

Basic Training Bible Ministries

Beauty for Ashes



“... to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.” Isa 61:3

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Beauty for Ashes

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” 2Co 1:3*

1. Have you ever stood in great need of comfort and encouragement? If so, you know that in time of affliction, there is no thought or word that has deeper meaning, nor any possession of greater value, than that of effective and genuine comfort.
2. We are presently living in a time of great national and historical crisis. In such times, incidents of personal suffering and affliction will inevitably increase.
3. Personal suffering and affliction often leads people to seek comfort in all the wrong ways, compounding their difficulties in days ahead. Each of us will no doubt face our own trials, and will stand in need of some form of comfort in the days ahead.
4. Not only this, but we will all see friends and loved ones going through tough times, and we will want to see them find comfort as well.
5. The objective of this study is to equip us to have the assurance that there is comfort available, and to know how to be comforted, as well as how to be a comfort to others in the fires of affliction.

Our Study Outline:

- I. The Need for Comfort
- II. The Way into Comfort
- III. The God of All Comfort
- IV. The Comfort of Jesus Christ
- V. The Other Comforter
- VI. The Comfort of the Word
- VII. Comfort One Another

I. The Need for Comfort

“But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered; like sheep having no shepherd.” Mat 9:36

A. Jesus addresses man’s need for comfort.

1. No one was ever more acutely conscious of the sorrows of men than was the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. As we will see, it was His greatest desire and mission in life to put an end to all suffering and wipe away the tears of mankind.
3. However, He faced the issue of suffering with a wisdom we do not have. He came not only to end sufferings, but also to reveal the truth that sorrow is the offspring of evil. Evil originated in a decision and could only be overcome by a decision.

B. Suffering is the natural state in a fallen world.

1. The entrance of sin brought in lasting affliction to men, Gen 3:17–19:
 - a. fear;
 - b. shame;
 - c. blame;
 - d. a curse;
 - e. conflict;
 - f. sorrow; and
 - g. death
2. The transmission of sin and death passed both the tendency and the affliction of these and other sufferings to all men, Gen 5:3 and Rom 5:12.

C. All men share in the perpetuation of suffering.

1. For God to rid the world of suffering, He would have to rid the world of men!
2. All men are born inherently evil, Mat 7:11a.
3. No one is free from indwelling sin or personal sins, Joh 8:7 and Rom 3:23.
4. All men naturally seek sin, not righteousness, Rom 3:10–18.

D. Evil and suffering play a role in their own demise.

1. God used the evil of the cross to defeat and conquer sin and death, 1Co 1:17–19.

*“Out of the eater came something to eat,
and out of the strong came something sweet.” Jdg 14:14*

2. Christ takes the curse of sinful men and brings the free gift of righteousness, Rom 5:6–10 and 2Co 5:21.
3. Imputation demands a choice, whether of sin to Christ, or of His righteousness to us. There must be submission to God’s will.

- E. The very need for comfort leads us to seek it.
1. The further we wander from God, the greater our need for Him, Jer 2:13.
 2. The hungering heart may at last seek and find rest, Jer 29:13 and Mat 11:28.
 3. The Father waits to welcome and bless all who seek Him, Heb 11:6.

Applications:

1. Think of how the story of the prodigal illustrates the above truths, Luk 15:11ff.
2. Consider how our own waywardness has often returned us to the Way, Joh 14:6.
3. Comfort and rest are ours for the taking, but by faith alone, Mat 11:29 and Rom 5:1.

