

God Answers Man's Suffering: Companionship

by Warren Wiersbe

God answers man's suffering through companionship, a deeper experience of His presence and the support of other people.

Duration: 39:41

Scripture: Joshua 1:9, Judges 6:12, Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 43:2, Acts 18:9-10, Acts 27:23-24, 2 Corinthians 1:20

Topics: "Suffering And Purpose", "Gods Presence"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that when we face difficulties in life, it is because God has a glorious purpose to fulfill. He compares our lack of understanding to Job, who saw the action but didn't know the script. The preacher highlights that we don't live by explanations but by promises, and God promises to be with us and gather us together. He also emphasizes that God sees us as precious, despite our failures and weaknesses.

Transcript

We read from Isaiah chapter 43, and then from 2nd Corinthians chapter 1. And you will see the connection in these two passages in the presence of God with his people when they go through trouble. Isaiah chapter 43. But now, thus saith the Lord who created thee, O Jacob, and he who formed thee, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed thee.

I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee, for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior.

I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee. Therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

Fear not, for I am with thee. I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Keep not back.

Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth, even everyone who is called by my name. For I have created him for my glory, I have formed him, yea, I have made him. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who

comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life, but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, who raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us, ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons' thanks, may be given by many on our behalf. Have you discovered that God is the God of all comfort? The sufferings and the trials of life will either isolate you or they will involve you.

If you are going through difficulties, valleys, problems, the result will be either that you will build walls or bridges. Some people, when they go through difficulty, build walls, walls of self-pity, walls of isolation, walls of resentment and bitterness and envy of those that they think are in better shape than they are, and this leads to loneliness. It leads to emotional and spiritual immaturity.

They build themselves into a box, and that box becomes a coffin. The Christian doesn't do that. He shouldn't do it.

The person who lives by faith in Jesus Christ when he goes through the difficulties of life finds himself not isolated but involved. He finds himself not building walls but building bridges. He discovers himself growing.

Instead of putting himself into a box, he finds himself expanding and enlarging. We have been talking these Sunday mornings about God's answer to man's suffering. Today, we have come to the fourth answer that God gives to us, companionship.

Our first answer was creation. There is suffering because the world we live in is a suffering world, groaning and travailing in pain. God's second answer was conflict.

There is an enemy in this world who is fighting us. The third answer God gave to us is character. Tribulation is working patience, and patience is tried and proven character.

And now the fourth answer, companionship. God permits us to go through difficulties and trials and sufferings because he wants us to experience the kind of companionship that can only be experienced in the valley. Now all of us, if we are honest, confess that life is not always dark.

Life is not always in a minor key. God knows how to arrange the experiences and the events of life to balance one against another. When you read the marching of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, you discover that there were times when they were hungry, and there were times when God fed them lavishly.

There were times when they were thirsty, and there were times when God just flooded the waters out at their feet. There were times when they were in battle, and there were times when God gave them rest.

Oases in the desert.

God knows how to balance life, and none of us can really complain. The master artist knows how to blend the colors of life for our good and for his glory. And there are times when God ordains that we go through difficulty, sorrow, suffering, that we might learn to experience the kind of companionship that Isaiah chapter 43 talks about, and the kind of companionship that 2 Corinthians chapter 1 talks about.

Because in the difficulties of life, if you're walking by faith, you will experience a two-fold companionship that you can experience no other way. Isaiah chapter 43 talks about this first companionship that we experience, a deeper companionship with the Lord. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee.

I'm not standing on the shore and saying, let me throw you a life preserver. I'm there with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.

When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned. The prophet Isaiah had said back in chapter 41 in verse 10, fear thou not for I am with thee. Be not dismayed for I am thy God.

The companionship, the deeper companionship with God. Now what is Isaiah saying to us in chapter 43? Well, he's saying this. First of all, that God is with us.

God is not against us, God is with us. And there was a time in our lives when we were against God. We were at enmity with God.

We were at war with God. God gave the law, we disobeyed it. God said walk this path, we walked over there.

And then there came a time when we trusted Christ as our Savior and we ceased to be at enmity with God. We were reconciled to God. We became children in God's family.

We began to share in the very life and nature of God. So he says, look, I'm with you, not against you. Now, why is he with us? Well, because we are his property.

Look at chapter 43 of Isaiah verse 1. But now, thus saith the Lord who created thee, he formed thee, I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name. We are his property. What father is there, what mother is there who would not endure the suffering with the child and even for the child? Now, he created us.

He took clay and he made us. And during our lives, he has been forming us. And not only did he claim us by creation, he claimed us by salvation.

I have redeemed thee. And that means Jesus died for us. That means the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for us.

And he goes on to say, I have called thee by thy name. We aren't strangers to God. When he spoke to little Samuel, he didn't say, hey, kid.

He said, Samuel, Samuel. When he spoke to Abraham, he said, Abraham, Abraham. Jesus looked up and said, Zacchaeus, come down.

Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and worried about many things. He knows your name. He created you.

