



**Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on July 18th 2021 at 10:45, meeting once more at Bethesda Chapel.**

The lifting of lockdown restrictions has resulted in the decision to meet in person at Bethesda Chapel once again. We still plan to use our YouTube channel to broadcast the services, and will continue to provide this written service sheet for those unable to attend Bethesda. We hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we all seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

We continue our series of "Encouragement in Hard Times" and our worship today is led by **Alec, who, after playing the piano beforehand, welcomes us all, wherever we are.** For the benefit of those watching the recording at a later date, in their own homes, he tells them where we are situated, in the middle of Blackburn, about an hours drive away from Manchester. He reminds us that God is with us as he promised, and that together with the angels and archangels we are going to sing to him, to praise his name, to listen to his word and to pray to him. We are fortunate to have that freedom in this country every day of the week, and we think of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who are not able to gather together in this way. Whilst we are sad for them, we rejoice that one day we will all be with him in the heavens.

As we continue with our series on Encouragement in hard times, when next week Colin will talk about joy, this week we think about truth in comfort, or the true comfort, a subject which Alec has found challenging in his preparation. His prayer is that each one of us may find, in our hearts and minds, God saying one thing during this service.

We begin not by singing, although next week we will be able to do so, but watching and listening to a traditional hymn. Written by George Matheson, one of 8 children, he was born with poor eyesight but still had clear dreams for his future. Sadly he began to go blind aged 20, and his fiancée called off his engagement. However he continued in ministry, supported by one of his sisters, and was even invited, by Queen Victoria, to speak at Buckingham Palace, which he did, on the patience of Job. His sister finally left him to be married, and he wrote this hymn the night before her marriage, indeed he said the Holy Spirit wrote this hymn in 5 minutes. Familiar to many, this version begins as a solo, slowing building as other voices join in song. Those at home can sing aloud, or read the words.

**Opening song "O love that wilt not let me go"**

O Love that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee.  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
that in thine ocean depths its flow  
may richer, fuller be.

O Light that follows all my way,  
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee.  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day  
may brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee.  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
and feel the promise is not vain,  
that morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee.  
I lay in dust, life's glory dead,  
and from the ground there blossoms red,  
life that shall endless be.

Words George Matheson (1882), Music Albert Peace (1884)

Public domain, CCL No 5664

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnKYenaH-GA&list=PLS4jQgASCDFJBgTn-JSL2E7ArFTKmZpmc>

### **Our Prayers are now led by Brenda.**

Our Loving Heavenly Father we come to worship You this morning in all kinds of moods and from a variety of situations but You know what they are and what each of us needs today.

First we bring our praise to You for Your continuing presence in our lives ,as You sustain and support us with the power of Your comfort and presence. Thank You for all that is good in our lives and things that give us joy - like the beauty of the natural world, contacts with our families and others we meet, and when good news reaches us. Thank you for beautiful songs and music and people who write them like blind George Matheson who wrote the hymn we have just heard. Most of all, thank You for the amazing gift of Jesus, Your Son, to live and die for us and for Your Word to us in the Bible.

You give us so much and we are guilty many times of not serving You in the way we should, because we do and say things we shouldn't and omit to do and say things we should. We bring to You all our wrongdoing and omissions and ask for Your forgiveness in the name of Jesus.

We all have different concerns in our hearts today but all of us are worried about

the situation in the world with the ongoing pandemic. Lord God, most countries are struggling to get on top of this and we know that only You know the way through and we pray earnestly for your help. Here in the UK as we now take restrictions away, in spite of many cases, we ask that all continue to be careful and take new opportunities with caution and that the vaccine will continue with its great success and be taken by all to whom it is offered. We pray for healing for those with the virus and its aftermath and strength and support for the many key workers, those struggling to isolate when called and others with reduced incomes and families to support. There are so many in difficult domestic circumstances at his time and we bring them all to You.

We remember before You, Almighty God, places in this town and country where there are troubles amongst people of different ethnic backgrounds with unkindness and misunderstanding. People are abused in many ways and online problems are becoming more and more apparent. Lord we pray that ways may be found to stop this and attitudes may change.