II. The Way into Comfort

“Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” Joh 11:40

- A. In context with above Scripture:
1. Lazarus had died. Martha and Mary were grieving and in great need of comfort from the Lord.
 2. Yet Jesus refused to compromise the truth for the sake of superficial emotion. He knew their need and how to meet it, but also how they must receive it. The only comfort available for Martha and Mary was to be found in faith.
 3. They had a decision to make, and He would not remove the burden of it.
- B. The only true comfort in affliction is faith in the nature of God.
1. Before we can believe the promise, we must trust its Author, Heb 11:1, 6.
 2. Trust in God lays a foundation and provides evidences of unseen realities.
 3. God gives comfort in any and every suffering situation, 2Co 1:4.
 4. This comfort is often a surprise discovery—like the hidden treasure—but we will always find it—like the pearl—if we seek it in faith, Mat 13:44–46.
- C. Moses is a great example of the comfort of living faith.
1. “By faith” implies the substance of his life and actions, Heb 11:24–29.
 2. His many decisions were away from the superficial “comforts” of Egypt, and toward the hardships of the desert and the leadership of Israel.
 3. Yet the comfort of his soul was found in communion—in abiding—in the presence of the Invisible One, and the assurance of His reward, Heb 11:26–27.
- D. Faith in trials builds on God’s Word and past experiences.
1. We can never learn the power of God to comfort until we experience His supernatural and all-sufficient presence and power in sorrow, 2Co 1:4.

2. The all-encompassing answer to the question, “Why would God let this happen to me?” is that He wants to draw us to Himself and His comfort, 2Co 1:8–10.
3. In no other way can we be equipped to know Him, and thus be able to become a channel of His comfort to those around us, Job 42:5–8 and 2Co 1:5–7.
4. The overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that in every trial, those who live by faith will come out victorious, Lam 3:22–33; Hab 2:4; Rom 5:1–5; Rom 8:37; Jam 1:2–5; 1Jo 5:4–5; and Rev 12:11.

Applications:

1. The question of the comfort of God is never one of availability—or of sufficiency—but is always one of our receptivity through faith.
2. The promises of God are the anchor of God to our souls, which, when we doubt, we doom ourselves to drift in a sea of doubt, fear, and anxiety, Heb 6:17-20.
3. We will never lose heart as long as we keep the eye of our soul fixed on eternal realities and choose to live in light of them, 2Co 4:16-18 and 2Co 5:6-8.

III. The God of All Comfort

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” 2Co 1:3*

A. In context:

1. Note first that He is “*Father of mercies*,” the word implies the fountain of compassionate care, of which He is the source.
2. The foremost expression of His manifold mercies (a word usually found in the plural) is in the sending of His Son Jesus Christ into this world.
3. In and through the person and work of His Son on the cross, He is the God of “*all*” comfort—there is no avenue or means of comfort He has not supplied.
4. Because of these things, God ought to be praised continually, 1Th 5:16, 1Th 5:18.

B. The need for comfort implies affliction, Psa 84:5–9.

1. The theme of this Psalm is “abiding” in God’s house, Psa 84:1–4.
2. However, this “abiding” is not in a location, but a state of mind, Psa 23:6.
3. It is by “abiding” that strength is found for the spiritual journey, Psa 84:4–5.
4. The way inevitably leads into affliction (*baca* means weeping), yet by faith that desert place is turned into a fountain-fed garden.
5. The path leads from “*strength to strength*,” as we go from “*faith to faith*” and “*glory to glory*,” all under the watchful eye of the Father. (Compare Psa 84:7 with Rom 1:17 and 2Co 3:18.)

C. God’s comfort expressed in the revelation of Him as “Father.” In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of the “Father” 109 times, establishing this as a theme found even more than that of “faith.”

1. Men, though inherently evil, often are capable of doing “good,” Mat 7:11.
2. God, who is inherently good, can only do what is intrinsically good.
3. Jesus illustrates the compassion of the Father in the parable of the prodigal son, (Luk 15:20), but we can only truly see the Father by looking into the face of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospels, Joh 14:9.
4. Such insight is possible only by the intuitive, non-rational, perception that is possible only to the regenerate and receptive heart, Mat 5:8; Joh 14:21; and 2Co 4:6. This truth is worthy of some careful pondering and reflection!

