

Quote from Nouwen book:

When do we receive real comfort and consolation? Is it when someone teaches us how to think or act? Is it when receive advice about where to go or what to do? Is it when we hear words of reassurance and hope? Sometimes, perhaps. But what really counts is that in moments of pain and suffering someone stays with us. More important than any particular action or word of advice is the simple presence of someone who cares.

When someone says to us in the midst of a crisis, "I do not know what to say or what to do, but I want you to realize that I am with you, that I will not leave you alone," we have a friend through whom we can find consolation and comfort. In a time so filled with methods and techniques designed to change people, to influence their behavior, and to make them do new things and think new thoughts, we have lost the simple but difficult gift of being present to each other. We have lost this gift because we have been led to believe that presence must be useful. We say, "Why should I visit this person? I can't do anything anyway. I don't even have anything to say. Of what use can I be?"

Meanwhile, we have forgotten that it is often in "useless," unpretentious, humble presence to each other that we feel consolation and comfort. Simply being with someone is difficult because it asks of us that we share in the other's vulnerability, enter with him or her into the experience of weakness and powerlessness, become part of uncertainty, and give up control and self-determination. And still, whenever this happens, new strength and new hope is being born. Those who offer us comfort and consolation by being and staying with us in moments of illness, mental anguish, or spiritual darkness often grow as close to us as those with whom we have biological ties. They show their solidarity with us by willingly entering the dark, uncharted spaces of our lives. For this reason, they are the ones who bring new hope and help us discover new directions.

These reflections offer only a glimpse of what we mean when we say that God is a God-with-us, a God who came to share our lives in solidarity. It does not mean that God solves our problems, shows us the way out of our confusion, or offers answers to our many questions. He might do all of that, but his solidarity consists in the fact that he is willing to enter with us into our problems, confusions and questions.

Nouwen, McNeill, Morrison. Compassion (New York: Doubleday, 1982), pg. 13-14.