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What's in a Name?: Wonderful Counselor

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Here it is: Beginning to look a lot like Christmas, the first snowfall of the winter, happy holidays. But as I stand here, I can't help but think of the family of Margaret Sias, and the tragedy facing Carole, and Katie, and Danny Laird, having lost Ron as husband and father, Ron, so young. I don't know exactly what to say. I want to help them bear their pain. I want to be there for them. I need to rely on God and ask him to help me help them. I want to be there, to counsel them and comfort them. You know, there are so many people in the world that need comfort and counsel!

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 "All praise to God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us. We have plenty of hard times that come from following the Messiah, but no more so than the good times of his healing comfort – we get a full measure of that too."

Where else can we turn? Where else can we run? Who else holds the keys of life and death?

And when life overwhelms you, where do you turn? Has God even provided for us in times like that? Yes.

True Story: A deer hunter in Oregon was startled when he was following an old logging road about to head back to camp when a noise exploded from the nearby brush. Before he could even lift his rifle, a small blur of brown and white fur came shooting straight up the road to him. He looked down and there was a little brown cottontail, spent, crowded up against his legs between his boots, trembling all over, but not budging. Talk about strange! Wild rabbits are frightened of people. It's rare you ever see one, let alone having one come to you and sit at your feet. While the hunter was puzzling over this, another explosion out of the brush happened, and a weasel burst onto the scene. When it saw the hunter, and its intended prey at his feet, it froze, mouth panting, eyes red. It was then the hunter understood he had stepped into a life and death drama in the forest. The cottontail, exhausted by the chase, was only moments from death. The hunter was his last refuge. The hunter didn't disappoint. He raised his rifle and shot into the ground just in front of the weasel. It leapt straight into the air a few feet and rocketed back into the forest. For awhile the rabbit didn't stir. It just sat there, huddled at the hunter's feet. Soon the rabbit hopped away from its protector.

Where do YOU run in your time of need?

Where do you go to get away from your past?

Where do you hide when you need rest, and peace?

We know so little of the wonderful God who loves us! But we're called to wait on the Lord, which is the whole theme of Advent, the beginning of the Christian year. I know this season is the most difficult for those who have lost someone, or those whose lives are full of broken relationships with others and with

themselves. But I think no matter what your circumstance, no matter what your struggle, no matter what your need, God is more than sufficient to meet it. God knew we would need a Wonderful Counselor.

The prophet Isaiah, when he was speaking to the people of Judah around 700BC, gave us four names for the coming Messiah. Do you know those names?

Isaiah 9:6 *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Today we are looking at the name *Wonderful Counselor*. The Hebrew word yaats means advise, counsel, and teach. Jesus the Messiah, the one whose birth we await, is the wonderful teacher, able to teach God’s ways. He came to us to teach us. Christmas is about God’s splitting time and space to come to us in the most amazing way. And his name is Immanuel, God with us. He didn’t remain aloof, but came and lived with us in order to teach us.

God knew what we would need – a wonderful Counselor.

- Not a counselor who would wait in an office for us to make an appointment, but someone who would seek us out.
- Not a counselor who only talks with us, but someone who walks through it with us and lives with us.
- Not a counselor who hadn’t been through what we go through, but someone who had really been there.
- Not a counselor who was a paid professional, but someone who was a friend closer than a brother, there only because he cares for us.

OK. STOP HERE. NAME YOUR “COUNSELOR”.

Whose counsel you are listening to. (there are many voices out there. Who do you find yourself going with most of the time?)

Whose message is getting through to you? (what are your thoughts about when you have that “think” time?)

What counsel are you feeding yourself with? (reading/watching/spending time with?)

And why not God? When I’m down, and tired of myself, I try to lift my focus off of myself, and set my eyes on things above, on God. Here’s my list from that last time I was overwhelmed:

He’s the Alpha, the Author and Finisher of our faith

He’s the Beginning and the end,

He’s the Comforter and Chief Cornerstone,

He’s our Deliverer,

He’s Everlasting God, the Eternal Word

He’s Faithful, a Father to the Fatherless

He’s the Good Shepherd, and the Guardian of our Souls,

He's the Holy One,
He's Immortal God, Immanuel,
He's Jesus,
He's the Keeper of our Souls, the King of Kings,
He's the Light of the world and the Lord of Lords, and the Life
He's Messiah, Mighty God,
He's Nearer than our next breath, the giver of New Life,
He's Omega, Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent,
He's Prince of Peace, our Provider,
He's the Quieter of our souls,
He's the Resurrection, the Righteous Judge, the Revealer,
He's our Salvation, our Savior and the Son of God
He's our Teacher and the Truth,
He's Understanding, the Unifier of the Church,
He's Very God of Very God,
He's Wonderful Counselor, our Wound Healer, the Way
He's our Cross-bearer, extraordinary Advocate,
He's Yahwah, the Great I AM,
He's Zion's Ruler.

(And that list was from this morning.) Because God is our wonderful counselor, we can turn to him at any time, in any place, because he is also Emmanuel – God with us.