D. He is the source of comfort by His very nature.

1. Jehovah is the great “*I Am*” (Exo 3:15), an unfinished sentence, a blank check:
 - a. He is “Jehovah-Jireh” (Gen 22:14), “I Am your sufficiency.”
 - b. He is “Jehovah-rapha” (Exo 15:26), “I Am your healing.”
 - c. He is “Jehovah-shalom” (Jdg 6:23–24), “I Am your peace.”
 - d. He is “Jehovah-ra’ah” (Psa 23:1), “I Am your shepherd.”
 - e. He is “Jehovah-tsidkenu” (Jer 23:6), “I Am your righteousness.”
 - f. He is “Jehovah-Sabaoth” (Jos 5:14), “I Am your defender.”
2. Consider how Jesus, in John’s Gospel, continues this revelation of God:
 - a. “*I am He*,” the promised and long-awaited Christ (Joh 4:26; Joh 18:5).
 - b. “*I am the bread of life*,” the nourishment of your souls (Joh 6:35, Joh 6:41).
 - c. “*I am the light of the world*,” your guide and comfort (Joh 8:12; Joh 9:5).
 - d. “*I am the door*,” your only hope of entering heaven, (Joh 10:7, Joh 10:9).
 - e. “*I am the good shepherd*,” your guard, defender and guide, (Joh 10:11, Joh 10:14).
 - f. “*I am the resurrection and the life*,” your victory over death (Joh 11:25).
 - g. “*I am the true vine*,” the source of all your production (Joh 15:1, Joh 15:5).

E. His mercy and comfort finds expression in His Word.

Here again we have a source of never-ending supply, like Jeremiah’s fountain (Jer 2:13), which we too often disregard and ignore in our time of need.

1. The command to “*comfort My people*” is fulfilled by the ministry of the Word of God that lives and abides forever, Isa 40:1–8.
2. The great tragedy of our generation is that the “*shepherds*” (pastors) are more into feeding themselves, forsaking the ministry of the Word, Eze 34:1–6.
3. When this happens, Christ Himself will step in and shepherd, Isa 40:10–11 and Eze 34:11–16. He will not fail His people no matter what the circumstances.

Point: All over this country there are believers meeting in homes, spending time in the Word, because they can’t find Bible-teaching churches.

F. He supplies “all comfort” because He rules over “all things.”

It is very interesting to study the “all things” of Paul. Here are few examples:

1. Our God controls, guides *“all things,”* conditions for ultimate good, Rom 8:28.
2. God has supplied us *“all things”* so we can minister in all things, 2Co 5:18 and 2Co 6:4.
3. By His providence, *“all things”* will ultimately praise Him, Rom 11:33–35.
4. Therefore, we can give thanks and rejoice in *“all things,”* 1Th 5:16–17.

Applications:

1. There will never be a time or a circumstance in your life where the comfort of God will not be supplied and available to you through faith alone.
2. In the deepest sorrows, we will find the greatest experiences of comfort.
3. Alexander Solzhenitsyn gave thanks for his time in the Russian Gulag, for he said it was here alone that he learned the true nature of freedom.
4. Never forget that Jesus Christ is your shield, nothing can touch you that does not pass through Him, and God will not permit anything to touch you that is not for His ultimate purpose.

IV. The Comfort of Jesus Christ

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” 2Th 2:16–17

A. In context:

1. The entire Trinity is engaged in all Their might for our comfort.
2. By the infinite love and grace of God, we are supplied all comfort for the present and hope for the future, both temporal and eternal.
3. This comfort is a means to an end; that we might be strengthened in a spiritual life of divine production in word and deed.

B. The commission of Christ was to bring comfort into the world, Isa 61:1–3, Isa 61:10. Jesus answers the call of Isa 40:1, *“Comfort, yes, comfort My people.”*

1. This is the passage Jesus read when He returned to Nazareth, Luk 4:14, Luk 4:21. On that occasion, He stopped mid-verse 2, as the rest will not be fulfilled until the Second Advent.
2. Let’s take note of a spiritual progression, the “journey,” we noted above.
 - a. The objective is spiritual healing for the brokenhearted (cf. Mat 5:3).
 - b. The means is through spiritual liberation by regeneration, Joh 8:32, Joh 8:36.
 - c. The *“acceptable time”* is always the perennial “now,” 2Co 6:2.
 - d. Regeneration, followed by growth, leads to the comfort of the Spirit, the beauty of holiness, the joy of fellowship, and the praise of right spiritual orientation (Mat 5:4; Mat 11:28–29; Joh 15:10–11; 1Jo 1:3–4; and Jam 1:2–4).

