

# 39. COMFORT OR DISTRESS IN GOD'S WORD?



*Out of context Bible verses can  
cause lots of anxiety.*

#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

## COMFORT OR DISTRESS IN GOD'S WORD

*Psalms 107:20: "He sent out His Word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction."*

There is a hymn we often sing in church that talks about the things we need in times of distress.

In times like these, you need a Saviour,  
In times like these you need an anchor;  
Be very sure, be very sure  
Your anchor holds and grips the solid Rock.

The second verse says:  
In times like these, we **need the Bible**.

Oftentimes we focus very much on the first verse, and yes, we need a Saviour and He is our anchor. Amen! Hallelujah! But we forget the second verse. We forget that we also need the Bible. We do need the Bible in times of distress and fear so that we can find the calmness and the peace and the healing that Psalms 107 speaks of. The psalmist says that God's Word healed them and delivered them from destruction. We really do need the Bible to heal us in times of distress, to help us and to deliver us from times of destruction.

With COVID-19 infiltrating our lives, I think many of us are in need of healing and deliverance from the destruction COVID-19 has caused. I believe that the Word of God can do this for us, but I also realise that many have come to a place in their lives where the Word of God does not give them what they need.

I THINK MANY OF US ARE IN NEED  
OF HEALING AND DELIVERANCE  
FROM THE DESTRUCTION COVID-  
19 HAS CAUSED.



What I mean with this is not that the Word of God became powerless and without significance, but that some have come to a place in their lives where they don't feel the power of the Word of God anymore. Where they don't see the point of reading their Bibles or where the Bible is not really meaningful to them anymore.

If you are in this place today, don't despair because I do believe that we have different experiences for various reasons. I do believe that there is hope to be found in the Bible. It may not have been a strong force and a source of consolation and help in your life in times of distress up until this point, but I hope that after reading this presentation, you will understand why it has happened and how it can be rectified.

We are living in a time where we are in a fight against invisible foes. The Bible says that we are in a fight, not against flesh and blood (humans), but against principalities and powers and the rulers of darkness. We need to be able to fight this foe. Oftentimes we feel very ill-equipped to fight against the trials and tribulations of this life and the things that these forces, these powers and rulers of darkness have brought into our lives. The Bible gives us guidance on how to fight in times of distress and how we can fight against the tribulations that come into our lives.

The Book of Ephesians talks about how we fight these invisible foes. It talks about the armour of God that we have to put on. Two of the verses say a part of the armour of God is the Word of God. Ephesians 6:14 says when we go into a fight, we need to gird our loins with the truth.

**THE BIBLE GIVES US GUIDANCE ON  
HOW TO FIGHT IN TIMES OF  
DISTRESS AND HOW WE CAN  
FIGHT AGAINST THE TRIBULATIONS  
THAT COME INTO OUR LIVES.**

We find the truth in the Word of God. Ephesians 6:17 says that part of the armour is the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. If we want to make it successfully through this battle and navigate ourselves successfully through the trials we are struggling with right now, we are going to need the Word of God.

**What do we want from the Word of God?** I am sure that in this distress or whatever you are facing at home, you have gone to the Word of God. In distress we approach the Word of God in a very specific way. We go there, seeking specific answers. We really want something from the Bible. We want the Bible to give us answers in our distress. We want the Bible to provide us with hope when we are feeling hopeless. We often go to the Bible because we are in need of healing, so we expect the armour of God to do these things for us. To give us answers, to give us hope, to give us healing and to also do away with the pain we are struggling with. The pain of the enemy attacking us over and over and over again.

How we approach the Bible often gets us into trouble. It is not so much that we don't go to the Bible, but the way in which we approach the Bible, the way that we put on the armour, that is what gets us into trouble. We pick up our Sword, the Bible, only when trouble approaches. I know this because I have done it as well. If you are only picking up your Sword now, it is okay. Don't feel guilty because you maybe haven't picked up your Sword in the past, not even in times when there wasn't any distress.

You can learn to use a sword during a battle even though it is going to be a bit harder. There is going to be more pressure and you might even cut yourself in the process. People who don't know how to use a sword are going to struggle to pick up a sword and to use it. They might even hurt themselves in the process.