In other places in the world there is suffering of many kinds and we pray for nations where there is religious persecution and for Christians who are not able to worship in freedom and peace. We bring to you places where there is war and uprising, remembering again Afghanistan and the difficult situation there, and places where many are hungry and homeless and also those caught up in extreme weather events, some caused by global warming. We pray for a continuing and persistent attempt by the leaders of nations to combat this. Today our hearts go out to the places in Germany along with Belgium and Holland where there is such terrible flooding. We ask for your presence with those who are suffering so much with the loss of those they know and the destruction of their homes and livelihoods. Also we ask that You be with those offering help and relief.

We pray for all who are working to bring better conditions for others and the many charities struggling at this time. We remember Brian and Jackie Chilvers, now back in Chad, asking for their safety, and for help with the work they have trained to undertake.

Now, Lord, we bring to You the people of this church and their families and ask for healing for those who are ill or in pain, patience for those who are waiting and comfort for those in distress in whatever way. Many need special prayers right now and in a quiet moment we name the ones we know before You. (A time of silence)

We bring all these to You, Heavenly Father

Please guide us as a church and help us on into the future, as things hopefully open more and we can reach out again to some of our congregation we haven't seen for a while and to this developing neighbourhood. Be with us, as we are in Your hands to lead us.

Lord God, we now ask for your presence with us throughout today's service and with Alec as he speaks to us. Please be close beside us throughout this week, guiding us through problems and sharing in our joys.

We offer our prayers to You in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Saviour.  
Amen

**Alec introduces our Second song, "O my soul" sung by Casting Crowns, which is a song we may not be familiar with. It is not a rousing praise song but is quieter and reflective, and he hopes that the way this is presented will be helpful to us all. (We were not able to include this on the recording, but you may read the words below)**

Oh, my soul, oh, how you worry,  
oh, how you're weary from fearing you lost control,  
this was the one thing you didn't see coming,  
and no one would blame you though if you cried in private,  
if you tried to hide it away,  
so no one knows, no-one will see if you stop believing.

Oh, my soul, you are not alone,  
there's a place where fear  
has to face the God you know.  
One more day He will make a way,  
let Him show you how you can lay this down  
'cause you're not alone.

Here and now you can be honest  
I won't try to promise that someday it all works out  
'cause this is the valley and even now  
He is breathing on your dry bones,  
and there will be dancing,  
there will be beauty where beauty was ash and stone -  
this much I know.

Oh, my soul.....

I'm not strong enough, I can't take anymore;  
you can lay it down, you can lay it down.  
and my shipwrecked faith will never get me to shore:  
you can lay it down, you can lay it down.  
Can he find me here? Can he keep me from going under?

Oh, my soul.....

'cause you're not alone,  
Oh, my soul, you are not alone

Songwriters: Bernie Herms / Nichole Nordeman / John Mark Mark Hall  
Oh My Soul lyrics © G650 Music, Pure Note Music, Songs Of Universal Inc.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjNZf878ISQ&list=PLE4CCC95E5A374862&i>

## **Trevor shares our Bible Reading - 2 Corinthians 1:1-11**

"The first two verses of Paul's letter are greetings to the church in Corinth and beyond. These days we are probably not as exuberant as Paul when starting an email or letter; perhaps only with 'Dear' or even just casually 'Hello' or 'Hi'.

There then follows a heading which sets the theme for today's service."

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Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,  
To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia:  
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **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.

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.

Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, <sup>11</sup> as you help us by your prayers.

Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

**As we prepare to watch, listen or read our Third song Alec shares that on July 3rd he wrote for the Deacons,** (as he often does) a thought for the day, that because of Covid and other factors, he feels our membership has been shattered and scattered into little pieces of fragile glass and stone. The wish to return to how we were is strong, in our present weakness the willingness to change and grow is understandably less evident. This thought, idea, feeling has led to the choosing of this song, as Alec thinks we are all broken, we are all crying. But God hears our cries

and answers, as is sung in this song, which again may not be familiar to us all. Written and recorded by Hillsongs, it is entitled "Cry of the broken"

Lord I come, Lord I thank you  
for your love, for this grace divine;  
love and mercy, undeserving  
You gave it all. the greatest sacrifice.

You were wounded for my sin  
And You were bruised for all my shame.  
You were broken for my healing  
Only by the cross I'm saved.

