



In our lives we often feel isolated and cut off from the deep springs of comfort and hope that can refresh us. Rev. Bauer shows you how to trust that God wills your wholeness. In his gentle words of encouragement, you will learn how to take enough time to love your little piece of time without forgetting that you also live beyond time.

**Comfort for Hard Times:
Meditations on Solace, Hope, and Healing**
by Louis E. Bauer

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LOUIS E. BAUER

*Comfort
for
Hard Times*

MEDITATIONS
ON SOLACE, HOPE, AND
HEALING

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Introduction

*That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by, the prophet Isaiah, "He took our sickness and bore our pain."
(Matthew 8: 16-17)*

*I*t was evening. The sun was setting, and it was the cool and calm time of the day. Matthew paints a picture for us. There are crowds—large crowds— inching their way toward the Rabbi, reaching out to him. There is a solidarity of experience in these people who are pressing forward. They know something of life's brokenness. Either they are diseased or someone they know and love is ill. Everyone in that crowd pressing toward Jesus that evening had come to him profoundly aware of their need to be healed. What distinguishes this crowd of sick and ailing humanity is just that: they are aware of their need.

This evening's round of healings was the climax to a busy day for Jesus. Matthew reminds us that on that same day a leper had come to Jesus and said, "If you will, you can make me clean." A centurion had come to him on behalf of his paralyzed servant said to him, "Just say the word, and my servant will be healed."

You begin to perceive this powerful, image of people coming to Jesus. They are bringing him their aches and pains, their sorrows and transgressions, their disappointment and their grief. Some are paralyzed. Some are fevered. Some are disabled. Some are depressed. Some are simply wounded by life. But they come, knowing their need. And they come trusting that he can do something for them, believing that he can heal them.

And that is the point, isn't it? Especially if what is ailing us may not be readily apparent to our family and our friends. We are first invited to recognize our need for healing, because no healing is possible unless we first have the courage to acknowledge our need to be restored and renewed. We are invited to come to this gentle healer with the same kind of trust displayed by those brave souls we encounter in Matthew's Gospel. This implicit trust means that

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if we dare to lay our infirmity, our weakness, our illness, and our pain upon Jesus, we can experience healing. We can experience wholeness.

I encourage you to quietly ponder your own neediness, and I encourage you to dare to bring it to God for healing, trusting that he desires and wills your wholeness. You will soon realize that you are not alone. You will soon know that you have already moved beyond weakness and infirmity to strength and love. We come to God, imploring, "Take our infirmities and bear our diseases." Remember the leper who called out, "If you will, you can make me clean." In the ultimate act of love, Jesus replies to each of us who come to him just as he replied to the leper: "I will."

Lou Bauer

A Final Word of Comfort

There are few words in all four Gospels more comforting than these: *Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* (Luke 12:32) Whenever I read these words or sing the beautiful and simple hymn that is based upon them, I feel consoled. Comforted. My anxious mind and troubled heart are eased by the powerful promise of God's pleasure in giving me the kingdom and the fullness of life that implies.

But no sooner have we taken our ease in those reassuring words, than we are shocked and baffled by what Jesus says in the very next verse. He utters this jarring imperative: Sell all your belongings and give the money to the poor. Provide for yourselves purses that don't wear out, for they will be your treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Suddenly the gift and the Father's good pleasure seem to have a string attached. Or a rope. Or even a chain. What are we to do with

these embarrassing words of Jesus, “Sell all you have, and give the money to the poor?” Really? Not even his church has ever truly taken those words at face value. What do you do when you come up against those words of Jesus that simply don’t fit into your world? Can you selectively omit them? Ignore them? What would a Biblical literalist do with what Jesus advised? I have never met one who has taken these words of Jesus literally.

One thing is clear. Jesus could not have intended this to be a platform or a program to provide for the poor, because surely he knew that hardly anyone would take him seriously on a matter as grave as this. No one is going to have a yard sale for all her belongs. Nor is he going to put everything he owns into trust with the Salvation Army.

So what are we—you and I—going to do with these words? Jesus did speak them, and we cannot ignore them, especially when they were spoken by someone who practiced what he preached.

Perhaps we can look for guidance at a few of the heroes of the Hebrew Bible, Abraham and Sarah. Abraham and Sarah were two old folks who found themselves one night in a sweet

tangle of love, conceiving a child, when most folks their age were shuffling around a nursing home pushing their walkers. God was faithful to his promise, and his two servants were faithful to his promise.

They were searchers. Seekers. Dreamers who were somehow never quite at home in this world. Call them homeless people, if you like. Home was somewhere else, lying way out there in the future. And so they wandered through the landscape of life believing promises and chasing dreams. They looked beyond every sweet thing of the world, waiting for God and craning their necks to glimpse the fulfillment of a promise. And there were others, like Moses and the great King David. What distinguished these people is that they saw themselves as strangers and nomads on earth. Because they never made the mistake of believing that they had found their home in this world, they could do what so many of us, deep in our hearts, would like to do.

The Bible remembers these people and holds them up because each one carried a light suitcase to eternity. Their suitcases were not chock full of possessions. They did not travel in caravans of U-Hauls. Tents were all that covered

their heads at night. And they were strangers on earth.

Such an unusual way of looking at life seems to be pleasing to God. The author of the Book of Hebrews says: *That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God.* Even though each one of them was really a scoundrel in his or her own way, God was proud of them and quite pleased to be associated with them in their poverty of spirit and poverty of life. And not one of them, according to the Bible, was ever disappointed by faithfully chasing after God and his unearthly, pie-in-the-sky promises.

And it was just that—being faithful, trusting beyond trust, believing beyond belief, dreaming beyond the wildest dreams, and behaving at times in the most god-awfully peculiar ways—that somehow led God to reckon each one of them as his kind of people. People with whom he wants to spend eternity.

That's the way it was with Jesus and his dreaming about a kingdom or a reign of God in this world, the likes of which few would ever see, but all would seek and search for with all their might. Because the God of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and David had promised that

things would someday be changed for those who kept hoping and believing.

Maybe that was something of what Jesus had in mind that day when he uncorked these words upon his disciples. He wanted them to get beyond all the appearances and to get at the life of trusting and chasing a promise down the road and all the way into the kingdom. Because that was the real stuff, and still is the real stuff, of life. Is the phrase, "Carrying a light suitcase into eternity," really a softening of what Jesus said? Perhaps it is, but I find it helpful.

I also find it helpful to ponder that maybe comfort—real comfort—is actually something quite different from what we conceive it to be, or what we yearn for it to be. Maybe it means hanging on blindly, empty-handedly—to promises. Hanging on in faith for what we cannot see, but has been whispered to us. Hanging on in faith, trusting, and believing. And perhaps comfort is best pronounced *challenge*. To be comforted is to be challenged to one's limits.

Honestly, I do not know what to do with Jesus's words. I can only take them into my heart and ponder them and bravely open myself

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to be challenged to the core of my soul. May you do likewise, fellow dreamer.



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