**HOW WE APPROACH THE BIBLE  
OFTEN GETS US INTO TROUBLE.**



I think the reason why we often discard the Bible is because of the experience we as Christians had – it hurt us. We are not used to using the Bible and when we pick it up, the verse saying the Bible is a double-edged Sword that pierces us, becomes true. It is piercing us, instead of piercing the enemy.

That doesn't mean we should give up. Start practising even if you haven't practised in the past, even if you have to go for a crash course in using the Sword of the Lord, the Bible. It will help, but a crash course is harder and more difficult than taking your time and learning to use the Bible over time.

Sometimes we approach the Bible in a kind of a fortune cookie way – we need some answers, a 'yes' or a 'no'. Is there a magic 8-ball that we can just shake and ask for answers? The Bible isn't a fortune cookie or a magic 8-ball that we can quickly open and find the answers. But we often approach the Bible as if it is a fortune cookie and we expect the Lord to speak to us randomly through the Bible. We all of a sudden open it randomly and say: "Lord speak to me." We then start reading verses which may not be so applicable to what we are dealing with at that moment.

Let me give an illustration to make it a little bit clearer. You might ask the Lord to please tell you what to do in your distress or in your situation. Then you open the Bible randomly and you poke your finger at a verse and start reading, because you believe that God's Word is going to give you the answers in that way. The verse where your finger stopped, says: "...and he went and he hung himself" (Matthew 27:5). You are shocked and ask the Lord if He is really telling you to hang yourself?

**WE ARE NOT USED TO USING THE BIBLE AND WHEN WE PICK IT UP, THE VERSE SAYING THE BIBLE IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD THAT PIERCES US, BECOMES TRUE.**

And you may think He made a mistake and you try again. So you close the Bible and you open it again and you poke with your finger at some verses and you read: *“Go and do what you have to do and do it quickly”* (John 13:27). You are so surprised that the Lord is telling you to go and hang yourself quickly.

Please do not use the Bible like this. The Bible is not a fortune cookie or a magic 8-ball to be opened randomly and selecting a verse and then believing whatever that verse says is what God is trying to tell you to do. This is not the way God expects us to use the Bible. We need to learn to have a **systematic plan for reading the Bible**. If you want to become successful in using the Sword in times of distress, you need to learn to use the Sword in times of the calm. Pick up your Sword every day. Practise to use the Bible. Learn the messages of the Bible.

Many of you already struggle with negative thoughts. If you are already struggling with anxiety and stress and you are feeling a bit depressed, or you are struggling with grief because of the many losses you have gone through in the COVID-19 pandemic, your mind tends to go with the theme of negativity, the theme of depression and sadness and anxiety. You then often approach the Bible in this very negative way. We say, “Lord, I am coming to You. Please help me in my distress. I’m feeling very sad and very negative. I am doing some spot-reading, so please help me.” We then go the Bible with this negativity and the things we end up reading and the things that come to our minds are the negative parts of the Bible.

**IF YOU WANT TO BECOME  
SUCCESSFUL IN USING THE SWORD IN  
TIMES OF DISTRESS, YOU NEED TO  
LEARN TO USE THE SWORD IN TIMES  
OF THE CALM. PICK UP YOUR SWORD  
EVERY DAY. PRACTISE TO USE THE  
BIBLE.**



The negative parts of the Bible are the parts that rebuke us. The parts of the Bible that tell us what's wrong with us. These are the things that come to our minds and that we search for in the Bible in times of distress. We see all our sins and all our own motives, we see everything that needs to be corrected and we tend to feel the burning effects of the Bible, piercing us and smashing us to pieces.

We are so used to being enveloped in the negativity that we automatically go to those verses in times of distress. Those verses that are showing us our sins and how much correction we need and that our motives are wrong. We sabotage ourselves when we approach the Word of God, because we approach it in an incorrect way, because we do spot-reading or spot-remembering. We reach out to specific Scriptures and topics, because we want more answers. The specific Scriptures we go to are often those verses that rebuke and hurt us even more.

Let me demonstrate. Say your spouse has filed for divorce. You are not okay with it and you want to know what the Bible says. So you look for verses on divorce and all you find is that divorce is a sin and that God hates divorce and that it is not in His plan for your life.