I come boldly to your presence  
Lord I bow before your throne  
You're my healer, my redeemer  
You're my hope, my life, my all.

You're the mender of the broken  
To every outcast, a friend and comforter.  
I come boldly to your presence.....

You hear the cry of the broken.....  
You answer the cry of the broken.....

Songwriter: Darlene Joyce Zschech  
Copyright@Hillsong worship2011 CCL No 5664  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRq-DF-4TRQ>

**Alec now shares his Message: "TRUE COMFORT"**

**Alec begins by sharing that this is probably the most challenging talk he has given in his time here. All the slides are on a black background, which he feels is appropriate for the subject today**

Would we experience true comfort wearing clothes and fabrics after they had experienced new life through ultimate care fabric softener?

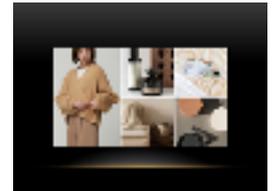


Or should we read Kristin Cavallari's cosy recipes for gluten-free and refined sugar-free foods. Comfort food is hard to find, even if it may be healthy. "True Comfort" features Kristin's favourite recipes for cosy breakfasts (Apple Pecan Dutch Baby, Espresso Overnight Oats, and Sweet Potato Toast), lunches (Roasted Cauliflower Tartine, Nashville Hot Chicken Salad Cups, and Butternut Squash and



Leek Chowder) and dinners (Red-Wine Braised Short Ribs, Oat Crust Chicken Pot Pie, and Saffron Seafood Cioppino) plus desserts (Orange Olive Oil Cake and Dark Chocolate Peppermint Silk Pie) and drinks (Cashew Egnog and Rosemary Charcoal Latte). With these cosy recipes how could we feel anything else but warmth and true comfort?

Or maybe you say, treat yourself to a moment of comfort? Pin on Rue daily style. Stretch your body. Anxiety tends to hijack the body. Visualise a peaceful image. Speak compassionately to yourself. Reach out. Ground yourself. Listen to soothing music. Practice mindfulness. Move your body. Maybe you say we need a more esoterically-orientated gospel?



It is said that money cannot make you happy, but it can help you to be miserable in comfort. But this kind of thinking, this kind of comfort-mentality is a non-starter and a non-finisher, like a DNS or DNF on your name and lane in the results list. Put another way this kind of comfort-mentality is like a one-sided coin.

Because earthly comforts have value of course, but this may be superficial, will be temporary, short-lived and transient, appearing and disappearing again like flowers that bloom and fade, like the daisies of the Transvaal, here today and gone tomorrow.

True comfort is one side of a two-sided coin. What is on the other side? Suffering of all sorts. Throw the coin up how does it land? Which side comes down first? This is not exactly like the chicken and the egg. Suffering precedes true comfort. But if we aim at comfort we will finish up with suffering.

Comfort is not something theoretical or abstract; not even something nice or cosy. It is concrete and reality-based. In suffering, in misery, in pain, in times of uncertainty, in difficulties, in loneliness, in illness, in death, in loss we all need comforting.

In the last few weeks we have listed up many of the challenges, the difficulties, the problems, dare I say the growth possibilities in our life situations related to the sudden start of, the resulting ongoing pressure from and the delayed resolution of the pandemic. We have truly been moved out of our previously well-familiar and probably generally well-loved social and personal environments, being compliant with “stay at home” has left us often not feeling at home anywhere being generally

separated from our friends and families, seeing our expectations remain unrealised, our hopes turned to fears and warm loving groups turned at least in part into cold conflict-filled technical units or amorphous constructs perhaps resembling and sometimes looking more like the approach routes to black holes than anything else, at least from the outside.

We have been living and breathing but struggling and fighting to remain in our previously truly amenable comfort zones.

And if I may say it I think we have basically failed. Failed to stay as we were, failed to remain as we would probably have been very happy to remain, and still struggling to try to get back to the beginning, to carry out our daily routine, to reach the goals that we have always set for ourselves.

But you see I thank God for this. I rejoice in this. Because He has something else in mind; something more in mind; He always did. Because it is not our expectations that matter but His; it is not our plans that are important but His; it is not our goals that we need to reach and fulfil but His.