- e. The end result is that the believer becomes an “oak of righteousness,” stable and secure in life’s storms, giving shelter to those who are weak (Rom 15:1).

Illustration: A shepherd in France named Elzéard Bouffier, between 1913 and 1947, who—having lost his wife and son—began planting acorns in a barren mountain area. By the time he died, the forest he planted was named a natural reserve, the streams began to flow, and farms began to flourish all around the forest.

C. He then finalized it by taking all our sin/sorrow on Himself.

- 1. Christ went to the cross “*for the joy ... set before Him,*” Heb 12:2.
- 2. His mission was to take our sin that we might receive His life, 2Co 5:21.
- 3. Beyond that, He intends that we enter into His work, 2Co 5:14–21.

D. He perpetuates His finished work through His Spirit.

- 1. The indwelling Spirit brings His presence and power, Joh 14:15–18.
- 2. Every reference to the Spirit in the Upper Room includes truth and comfort, Joh 14:16–17; Joh 15:26; and Joh 16:7, Joh 16:13. There is no comfort apart from the truth.
- 3. By the provision of the indwelling Spirit, we have the greatest promise in the Bible for the Church-Age believer, given in Joh 14:21–23. Think about it!

V. The Other Comforter

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2Co 3:17–18

A. In context:

- 1. The indwelling Spirit of God is working as the presence and power of Christ.
- 2. Two of our greatest sources of comfort are spiritual liberty and conformity.
- 3. The Spirit accomplishes these through the agency of the Word of God.
- 4. Again, the end goal of comfort is transformation and productivity.

B. The Holy Spirit is inseparable from the truth of God’s Word.

- 1. True worship is an engagement with the Spirit and Truth, Joh 4:23–24.
- 2. The very Word of God is the breath and mind of the Spirit, Joh 6:63; 2Ti 3:16.
- 3. To be “filled by means of the Spirit” is to “*let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly,*” Eph 5:18 with Col 3:16.

- C. The Spirit of God is the author and interpreter of God's Word.
1. The Spirit is actively involved in the work of revelation, 2Ti 3:16.
 2. He then follows up through the work of inspiration, 1Pe 1:10–12.
 3. Then the Spirit guards the Word by active preservation, Eph 3:5–7, Eph 3:20–21).
 4. This makes possible His current work of illumination, Eph 1:18.
 5. Finally comes the enablement of the believer for application, Eph 3:16–19.
- D. The Spirit enables and empowers the believer for service.
1. The foundation of all service is fellowship through faith, Rom 1:17 and 1Jo 1:7.
 2. Enablement to serve comes by indwelling and gifting, Rom 8:9 and 1Co 12:4–7.
 3. All spiritual work begins with prayer; here, the Spirit intercedes, Rom 8:26.
 4. Therefore, the doing of the work is a (super) natural result, Joh 15:1–8.
- E. The comfort of God is a united effort from the Trinity.
1. The Father designs for each one of us a good and perfect plan, Rom 12:1–2.
 2. The Son accomplishes redemption to bring us back to God, 1Pe 2:21–25.
 3. The Spirit becomes our constant companion and comforter, 1Th 1:5–6.

Applications:

1. The divine sources of comfort available to the believer are without number.
2. We suffer and seem to lack adequate help and comfort simply because we do not rely on Him who is the ever-present Comforter.
3. We must become attentive to the “still small voice” and learn to be led by the Spirit of God if we are to be stable and secure in the days ahead, 1Ki 19:12 and Rom 8:14.

VI. The Comfort of the Word

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the perseverance and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Rom 15:4

- A. In context:
1. Note Rom 15:5, Paul appeals to “*the God of patience and comfort.*” God's will comes to pass in accordance with His Word.
 2. It is evident He works these in us through the agency of His Word.
 3. We might even see a progression here: first learning, leading to endurance, resulting in comfort (present) and hope (future).
 4. In anticipation of our next session, note too that in Rom 15:1, Rom 15:5, the Word of God then works through believers one to another.

