

The book cover features a vibrant, textured illustration. At the top, the title 'Comfort in Uncertain Times' is written in a white, cursive font against a blue background with white, swirling, wind-like patterns. Below the title, two large, stylized flowers in shades of green and yellow are depicted. In the center, a person with long, dark, flowing hair, wearing a yellow shirt and orange pants, stands with their back to the viewer, holding the hand of a smaller child in an orange outfit. They are standing on a dark, rocky ledge. The bottom right corner contains the subtitle 'HELPING CHILDREN DRAW CLOSE TO GOD THROUGH BIBLICAL STORIES OF ANXIETY, LOSS AND TRANSITION' in white, uppercase, sans-serif font. The author's name 'RACHEL TURNER' is printed in white, uppercase, sans-serif font at the bottom left.

Comfort in Uncertain Times

HELPING CHILDREN
DRAW CLOSE TO GOD
THROUGH BIBLICAL
STORIES OF ANXIETY,
LOSS AND TRANSITION

RACHEL TURNER

Comfort
in Uncertain Times



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THROUGH BIBLICAL STORIES OF ANXIETY,
LOSS AND TRANSITION



RACHEL TURNER



For my godchildren –
Eli, Zeke, Tabby, Emily and Caitlin.

May your uncertain times be filled with
God's comfort and joy.

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12

No words



Genesis 16 and 21

KEY TRUTH

God can hear our prayers even when we don't know what to say.

There are times when we have so many feelings, we don't know how to talk about them. Sometimes the sadness is so big, or the uncertainty is so powerful, that we don't know what to do. God loves us so much, and knows us so well, and is with us so closely, that he can hear our hearts even without words. We can just share our emotions with God or ask him to be with us and he can understand us.

Story

Ishmael's head was throbbing. The glare of the desert sun bounced off the hot sand and hurt his eyes. He could see his mother a few steps ahead of him, shuffling along the path, leading the way as best she could.

Ishmael's mouth was dry and his throat scratchy. He was so thirsty. Their containers had run out of water days ago. And now their only hope was to find a well or a spring of water in the barren desert. 'I don't think we're going to make it,' Ishmael mumbled. 'We must be lost.'

He remembered the hug his dad gave him when they said goodbye. He could still smell his dad's thick robe and feel his rough beard against his forehead. He remembered his dad's sad voice saying, 'You'll be okay, son.'

Ishmael trudged on behind his mother. *We shouldn't even be here*, he thought. *I don't understand why Dad sent us away and said we can't live with him anymore.*

Ishmael's feet were heavy with every step. He tripped over a rock and stumbled to the ground. 'I can't keep walking, Mum,' he groaned. 'I'm just too exhausted. I need water.' He knew his body wouldn't move anymore without it. He felt defeated.

His mum brushed his cheek with her hand. 'That's okay,' she said. Her voice was weak but reassuring. 'Let's rest here. You've done so well today.' She helped him hobble over to a large bush and lie down in its shade. She kissed him on the forehead, and then whispered, 'I love you, Ishmael.'

He closed his eyes to rest, and he heard his mum stumble away. And then he thought he heard her crying.

I feel so alone, he thought. *God, are you there? God, I...*

He didn't know what to say. He had no words to express what he felt. His life was in such a jumbled mess. Sadness flowed up like a fountain inside him until he felt he was drowning in it. He began to cry loudly, and his whole body shook with emotion.

Ishmael cried for what felt like years.

Then, his attention was pulled to his mother's voice in the distance, shouting and sobbing. 'Ishmael! It's water! I have water!'

Ishmael sat up the best he could to see what was happening. He caught sight of his mother running towards him with a plump water carrier in her hands, water soaking her sleeves and dripping from her arms. Her face was beaming with joy.

‘God sees us!’ she called as she dropped down beside him. She scooped his head up and held the carrier to his lips. ‘Drink, Ishmael. Drink.’

Ishmael sipped the water slowly. It tasted so good. And with every sip, he felt better and stronger. Ishmael looked up at his mum’s radiant face and was confused. ‘Where did you find this water?’

‘Just over there where I was sitting,’ she said, pointing to the spot. ‘I heard a voice from heaven with my own ears! The angel said to me, “What is wrong, Hagar? Don’t be afraid! God has heard the boy crying there. Go help the boy. Hold his hand and lead him. I will make him the father of many people.” And then I looked to my left, and there was a well of water. Right next to me.’ She threw her hands up and laughed and cried at the same time.

Ishmael sat quietly for a minute, just thinking about it all. ‘God saved us,’ he said softly.

‘Yes, he did!’ she said. ‘Don’t you see? God didn’t say he heard *me*. He said he heard *you*.’

Ishmael glanced at his mum and then out towards the well. ‘But, Mum, I couldn’t pray. I don’t think I said anything to God. I didn’t know what to say. I just... cried.’

His mum gently bumped against him. ‘Not all prayers have words. God didn’t need words from you. He loves you. He saw you. He heard you crying. He understood what it meant. Sometimes that is prayer enough.’ She smiled.

Ishmael thought about what she had said. Yes, God had *heard* his cries. God had been with him! He *wasn’t* alone.

Then he remembered his old home. 'This doesn't change what happened with Dad, though,' he said, feeling a little of that sadness welling back up again.

'No, it doesn't change anything with Dad, my son. That will hurt for a while,' she sighed. 'But it does mean we have a God who has great plans for our lives.' She patted his shoulder gently. 'And we know he hears us.'

Ishmael looked out towards the well. *Thank you, God, for coming to help. I didn't have the right words, but you heard my heart anyway.*

Conversation starters

Let's answer some questions together. I'll answer them too.

- What part of the story did you like or find interesting or surprising? Why?
- What does this story tell us about God?
- Ishmael felt like his life was falling apart. He didn't know what to say to God. Have you ever felt like you didn't have the words to talk to God?
- God doesn't need words to hear what we want to express to him. He wants you to share your feelings with him, in any way you can. What are some other ways you can express yourself to God besides words?
- Share a story of a time you didn't have words to tell God how you felt, but you knew God understood you and responded to you. *(Or use a story at parentingforfaith.org/comfort-stories.)*

Connect with God

Let's connect with God and chat with him about this.

- God, we have so many feelings about our situation. Search us, God, and know all of our thoughts and feelings. We want you to know us.
- *Spend some time in the quiet, or listening to a song while you just rest with God, not feeling the pressure to talk to God, but just resting and inviting God to be with you.*
- *You might want to finish with a prayer – Thank you, God, that you know us inside and out. Hear our cries and thoughts and understand all of us, even if we don't have the words yet. Thank you for loving us.*



Enabling all ages to grow in faith



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Uncertainty and change can be hard, and even more so for a child. Feelings of confusion, powerlessness and insecurity may be overwhelming. Scripture is full of people just like our children who had to cope with uncertainty and transition and flourished as they saw God's hand and presence within it all. Designed as a series of stories and discussions for families, this book lays a biblical foundation for who God is in uncertain times and how to stay connected to him.



Rachel Turner is an author, speaker and the pioneer of Parenting for Faith. Until March 2022, she led the Parenting for Faith team at BRF, and she presents the **Parenting for Faith course**, a video-based resource for church groups and individuals.

Praise for *Comfort in the Darkness*:

'What is not to love about this book? Get hold of this wonderful book and find comfort in the darkness – not just for your children, but maybe for you as parents too!'

Ali Campbell, *The Resource*



Also by Rachel Turner



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