‘We make it our aim to please Him.’ (2 Cor. 5:9)

But on the way forward we do need encouraging; and, as we are considering today, we do need comforting. We do not need to go backwards in order to go forwards. But we do need and will continue to need comforting.

What does the Bible say about this? Has God anything to say to us about this?

The Bible says a great deal about comfort. It talks again and again about the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete as I referred to in considerable detail on Pentecost Sunday some weeks ago. Paraclete comes from the Greek word *parakaleō*, the best translation of which might be “one who is called alongside, the one with us”. Another of the same, called to be near us. This is the Holy Spirit of God, the Comforter. Jesus says in John 14:17b“... For he lives with you and will be in you.” He comforts us.

In the course of our lives we find a growing need for comfort, especially in difficult times like these. It is no surprise, then, that the concept of comfort occurs quite often in the Bible. One of the earliest examples of this occurs in the book of Job, where Job lost all his sheep and cattle to a group of people who attacked them and took them away, lost all but one of his many servants and then he lost all his sons

and daughters when the house they were celebrating in collapsed resulting in their deaths and in the midst of his suffering three so-called “comforters” come to advise him. By the end of the first round of their speeches (which are fully recorded in Job, chapters 4-14) Job realises that they had given him little or no comfort. So during the second (of three rounds of speaking) Job could say to his friend, „I have heard many things like these; you are miserable comforters, all of you! Moreover, he tells them that were the situation reversed, if it was the other way round he says “I could also talk like you if only you were in my place! Then I would encourage you with what I have to say; my words of comfort would lessen your pain.” (Job 16:4-5).

Indeed, when our friends and family are in distress, it is a challenge, a responsibility and a privilege to bring comfort and encouragement to them. Interestingly enough, in the closing chapter of the book of Job we find that a restored Job experienced this kind of comfort himself, (42:10-11).

Directly following on in the Bible from the book of Job we arrive at the Psalms. It is just like on the one hand having had a clear view of the challenges and difficulties of the mountains as we look at the view to our left and then seeing the struggles and potential dangers of the raging sea in the coastal view on our right. The Psalms are really a great source of comfort aren't they. I am sure you frequently find yourselves turning to the Psalms for comfort, for strength and for encouragement.

In Psalm 119 we read

“My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word. My eyes fail, looking for your promise; I say, “When will you comfort me?”” (Psalm 119:81-82)

Is that how we think? Is that how we genuinely feel?

In verses 50 and 52 we read:

“My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. I remember, Lord, your ancient laws, and I find comfort in them.”

Is that true of us?

Again in verses 75-76 we find:

“I know, Lord, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant.”

Similarly, the prophet Isaiah also points out that God is the Great Comforter who does bring comfort to His afflicted people, even in the most dire circumstances (Isa. 49:13). Not surprisingly Isaiah instructs his readers in the same way to be those who comfort their fellow men (Isa. 46:1-2; cf. 61:2).

Racing into the New Testament we see that Paul is one who does his best to comfort others. He tells the Thessalonian believers:

“You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory. (1 Thess. 2:11-12)

God has called us to live in a way which fits where we are going.

Paul’s most informative plaidoyer, one of his clearest appeals for the need for a proper and worthy life as a believer is found in his second epistle to the Corinthians. In his instructions to the Corinthians he gives what is perhaps the key passage concerning Christian comfort. It is that which comes from God. Paul begins his second letter with this very theme (2 Cor. 1:1-7). Central to the teaching in this section are verses 3-4:

“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 have received from God.”

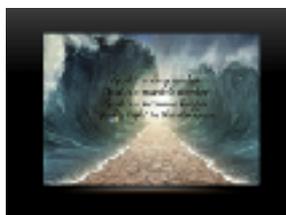
There is no trouble that someone may have with which we cannot help.

It is the Lord who ultimately is the active source of all comfort. He is the source of consolation not only by delivering us from evil, not only by ordering the external circumstances of our lives, but also, and mainly, by His working in our hearts and minds, placating the storms, alleviating the heartaches, pacifying and softening our internal conflicts and filling our hearts with joy and peace in believing through His Holy Spirit who lives in all those who have repented of their sins and given their lives back to God.