B. The comfort of God's Word in affliction is proven in fiery trials, Psa 119:65–72.

1. This is the *teth* file in the alphabetical acrostic that is Psalm 119. It is the symbol of a gripping hand, like one hand holding another for support.
2. This section demonstrates the “*Lord is my helper*” (Heb 13:5–6), or, as Jeremiah said, “*The Lord is with me as a mighty [champion]*” (Jer 20:11).
3. See in Psa 119:65–66 the combination of gratitude in hardship coupled with a desire for enlightenment and illumination relevant to his daily experience.
4. When we see the value of afflictions, for our spiritual refining (Psa 119:65, Psa 119:71), we are enabled to endure profitably. This is Rom 5:1–5 and Jam 1:2–4 in action.
5. The cry “*teach me,*” Psa 119:66, Psa 119:68, is the piel imperative from *lamad*. This “conveys the sense of training, as well as education.” Teaching and learning are not academic, but are focused on knowing and responding to the will of God (cf. Deu 31:12–13,” *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*; Lawrence O. Richards). The same verb is translated “*learn*” in Psa 119:71.
6. This cry occurs nine times in Psalm 119, revealing the spiritual hunger of the author in the midst of the most humbling and painful afflictions. He combines with it a personal commitment to obey whatever God reveals to him, Psa 119:69–70.
7. Finally, he expresses the value of God's Word as his personal treasure, Psa 110:72. With the Word of God in his soul, he is rich. This is amplified by the word “*delight*” in Psa 119:70, which is *sa'a*, meaning “take great pleasure in, fulfilled desire and joy.” This word occurs eight times in this Psalm. Paul picks up the idea in two passages:

“*For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.*” Rom 7:22

“*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities ... for when I am weak I am strong.*” 2Co 12:10

C. In fact, it is often affliction that drives us into the Word of God.

1. Read Psa 42:7–8; the “*deep*” of affliction calls to the “*deep*” of God's comfort.
2. David's confession in Psa 51:6–13 shows the corrective effects of discipline.
3. It is through the affliction of discipline that David learns,

“*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.*” Psa 51:17

D. Obedience brought about by suffering is one of our greatest comforts.

1. I often heard my father say, “The softest pillow is a clear conscience.”
2. When we suffer due to disobedience, our comfort is found in accepting the correction, being able to say, “I get it!”
3. When Paul and team were undergoing severe trials in Asia (2Co 1:8–10), his comfort was a clear conscience in regard to his conduct (2Co 1:12). The word “*simplicity*”

- means “single, without folds, nothing hidden,” while “*sincerity*” indicates “able to be judged in the sunlight.”
4. We see another example in 2Co 12:7–10, where we have an example of preventive discipline. God, knowing the danger to Paul of exalting himself, brings affliction to humble him, thus keeping him operating under the grace of God, 2Co 1:12; 2Co 12:7–10.

Applications:

1. The Word of God is great comfort in affliction. However, the key is to saturate the soul with the Word before affliction comes.
2. Whether the sufferings we endure are providential for refining, or discipline for disobedience, God’s Word brings light into dark and difficult times, Psa 119:105.
3. The only spiritually sane approach to life on this embattled planet is to “*abide in the Word,*” and let the Word abide in us, Joh 8:31, Joh 15:7. To abide in the Word means consistent study, whereas permitting God’s Word to abide in us implies active obedience under the leadership and power of the Holy Spirit.
4. I use the word “permit” in light of the “permissive” command of Col 3:16.

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ...”