He is everything we could need. Then why don't we turn to him? Why do we hesitate to run to the arms of our all-sufficient God?

Two reasons:

1. Lack of understanding of who God is.
2. Lack of trust in who God is.

We don't understand who God is and we don't trust what he's done for us. He's created us, he's redeemed us, and he sustains us. God gives us life and then gives us new life. Both are amazing. But he didn't leave us

alone. He sent Jesus to be our wonderful counselor. **Have you invited him in?** Have you opened the door of your heart to let him in? Jesus said *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me.”* (Rev 3:20). Have you done that? You do it with a simple prayer. And in that prayer Jesus sets up residence in you, to help you through whatever you may be facing.

As C. S. Lewis put it, “If he had not told us the Good News of God’s forgiving love, we never would have guessed it.” Jesus is Wonderful Counselor – his counsel to us about God is full of wonder!

Jesus knows just how to help. He knows your every need. Trust in his Spirit. Henry Ford’s Dearborn plant shut down. Ford called in Charlie Steinmetz. He puttered for a few hours, threw a switch, and put the plant back into operation. A few days later Henry Ford received a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000. Although Ford was very rich, he returned the bill with a note, “Charlie, isn’t this bill just a little high for a few hours of tinkering around on these motors?” Steinmetz returned the bill to Ford. This time it read: “For tinkering around on the motors: \$10. For knowing where to tinker: \$9,990. Total: \$10,000.” Henry Ford paid the bill. Jesus’ name is Wonderful Counselor. Jesus knows where to tinker. Jesus was the only normal and perfectly sane person who has ever lived.

We have sins as friends. Many of us have tormentors of guilt, “living in the perpetual penance of regret.” (Tozer). Is that you? Have you settled for your sins to be your friends? Are you living in regret? Then listen to the Counselor.

One time Jesus told a parable about a servant, not realizing he was completely forgiven a huge debt. He thought he still had to go around collecting money from the servants who owed him, so he could pay back the lord a debt – that had been canceled. So he grabbed the first guy he saw by the throat, and said, “Pay me what you owe me. Give me my \$20 bucks.” The lord hears of it and throws him in prison to be tormented. Jesus says *“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”* Matthew 18. This is powerful.

God’s mercy isn’t just for more time on the debt. Rather the debt is completely forgiven. Gone. Zippo. Jesus is counseling us to realize that his forgiveness, mercy, and grace is not just an extension of time and patience from God. “He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free...” We don’t get that you can’t pay grace back. You can’t pay mercy back. So we get stuck on the treadmill of performing, achieving, and striving.

When we fail to accept and receive God’s grace and forgiveness, we also fail to give forgiveness and grace to other people. And this results in a breakdown in our relationships. The unforgiven are the unforgiving.

Do you go around thinking that all the significant people in your life owe you a debt? Those who hurt you, those who failed you, teased you, betrayed you, or rejected you. Are you a debt collector? Is your marriage made up of two takers? Two collectors with nothing to collect? The vicious circle becomes more vicious. Emotional conflicts and broken relationships are the result, and they’re only accentuated during the holidays.

If you need the “Wonderful Counselor,” find a community of debt-free believers. In this church we follow Jesus Christ. We seek his Wonderful Counsel. We are a debt-free community of Christians. We know the joy of having seen the Master tear up the note. He hasn’t asked us for more time. He’s only freed us. Matthew 10:8 *“Freely you have received, freely give.”*

What I hope you see is that when Christ came into the world as a baby in Bethlehem, it was not some historical event that is irrelevant to you and me. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem the Wonderful Counselor was born. He is one we have been looking for all our lives.

He is the one who understands when no one else does

- He is the one who stands by us when everyone else turns away
- He is the one who really can help us confront the past and begin again
- He is the one who can help us find the God we knew was present but couldn't reach.

I've invited some of the gang to come and share a song with you. It's essentially a song about His name: Wonderful Counselor, Emmanuel. – God with us.

While we sing, take this time to ask yourself: Who is your counselor? Who do you turn to? And take the time while you listen to turn to Jesus.

Our Lord has given us His prescription for joyful living this season and every season, based on nothing more than who he is. He told us to resist the morality and advice of the world and to follow his wonderful counsel: Practically, that means

- We are to trust Him rather than trusting ourselves
- We are to love rather than take advantage of one another
- We are to forgive rather than be bitter
- We are to be holy rather than profane
- We are to store up treasures in Heaven rather than on earth
- We are to be generous rather than selfish
- We are to seek to serve rather than be served

Talk about good stuff! When we listen to that voice, we get it right. Life, that is. Jesus came to earth to tell us how. He lived like we live. He is a counselor who's been there. And he is with us! He is with us! Emmanuel – God with us. And when we let him in, he dwells in us, to counsel, support, guide, and instruct. *“How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given; so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.”* That's good news for you and me today, based on nothing more than the name of God. Find comfort in that name. Run to that name. Emmanuel, God with us.

Let us pray: O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray; cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels their great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.