From the bible passages I have mentioned so far today we learn that the believer has God's unfailing love in all circumstances, whether in good or distressing conditions. Our true comfort is in God alone. Let us, then, humbly place our full and complete trust in Him who is the ultimate, the only real source of our support, help, and comfort (cf. 2 Cor. 7:6). The failure and the ultimate breakdown of earthly comforts points to a need for comfort that God alone can satisfy. He is "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort."

Most of us know something of what Paul experienced.

There are bridge builders who complete their work and then get thrown metaphorically speaking unceremoniously from the bridge.



There are way makers who are faced with hindrances that attempt and threaten to block them along the way.

There are architects who find themselves so to speak locked in the basement of the structures they are creating, locked in without light, warmth or voices.



Whether we look at Joseph who was rejected by his own brothers, sold into slavery to become a victim of deceit and to be thrown into a foreign prison; or Jeremiah who was also a great model of this lifestyle of dependence on God who was born into a world of violence and intense power struggles, faced conspiracies to kill him, was beaten and put in stocks and was lowered by ropes into a cistern which had no water in it, only mud, into which Jeremiah sank down.

Whoever we look at these servants of God needed comforting. We are in comparison maybe, indeed probably, spoiled for comfort.

2 Corinthians 4:17 reads: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

As Trevor read for us, 2 Cor. 1: 3-7 is an epic poem to God's comfort in suffering.

# WHO UNDERSTANDS COMFORT?

- There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection
- Some faced jeers and flogging and even chains and imprisonment.
- They were put to death by stoning
- They were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword
- They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated
- The world was not worthy of them
- They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.
- These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect

Maybe you think that something like that is easy to write? Do you know the background of the Corinthian church to which Paul was writing, this Paul who speaks of the God of comfort? He spoke of comfort on the basis of experiencing it in the sufferings through which he had been led to go.

After the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 and the consequent letter written to Gentile believers Paul had a really rough time. First he had a kind of mini-bust up with Barnabas, who had previously deserted him, had an effective time of ministry with Silas strengthening the churches in Syria and Cilicia; he then went on to Derbe and Lystra from where he added Timothy to his group continuing to strengthen churches wherever they went and after very clear and direct leading of the Holy Spirit they travelled to Philippi. That was where God led them.

So wouldn't we expect Paul to have been given a great time by God, lots of cool experiences and real happiness? After all Paul obeyed God in going to Philippi. And then he really got hammered. Started a midnight worship praise meeting in the prison where he was an inmate, eventually left for Thessalonica where they were attacked by a Jewish mob, went on to Berea where they were also eventually faced with the Thessalonians agitating and stirring up the crowds and then went to Athens. Maybe we might think that would have been enough but no. In Athens Paul

preaches the resurrection of Jesus Christ and he was sneered at by some. So Paul left and went to Corinth for a break, for a few days break. No. No. No. But he had just about had enough. And this is what happened.

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks, insiders and outsiders. Both are frequently in need of persuasion. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. **PP12h** But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptised.

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

Normally Paul stayed for between 3 and 6 months and then went on somewhere else, though he was as long as two and a half years in Ephesus. It is this Paul, who experienced all this suffering, who started the church in Corinth, who on his missionary travels prayed and supported the church, who wrote them letters, who told them about the God of comfort. He knew what he was talking about.

True comfort comes from God, through His Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit and from nowhere else. So let us individually and together:

Look to the Lord;

Read and understand the Word;

Live each day filled with the Spirit.

**Our closing song is probably familiar to many: When I survey the wondrous cross (Sung by Westgate Baptist Church, Newcastle upon Tyne.)**

When I survey the wondrous cross  
on which the Prince of Glory died,  
my richest gain I count as loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
save in the death of Christ my God:  
the very things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,  
sorrow and love flow mingled down:  
when did such love and sorrow meet,  
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were an offering far too small;  
love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all!

Words: Isaac Watts

Public domain. CCL no 5664

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4\\_fvFfPqj04](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_fvFfPqj04)

**Alec leads us in the Grace: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore.**

**Next week we meet again at Bethesda Chapel, and as the restrictions are lifted, we may choose to sit somewhat closer together if we feel comfortable so doing. We will no longer have to wear masks although some may choose to do so, and we will have the opportunity to sing aloud together.**

**(Following the service today, some may wish to stay behind for a time of singing in the church garden, and next week we also hope to be able to serve refreshments)**