VII. Comfort One Another

“Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” 2Co 1:4

A. In context:

1. Here is the real end game of experiencing the comfort of God.
2. If trials conform us to Christ, then comfort is designed to enter us into His ministry of comforting others in the same way.
3. The “*any trouble*” 2Co 1:4 corresponds to the “*all comfort*” of 2Co 1:3.
4. If we truly lived by faith, and were conscious of God’s dealings with us in times of trial, we would be adequately equipped to help those around us who suffer—whatever the cause.
5. Jesus gave a great illustration of giving comfort in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luk 10:25–37). His application to the scribe who elicited the story was, “*Go and do likewise.*”

B. We need to experience God’s comfort before we can administer it, 2Co 1:8–11.

1. Paul was acutely conscious of the fact that every experience involves a lesson.
2. God is at work in the details of our lives, and what we call “the daily grind” is actually the stuff of legends, if we will only learn and convert the lessons into ministry to those around us.

3. 2Co 1:11 is a classic case of divine viewpoint on how God works in our lives. Paul and his team are suffering; the Corinthians are praying for them. As those prayers are answered, they will give rise to many others offering thanksgiving for how God delivers them.
 4. One of the great biblical illustrations of these truths is the book of Ruth. The hand of God is so evident in the commonplace events of the lives of “ordinary people,” who simply—by their willingness to play the part God assigned to them—become “heroes of the faith”!
 5. The phrase “it came to pass,” or “it so *happened*” (cf. Rut 2:3), is common in the Old Testament, and is a constant reminder that the providence of God is always at work in our lives.
- C. This is what is meant by being an “Oak of Righteousness,” Isa 61:3, Isa 61:10.
1. Notice a progression in the context: First, there is the divine objective (Isa 61:3)—that of transforming frail men into “oaks of righteousness.”
 2. Then we see the effects in Isa 61:10–11, the believer “standing firm,” rejoicing in time of trials (cf., Rom 5:3, Jam 1:2), because through them he/she is “*clothed with the garments of salvation ...covered with the robe of righteousness.*”
 3. Finally, there is the eternal reward (Isa 62:1–3, 11) given for the fulfillment of the plan of God.
 4. I cannot stress enough that in the plan of God for the royal family, there is no such thing as an insignificant believer or a cameo-appearance role to play.
- D. The ministry of comfort is open to all who are willing to engage in it, 1Th 5:11, 1Th 5:14.
1. There is a comfort that comes from understanding sound doctrine, 1Th 4:18.
 2. There is another comfort resulting from mutual spiritual strength, 1Th 5:11.
 3. But there are times when one member is weak, and the comfort of one “oak of righteousness” with a spiritual sapling is priceless (we are saplings from time to time).
 4. Paul says in Rom 15:1, “*We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*” This is a reflection of what Christ has done for us (Rom 15:3), and we will all take our turn being the weak member standing in need of comfort and strength from other believers.
 5. One of the greatest ways we can encourage and strengthen those around us is found in the context, Rom 15:16–18. It is often difficult to find truly joyful, cheerful, and thankful saints. I quote Malcolm Muggeridge, former BBC journalist, from his book *Conversion*. He refers to himself as “the journalist”:
- “Newcomers to the Christian faith, the journalist finds, are considered, by the nature of the case, to have lost their sense of humor: How funny he used to be! And now, alas, how solemn! How portentous! What an unconscionable bore he has become! This assumption that a sense of humor and a Christian faith are incompatible is totally mistaken ... Laughter, indeed, is God’s therapy.”* (pp 70–71)

6. It is worth mentioning and keeping in mind, that we cannot offer to others what we do not have.
7. One of the greatest opportunities for the ministry of comfort open to us all is that of restoring a fellow-believer who has fallen, Gal 6:1–5.

Become an oak of righteousness! Give beauty instead of ashes.

Applications:

1. Your every trial is a spiritual “gym session” designed to build spiritual muscle in your faith.
2. The stoic philosopher, Epictetus, said (I paraphrase from memory), “When you find yourself in some difficult affliction, then consider that the Great Coach has pitted you against a tough and worthy opponent, so as to prepare you to be victorious in the Great Games.”
3. Denzel Washington, in an interview regarding the movie, “The Book of Eli” said, “There is no testimony without a test.”
4. Let us learn to be true warriors of Christ, to “*endure hardship as a good soldier*” (2Ti 2:3), and to draw on the manifold mercies of God for our comfort, that we might become a channel of comfort to those around us, in these perilous times!