He formed you. He redeemed you. He called you.

And he said, having done all of this for you through Jesus Christ, I am not going to desert you. Verse 4 tells us that we are precious to him. Since thou was precious in my sight.

We look upon the word precious today as somewhat of an effeminate kind of a word, the kind of a word that strong people don't use. Oh, but it is the kind of a word that strong people use. Who would criticize or laugh at a strong man who takes his little child in his arms and says, you're precious? That's not a sign of weakness.

That's a sign of strength. And God looks upon us with our failures and our faults and all of our weaknesses and our sins. And he says, you're precious to me.

I gave my son to purchase you. He tells me in verse 7, I have created him for my glory. You see, whenever the Lord permits us to go through difficulty, it's because he has some glorious purpose to fulfill.

We don't always understand it. We're like Job. We see the action, but we haven't read the script and we wonder what's going on.

You ever walk into the room in the middle of a TV drama or a football game for that matter, and you say, hey, what's going on? Life is this way. And the waters begin to get higher and higher and the fire begins to get hotter and hotter. And we say, Lord, we don't understand.

He says, I can't explain it all to you. And if I did explain it, it wouldn't make much difference to you because you don't live by explanations. You live by promises.

If you only used in your life, those things that you understood completely, you wouldn't use very much. I don't understand the electricity. I'm sure there are people who do, but I thank God for it.

I don't understand the internal combustion engine. There are people who do, but I thank God for it. It beats walking.

A deeper companionship with God because we are His. That's what he says. You are mine.

Fear not, I am with thee. Now, how is God with us? When he says, don't be afraid, I am with you. How is he with us? Does this mean that he forsakes the throne of heaven and comes down and walks with me? Does it mean he sends angels to be with me? Well, he tells me in verse 3, I am the Lord, thy God, the Holy One, thy Savior.

He is with us in His person. He is there in the person of the Spirit of God. He's right there with us.

Now, we've had people say, well, I'm with you in spirit, which means they're not going to be with us in presence. You're lying in the hospital bed and you feel very, very ill. And the doctor comes in and he attends to you, but he can't stay with you forever.

He has 27 other patients in that hospital and he has a family and a wife. And he says, I'll be thinking about you. But our God says, I am there in my person.

I am the Lord. Look at these names, the Lord, Jehovah, the God who makes covenants and who keeps them. And when you were saved, you entered into a new covenant with me and I'm going to keep that covenant.

I'm the Lord. I am thy God. That word God is the word that speaks of power, the God of power.

I am the Lord, thy God, the Holy One. That encourages me. When you're going through the waters and the fire, the devil comes and says, oh, why is this happening to you? If God really were the right kind of a God, he wouldn't do this.

Satan is the accuser. Not only does he accuse the brethren, he accuses the Lord. Oh, the only reason that Job is a good godly man is because you protected him.

He's your favorite. He's your teacher's pet. My Bible says that when I go through difficulty and trial, God is the Holy One.

He cannot do anything wrong. I don't understand. And Satan may whisper to me, God's holding out on you.

God is not being true to you. That's not true, Satan. He's the Holy One.

He cannot do anything wrong. This is what Abraham said to God when he was interceding for Sodom. He said, can does not the judge of all the earth do right? And the answer is yes.

He is the Redeemer, the Savior. I am the Lord, thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior. He's with us in His person.

Now, you don't always feel Him there. You don't always see Him there, but He's there. How do you know He's there? He said He would be there.

He didn't say a light would flash, a voice would sound, a trumpet would blow, an electric shock would go through your body. He just simply said, I am there whether you feel it or not. That's what the incarnation of Jesus Christ is all about.

When Jesus came to this earth and wedded Himself to human nature, God said, call His name Emmanuel. Emmanuel means God with us. And all the way through the earthly life of Jesus, it's God with us.

Then He went back to heaven, but before He left, He said something, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Though I am leaving physically, I can never leave you personally or spiritually. He's with us in His person.

He's with us in His providence. Verse 2, you're going through the waters. I control those waters.

You're going through the fire. I'm in charge of the fire. I'll see to it that the waters won't drown you.

Oh, they may come up to your chin. And you may have to do some real evangelical dog paddling to keep yourself up there. That's all right.

You'll grow muscles that way. I'm in charge of the fire. He's with us in His providences.

We have forgotten, I'm afraid, in this world of science and technology, we have forgotten that God still controls this world. Now God is not to blame for the wickedness of man. God is not to blame for the convulsions of nature.

As I said, we live in a world that is just travailing in pain. But God's in control. When they put those Hebrew children into the furnace, God was in control.

They went through the fire and the fire didn't burn them. And more than that, the Lord was right there with them. When the nation of Israel went through the waters, the waters didn't drown them.

God is with us in His providences. God is still on the throne and He will remember His own. He certainly is with us in His promises.

I've noticed in this passage in Isaiah 43, how many times He says, I will, I will, I will, I will. He doesn't say, now, if you do this, I will. If you're good, I will.

