

## Comfort, Comfort My People

Carla, a little girl, fell while playing and badly skinned her hands and knees. Bursting into tears she ran inside. Her mother, Maria, picked her up, sat her on her knee, wrapped her arms around her and proceeded to tell Carla why her hands and knees hurt! Maria explains to Carla about nerve endings and the laws of physics and tells her she must be more careful next time and to watch where she is going. "Yes mummy," Carla says, "but it still hurts!" Carla didn't need a discourse, she wanted her mother's hugs and kisses. She wanted to be comforted.

John Feinberg was confused, devastated, disbelieving. He says, "I found little comfort in the intense intellectual, theological and philosophical answers to the problem of suffering. The truth is, I couldn't figure it out. I knew all the intellectual answers, but none of them made any difference in how I felt on a personal level. The emotional and psychological pain was unrelenting and even devastating physical pain resulted from the stress of knowing my wife had Huntington's Disease. ... I was suffering a religious crisis . . . All my study and all the intellectual answers were of little help . . . my problem was not an intellectual one it was fundamentally an emotional one! . . . My problem was about how, in the midst of affliction, I could find comfort?" You can read John and Pat's story in the book: *Where is God? A Personal Story of Finding God in Grief and Suffering*.

The apostle Paul was a church planter, missionary, pastor-teacher and apostle of Jesus Christ. He describes his personal circumstances as being "under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8). Paul, because of a riot, is forced to leave Ephesus, is rejected and vilified by the Corinthian church, and plunged into a vortex of undefined suffering.

Paul says that he was "rescued" by "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort." How does God give us a "big hug and kiss?" How does God give us that loving embrace and reassurance? Paul experienced God's comfort through reading and recalling the Scriptures, a vision (Acts 18:9), through the ministry of friends and hearing good news (2 Corinthians 7:6-7).

John Feinberg recalls one of the things that did bring him God's comfort when he felt he couldn't take it any more, let alone comfort his wife, was a remark his dad made: "John, God never promised you tomorrow's grace for today." John writes: "In that one comment . . . God impressed on me I don't have to live my tomorrows today." Another major factor, John says, in helping me cope "was seeing that God and others really loved and cared. This was expressed in a multitude of loving, creative, sensitive, compassionate, tangible ways."

"Comfort my people," says our God. "Comfort them!" (Isaiah 40:1). Will we comfort each other?