You then end up feeling even more destitute and more desperate and more anxious because you have no control over your spouse who has filed for divorce. You don't want the divorce because the Bible says it is wrong. Be careful of this type of spot-reading. I recommend that you follow a reading plan each day, even if it's a small portion. God is wonderful in the way that He will lead you in those small portions you are reading.

**WE SEE ALL OUR SINS AND ALL OUR OWN MOTIVES, WE SEE EVERYTHING THAT NEEDS TO BE CORRECTED AND WE TEND TO FEEL THE BURNING EFFECTS OF THE BIBLE, PIERCING US AND SMASHING US TO PIECES.**

God will answer you through the reading plan you are following every single day. It is kind of weird. If you haven't tried that, you won't understand the power of God. Even though you are following a reading plan, He will use whatever has been planned to give you the answers you need for that day.

Your reading plan for the day may be about the story of David and Goliath. You may wonder how this story could help you who are going through a divorce. But at the end of the passage the Holy Spirit might bring into your mind that the divorce is like a giant you need to face. It is huge and it is scary, but God, in His power, will help you to chop off the head of this giant. He will help you to gain victory. By the leading of the Holy Spirit and by you being consistent in using your Sword, God will use even the small things which may seem as if they are not going to give you answers, to help you to fight the enemy and to overcome the trouble that you are facing.

Many of us cast ourselves into spiritual distress because we have a **distorted view of the Bible**. Because we do spot-reading or we use it as a fortune cookie, we don't remember the holistic parts of the Bible. We forget that there is a balance in the Bible. We focus so much on the verses that tell us what we should and shouldn't do, that we start feeling very anxious and guilty. We struggle with the bad choices we make and then we go to verses that speak about bad choices. We struggle with guilt and then we read verses that talk about sins and how our sins will be punished. We struggle with anger inside ourselves and we read verses like Ephesians 4:26 which says that we should not let the sun go down on our anger.

**EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE FOLLOWING  
A READING PLAN, HE WILL USE  
WHATEVER HAS BEEN PLANNED TO  
GIVE YOU THE ANSWERS YOU NEED  
FOR THAT DAY.**



We might be lying in bed with our spouses lying next to us and we are really angry. The sun has long set and we are still angry. Reading such verses in the Bible makes us feel even worse.

You see how spot-reading can get us into trouble? You see how we only focus on the things we are not accomplishing and the things we are not able to do in our lives? We might struggle with unforgiveness or grief or worry or doubt. There are so many verses in the Bible that tell us not to worry and not to grieve like the world, not to doubt but to have faith, that we end up feeling more distressed when we use the Bible in this way. When we spot-read and we see all the things the Bible says we must and must not do, we become more anxious.

The Bible tells us the Word of God is something that does hurt. When we read these verses, there will be times that they are going to carve away to make us better people. For example, in the Book of Isaiah, the Bible talks about the Word of God being a double-edged sword that discerns our thoughts and the intentions of our hearts and it leaves us naked before God, leaving us exposed to see all the wrong we have done.

Jeremiah 23:29 says that God's Word is like a fire and a hammer that breaks rocks to pieces. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that the Bible is there to teach us, reproof us, correct us and train us in righteousness. So, there is a work the Bible does that is going to carve away at our souls and it is going to cause a bit of hurt. But that is one side of the Bible. What about the other side of the Bible? We forget the good things the Word of God does to us.

**BE CAREFUL OF FOCUSING SO MUCH ON THE VERSES THAT TELL YOU WHAT YOU SHOULD AND SHOULDN'T DO, THAT YOU START FEELING VERY ANXIOUS AND GUILTY.**

Oftentimes we avoid reading the Word of God because we feel that the double-edged sword is piercing our souls. We feel the searching eyes of God leaving us naked and bear before Him. We feel the fire that burns and the hammer that breaks. We feel the reproof and the correction. Sometimes it becomes very burdensome if we only focus on that. But the Bible tells me the Word of God is so much more than just a Book that reproofs and reproaches and shows us all our faults.

Psalms 119:105 says: *"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."* The Bible gives us guidance, shows us where to go when we find ourselves in darkness.

