**15 Martin Luther Quotes on Comforting the Suffering**

**95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 2**

**A Word from Bob:** This article originally appeared as Part 2 of a six-part blog series on *95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note*. For Part 1, visit: [*15 Martin Luther Quotes on the Sufficiency of Scripture*](http://bit.ly/15LutherSuf).

Martin Luther is famous for his Ninety-Five Theses which launched the Reformation. So, I’m collating my favorite 95 Martin Luther quotes from my book: [*Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life*](http://www.rpmministries.org/writing/counseling-under-the-cross/).

**Luther’s Words of Gospel-Centered Comfort**

Since 95 quotes would make for a very long blog, I’m dividing these quotes into several blog posts. Here’s post number two…with quotes focused on Luther’s compassionate ministry to the suffering.

Many people are surprised, if not shocked, at how comforting Luther was in his writings. They picture Luther as the bold Reformer. These quotes remind us that alongside Luther’s boldness was another side—the tender pastoral shepherd.

As one of Luther’s translators said of Luther’s letter to a troubled man, “The entire writing echoes his experience as a pastor and confessor constantly in contact with men and women who were terrified by the maze of popular customs and practices observed by the church in connection with death. To Schart and others like him *Luther speaks with intimate and comforting understanding*.”

**Comforting His Mother**

Luther’s compassionate ministry included comforting his mother when it was apparent that she was near death.

1. “My *dearly beloved Mother*! I have received my brother James’s letter concerning your illness. Of course *this grieves me deeply*, especially because I cannot be with you in person, as I certainly would like to be. All your children and my Katie pray for you; *some weep*.”[[1]](#endnote-1)
2. “Dear Mother, you also know the true center and foundation of your salvation *from whom you are to seek comfort in this and all troubles, namely, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone*. He will not waver or fail us, nor allow us to sink or perish, for he is the Savior and is called the Savior of all poor sinners, and of all who are caught in tribulation and death, and rely on him, and call on his name. *The Father and God of all consolation* grant you, through his holy Word and Spirit, a steadfast, joyful, and grateful faith blessedly to overcome this and all other trouble.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

**Exposing Satan’s Lies and Christ’s Grace and Truth**

A cornerstone of Luther’s comforting counsel was to remind believers of the *lie of Satan and of the love and truth of God*, as he does in the next quote.

1. “When God sends us tribulation, it is *not* as reason and Satan argue: ‘See there God flings you into prison, endangers your life. Surely He hates you. He is angry with you; for if He did not hate you, He would not allow this thing to happen.’ In this way Satan turns the rod of a Father into the rope of a hangman and the most salutary remedy into the deadliest poison. He is an incredible master at devising thoughts of this nature. Therefore, it is very difficult to differentiate in tribulations between him who kills and Him who chastises in a friendly way.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

Luther always directed people to the comfort of Christ, as he does in this next letter to the Elector Frederick.

1. “When, therefore, I learned, most illustrious prince, that Your Lordship has been afflicted with a grave illness and that Christ has at the same time become ill in you, I counted it my duty to visit Your Lordship with a little writing of mine. I cannot pretend that I do not *hear the voice of Christ crying out to me from Your Lordship’s body and flesh saying*, ‘Behold, I am sick.’ This is so because such evils as illness and the like are not borne by us who are Christians but by Christ himself, our Lord and Savior, in whom we live even as Christ plainly testifies in the Gospel when he says, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’”[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Looking at Life with Cross-Eyes**

Luther sought to help suffering people reshape their perspective or interpretation of their life situation—from a gospel-centered perspective.

1. “The Holy Spirit knows that a thing only has such *value and meaning to a man as he assigns it in his thoughts*.”[[5]](#endnote-5)
2. Therefore, “if we consider this (the broader rule and plan of God) rightly, we shall see how greatly we are favored by God. We thus see that all our suffering is nothing when we consider and ponder the afflictions of men. *Oh, if we could only see the heart of Christ as he was suspended from the cross*, anguishing to make death contemptible and dead for us. This (delighting in suffering) will come to pass if this image (of Christ’s resurrection) finds its way into our heart and abides in the innermost affections of our mind.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

Luther wanted to help Frederick to understand that the death of Christ for him and the suffering of Christ with him could change Frederick’s perspective:

1. “How does this come to pass? Surely, it comes to pass when you hear that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, has by his most holy touch consecrated and hallowed all sufferings, even death itself, has blessed the curse, and has glorified shame and enriched poverty so that death is now a door to life, the curse a fount of blessing, and shame the mother of glory. Suffering has been touched and bathed by Christ’s pure and holy flesh and blood and thus have become holy, harmless, and wholesome, blessed, and full of joy for you. *There is nothing, not even death, that his passion cannot sweeten*.”[[7]](#endnote-7)
2. “*If only a man could see his God in such a light of love* . . . how happy, how calm, how safe he would be! He would then truly have a God from whom he would know with certainty that all his fortunes—whatever they might be—had come to him and were still coming to him under the guidance of God’s most gracious will.”[[8]](#endnote-8)

Luther wanted people’s non-faith or earth-bound, human story of suffering to give way to God’s narrative of the cross and resurrection:

1. “He who does not believe this is like a deaf man hearing a story…. If we considered it properly and with an attentive heart, this one image (Christ crucified and raised)—even if there were no other—would suffice to fill us with such comfort that we should not only not grieve over our evils, but should also glory in our tribulations, scarcely feeling them for the joy that we have in Christ.”[[9]](#endnote-9)

**Giving Hurting People Permission to Grieve and Pointing People to Christ—The Ultimate Comforter**

Luther often wrote to hurting people, giving them permission to grieve and encouragement to hope.

1. “I am not so inhumane that I cannot appreciate how deeply the death of Margaret distresses you. For the great and godly affection which binds a husband to his wife is so strong that it cannot easily be shaken off, and *this feeling of sorrow is not displeasing to God…since it is an expression of what God has assuredly implanted in you*. Nor would I account you a man, to say nothing of a good husband, if you could at once throw off your grief.”[[10]](#endnote-10)
2. “My dear Cordatus: *May Christ comfort you in this sorrow and affliction of yours*. *Who else can soothe such a grief*? I can easily believe what you write, for I too have had experience of such a calamity, which comes to a father’s heart sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the marrow. But you ought to remember that it is not to be marveled at if he, who is more truly and properly a father than you were, preferred for his own glory that your son—nay, rather his son—should be with him rather than with you, for he is safer there than here. But all of this is vain, a story that falls on deaf ears, when your grief is so new. *I therefore yield to your sorrows. Greater and better men than we are have given way to grief and are not blamed for it*.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

Luther frequently offered permission to grieve by communicating that it was abnormal and unhealthy *not* to grieve. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. Matthias Knudsen were the parents of John Knudsen, a graduate of the university in Wittenberg. Luther wrote to them after their son’s death. After expressing consolation in the experience of the death of their son, Luther writes:

1. “It is *quite inconceivable that you should not be mourning*. In fact, it would not be encouraging to learn that a father and mother are not grieved over the death of their son.”[[12]](#endnote-12)
2. “So you too, when you have mourned and wept, should be comforted again. *The Lord and supreme Comforter Jesus Christ*, who loved your son even more than you did and who, having first called him through his Word, afterward summoned him to himself and took him from you, comfort and strengthen you, with his grace until the day when you will see your son again in eternal joy.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

**Sharing Personal Suffering**

Luther often vulnerably shared his own raw grief, such as these honest words after his father’s death:

1. “*This death has cast me into deep mourning*, not only because of the ties of nature but also because it was through his sweet love to me that my Creator endowed me with all that I am and have. Although it is consoling to me that, as he writes, my father fell asleep softly and strong in his faith in Christ, yet his kindness and the memory of his pleasant conversation *have caused so deep a wound in my heart that I have scarcely ever held death in such low esteem*.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

John Zink was a young graduate student at Wittenberg and a frequent guest in Luther’s home. On April 20, he died, and Luther wrote his parents to express the great personal loss John’s death was to him and to empathize with their grief:

1. “Accordingly we all are deeply grieved by his death. As is natural, your son’s death, and the report of it, will distress and grieve your heart and that of your wife, since you are his parents. *I do not blame you for this, for all of us—I in particular—are stricken with sorrow*.”[[15]](#endnote-15)

**Join the Conversation**

Of these 15 quotes, which ones resonate the most with you?

How could Luther’s words giving Christians permission to grieve, help you to lament vulnerably and grieve deeply your life losses?

Like Luther, how can you point people to Christ—the Ultimate Comforter?

**Endnotes**

1. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, pp.17-24. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, pp.17-24. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 16, p. 214. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*,p. 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, p. 124. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, pp. 126, 131, 132, 147, 149, 135, 139, 143, 145. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, pp. 141-142. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, p. 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, p. 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*,p. 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*,p. 60. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*,p. 61. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*,pp. 61-62. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*,p. 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 50, p. 51. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)