some people have only tragic experiences with their mom; others, no mom at all. If that is you, then substitute for mother the most loving, gracious, and comforting person in your life. Washing away all the faults of your mother and purifying her love gives us a glimpse of God.

God says. **Isaiah 66:13a NRSV “As a mother comforts her child, so I comfort you;”** Comfort is a strong theme in the Bible. Isaiah chapters 40-55 and Jeremiah 30-31 are often described as “Books of Comfort”. The psalmist sings of many ways God comforts us. Revelation describes God’s comfort as, **Revelation 21:4 “God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”**

Comfort means to soothe, to alleviate pain, suffering, grief, fear, hate and distress, to free from all that constricts. Comfort is a peaceful state physically, emotionally, and spiritually that fosters love and joy. Comfort means to strengthen, to nurture. Comfort fortifies us and gives us fortitude. Comfort strengthens us to overcome every obstacle. Comfort produces a state of well-being, prosperity, and a pleasant lifestyle. Comfort is like a soft, warm blanket on a cool night.

Psalm 94 bemoans the injustice of life, the hardships and the arrogance of evildoers. The psalmist finds comfort in the confidence that God reigns and will deal with the inequities and ugliness of life. The psalmist sings, **Psalm 94:19 CEB “When my anxieties multiply, your comforting calms me down.” Psalm 94:18 NRSV “When I thought, “My foot is slipping,” your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.”**

You are hiking alone in the wilderness. You come across adorable grizzly bear cubs. You look ahead and see mommy grizzly bear. Do you “A” throw rocks at the cubs and torment them or “B” quickly and quietly move away so mommy bear and her cubs can enjoy their time together? If you have something that is tormenting you, scripture proclaims God’s word. **Hosea 13:8a “I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs and will tear open the covering of their heart.”** It is comforting to know that God has our back. Absolutely nothing can separate us from God’s love.

God comforts us in prayer. God is always with us. God is always listening. Your prayer may be angry, a rant, humanly incomprehensible, yet God knows exactly what you are experiencing and what you need. God never grows tired of listening. Even when all you can do is whimper, cry, or ache, God understands, soothes, heals, and rejuvenates. God’s comforting answers come through scripture, the beauty of nature, moments of wonder, laughter, pure delights, art, music, food, loving people and an inner spring of peace, hope, love, and joy.

God comforts us through grace. No matter what we do, God loves us. No matter how we mess up, God forgives, encourages, and gives us endless chances. No matter how far we run, God is always with us eager to welcome us home. No matter how wasteful, God continually showers us with blessings.

Henri Nouwen spent hours observing Rembrandt’s painting of the prodigal child, the father welcoming his lost son home, holding his kneeling son against him. It struck Nouwen that the two hands of the father holding his lost son were different -- one is coarser, thicker, while the other is more slender and delicate. For Nouwen, it represents the masculine and feminine sides of God welcoming us home, cradling us in God’s arms. God, who with all the love of a mother and father comforts us, encourages us and always welcomes us home.

Rembrandt lived in a male dominated society. He was commissioned and paid by a church controlled by men, who only used male language when speaking of God. Yet, it appears Rembrandt experienced God as a mother and a father and wanted everyone to know that God is our mother who comforts us.

Jesus embodies God's motherly qualities. **Matthew 14:14b "Jesus saw a great crowd; and Jesus had compassion for them and cured their sick."** Jesus comforts with his compassion, touching, healing and nurturing. Jesus doesn't ask, how did you get into this mess. Jesus compassionately heals. Jesus doesn't ask, what were you thinking. Jesus compassionately bails us out. Jesus doesn't lecture or say don't do it again, because Jesus knows we will constantly mess up. Jesus compassionately cleans up our mess every time. When we fail, Jesus points out our potential. When we feel inadequate, Jesus points out our gifts and gives us more gifts and enhances the gifts that God has already given us. When we are lazy, Jesus encourages us. Jesus is our biggest fan, cheering for us, delighting in every success, forgiving every shortcoming, constantly celebrating you.

God comforts us by assuring us that God is always with us. **Isaiah 49:14-16 NRSV "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands."**

God comforts us by keeping us safe and guiding us. God will redeem every situation. God will mend every brokenness. God will nurture the most excellent way, the way of love. **Psalms 22:9 NRSV "Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast." Deuteronomy 32:11-12 "As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up and bears them aloft on its pinions, the Lord alone guides us."**

God comforts us with perseverance. Often, we do not listen. Often, we hurt ourselves by doing the very thing God warns us not to do. God keeps gathering us together in the vibrant harmony of her family. **Matthew 23:37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"**

One of the earliest names for God is El Shaddai. English Bibles usually translate El Shaddai as "God Almighty," but scholars say that is just a guess at its meaning. The El part of the name is the shortened form of Elohim and it means "God," but Shaddai is possibly derived from the Hebrew word shad, which is invariably used in Scripture for a woman's breast, the place where a child is cuddled and nursed, and thus the name may be a nod to the maternal side of God's nature.

Many of us can remember our mother's comfort. We are grateful for loving mothers, for their unconditional love endures forever.

Today, we celebrate mothers. We thank God for their wonderful qualities and ask God to transform their shortcomings. Amy Young wrote, "To those who gave birth this year to their first child -- we celebrate with you. To those who lost a child this year -- we mourn with you. To those who are in the trenches with little ones every day and wear the badge of food stains -- we appreciate you. To those who experienced loss through miscarriage, failed adoptions or running away -- we mourn with you. To those who walk the hard path of infertility, fraught with pokes, prods, tears and disappointment -- we walk with you. Forgive us when we say foolish things. We don't mean to make this harder than it is. To those who are foster moms, mentor moms and spiritual moms -- we need you. To those who have warm and close relationships with your children -- we celebrate with you. To those who have disappointment, heartache and distance with your children -- we sit with you. To those who lost their mothers this year -- we grieve with you. To those who experienced abuse at the hands of your own mother -- we acknowledge your experience. To those who lived through driving tests, medical tests and the overall testing of motherhood -- we are better for having you in our midst. To those who are single and long to be married and mothering your own children -- we mourn that life has not turned out the way you longed for it to be. To those who step-parent -- we walk with you on these complex paths. To those who envisioned lavishing love on grandchildren, yet that dream is not to be -- we grieve with you. To those who will have emptier nests in the upcoming year -- we grieve and rejoice with you. To those who placed children up for adoption -- we commend you for your selflessness and remember how you hold that child in your heart. And to those who are pregnant with new life, both expected and surprising -- we anticipate with you. This

Mother's Day, we walk with you. Mothering is not for the faint of heart and we have real warriors in our midst. We celebrate you."

God says. **Isaiah 66:13a NRSV** "**As a mother comforts her child, so I comfort you;**". We celebrate, God, our mother, who knows us complete, loves us unconditionally and comforts us. We praise God the source and nurturer of life. We thank you, God, for having a mother's heart, for gathering us, your children, for comforting us and holding us in your warm embrace. When we hurt, your arms enfold us. When we are afraid, your wings protect us. When we are hungry, you serve us the bread of life. Your steadfast love surrounds and supports us, in good times and in tough, in the midst of joy and pain, always and everywhere. You will never leave nor abandon us. Enable us to be like a good mother, like you, to everyone, forgiving with abounding grace, enlivening with ceaseless love, protecting with rock solid peace, revealing glorious hope and invigorating with joy. Amen