Romans 10:17 says: *"Faith comes from reading the Word of God."* Our faith can become stronger as we read the Word of God. If right now you are struggling to trust the Lord, start spending time in His Word daily – it will give you the faith to carry on. Interestingly, the Bible also tells us that heaven and earth will pass away, but His Word will never pass away. It is something that we can trust and rely on even though the world seems to be going to pieces all around us. We wonder how much longer this world can stand, but the Bible tells us whatever is written in His Word, will stand. It will not be broken down like the rest of the world and we can trust in it.

Psalms 19:7-10 gives a beautiful promise: "The law of the Lord is perfect, it can revive the soul. The commands of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to those who lack it." This is how we need to approach the Bible during times of distress. We need to read it so that it can revive our souls. If you feel that you are lacking wisdom in this stressful time, go to the Word of God because it will make you wise.

**OFTENTIMES WE AVOID READING  
THE WORD OF GOD BECAUSE WE  
FEEL THAT THE DOUBLE-EDGED  
SWORD IS PIERCING OUR SOULS.**



You need to learn to spend time in the Bible, using a systematically reading plan. *"The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart."* (Verse 8). When you read the Bible systematically, it can bring joy into your heart. It can bring excitement into those nerves which became dormant and left you feeling depressed and sad. *"The commandments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the eyes."* Reading Gods Word can help you to see answers where everything is bleak and dark. Learn to use the Bible so that it can do all of these good things that are promised.

Psalms 119:9 reads: *"How can young people keep their lives pure? By guiding it after your Word."* If you have been struggling with sin, the Word of God is going to help you, to show you and to guide you into that purity of life you so badly desire.

Jesus says in Matthew 4:4: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."* The Word of God is the thing that gives us life. We need to learn to spend time in it in order to fill our lives with what it is promising.

Proverbs 4:21-22 says: "My son, be attentive to My words, incline your ear to My saying. Let them not escape from your site. Keep them within your heart, for they are life to those who find them and healing to all their flesh." As I read these words I ask myself whether this is not what we need right now. Is it not what we yearn for this life, the healing within our flesh? Our bodies feel weak and mushed down because of what's happening right now. The Bible is saying that we need to go to God's Word and allow it to give us healing, allow it to give us a life again.

**IF YOU FEEL THAT YOU ARE  
LACKING WISDOM IN THIS  
STRESSFUL TIME, GO TO THE WORD  
OF GOD BECAUSE IT WILL MAKE YOU  
WISE.**

"It sanctifies and purifies us", says John 17:17. Psalms 37:31 says that the Word of God will help us not to slip in times of distress. Some of us are feeling like we are falling. We are feeling like we don't know where to step, how to step and that our very next step is going to get us into trouble. Going to the Word of God will make our feet secure so that we can walk this path without stress or anxiety.

Matthew 7:24 says: *"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them, will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock."* The Bible really has two sides to it. It's not just about rebuking us and telling us what to do, but it also helps us so that our feet will not slip. It gives us healing and strength. It enlightens our eyes, it makes us pure, it helps us to rejoice and it helps us to revive the soul and become wise and have faith. It helps us not to sin (Psalms 119:11).

It also tells us what will soon take place. A lot of times when we approach the Word of God, we are looking for answers and we spot-read, but we don't look at the bigger picture. There are answers in the Word of God on what will soon take place in this world. Revelation 1:1 says: "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God has shown His servants the things that will soon take place."

When we read the Bible we are so prone to remember and to notice the things we are doing wrong. There are so many verses in the Bible that tell us about the good things, the more balanced things of life.

**THE BIBLE IS SAYING THAT WE  
NEED TO GO TO GOD'S WORD AND  
ALLOW IT TO GIVE US HEALING,  
ALLOW IT TO GIVE US A LIFE  
AGAIN. "IT SANCTIFIES AND  
PURIFIES US".**





# Podcast



SCAN ME

To listen to the audio of this episode on podcast scan this QR code with your phone.



*Northern Conference, Pastoral Counselling Department  
Revive, Refresh, Restore  
fleming@nc.adventist.org  
Cell: +27836584296  
Author: Nandi Fleming  
Editors: Kobus & Adele Beukes*