He says, I will. The mother puts the frightening child to bed and the child says, mother, I'm afraid. I'll be right here.

And if you call, I'll be right by your side. The child turns over and goes to sleep and says, mother made a promise and she'll keep it. You see, we live by promises.

Recently, someone was asking me for an explanation of why certain tragedies took place. And my answer was very short and simple. I don't know.

But if I did know, it wouldn't make a bit of difference. We don't live by explanations. We live by promises.

God is with us in His promises. And He says, I am with thee. Fear not.

I will, I will, I will. I will gather you Jewish people from the north and the south and the east and the west. I'm going to gather you.

I'm not going to scatter. You see, the unsaved person and the unbelieving person, when he goes through difficulty, everything falls apart. But the Christian who trusts God, God gathers everything together.

He's with us in His promises. He's with us in His power. I recall walking into a hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio, walking into a room and there in that bed lay a precious girl and had the joy of baptizing her and her father and her mother and her grandfather.

And she was dying. She was an only daughter, only child. She was dying.

And she took my hand and she said, why is this happening? I said, I don't know. But I know who knows. I said, get your Bible.

And she reached for it. I said, turn to Isaiah 41. And she found that.

I said, look at verse 10. And we read it together. Fear thou not, for I am with thee.

Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee. Yea, I will help thee.

Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. And I said, now, it doesn't say I will heal you. It doesn't say God's going to change you.

But He might. He might in His divine power heal you. But if He doesn't, here's what He says.

I'm with you. Don't be afraid. I'm going to strengthen you for whatever you have to have.

Needles and hoses and machinery and medicine and pain. I can still remember how many times until the Lord called her home, I'd stop to see her. And very often before I'd leave, she'd say, Isaiah 41.10. He's with us in His power.

And we say, Lord, I can't go through this. He says, but I can, so I'll take you with me. But Lord, I'm going to sink.

Oh no, my hand, my arm is with you, but I can't make it. I'll strengthen you. But I'm afraid.

Don't be afraid. I'm with you. My friend, you don't learn that in a theology book.

You don't learn that from a sermon. You'll learn that going through the water and going through the furnace. And it's a great lesson to learn.

It's a costly lesson. It's a painful lesson. But I have discovered that the greatest lessons of life cost something.

You say, but that's just for special people, isn't it? I notice that He calls Him Jacob. Isaiah 43. But now thus saith the Lord who created the old Jacob.

You ought to read the life of Jacob and find how many times God said, I'll be with you, I'm with you. Jacob ran away from home, a liar, a schemer, and he went to sleep. And God said, you know what, Jacob, I'm right here.

He said, I didn't know that. Well, I'm here, and I'm going to be with you. Over and over again in the book of Genesis, you find it says, and God was with Jacob.

And God said to Jacob, don't be afraid to go to Egypt. I'll be with you. Don't be afraid to do this.

I'll be with you. I'll be with you. Happened to Joseph.

Boy, if anybody had a raw deal, Joseph did. Sold as a slave and made into a prisoner. Yet it says in the word of God, the Lord was with Joseph.

The Lord was with Joseph. Moses said, I can't do it. Lord, he said, don't be afraid.

I'll be with you. The angel shows up at Gideon's side where Gideon is hiding and threshing some wheat. The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.

And God took that ordinary dirt farmer who was scared to death and made a great hero out of him. Why? He was with him. God made the promise to Joshua.

Don't be afraid. As I was with Moses, I'll be with you. The apostle Paul was having a rough time in Corinth.

Acts chapter 18, he was ready to quit. The Lord Jesus showed up and said, don't be afraid. I'm with you.

Just stay right here. I have many people in this city. Later on, when Paul was arrested, the Lord showed up and said, don't be afraid.

I'm with you. On that boat, when they're going through the storm, God's angel comes and says, Paul, don't be afraid. You aren't going to sink.

I'm with you. When Paul wrote his last letter, second Timothy, you get to chapter four. He says, everybody's forsaken me.

Everybody's forsaken me. You can't depend on people. Everybody's forsaken me, but the Lord stood with me.

My friend, there is a deeper experience of the companionship of God. When you go through difficulty, you can escape it, but it's a kind of a blessing that I don't think you want to escape. Now in second Corinthians chapter one, there is a second kind of companionship that we experience in the sufferings of life.

Not only a deeper companionship with God, but a deeper companionship with other people. You see, everybody is going through suffering. Everybody.

Unsafe people go through it. New Christians go through it. Mature Christians go through it.

Everybody's going through something. That great Scottish preacher, John Watson, used to remind his students, be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a battle. That's true.

That waitress was a little bit sharp with you the other day. Ah, but she's got a sick baby at home. She's worried about her.

That neighbor in your building was a little bit curt with you in the laundry room, but that's okay. She's about to lose her job. Everybody's got something.

And in second Corinthians chapter one, we discover Paul was going through trouble. Look at the words he uses. Tribulation.

Trouble. Suffering. Pressed out of measure.

Sufferings. Trouble. Despair.

That's an interesting thing. In verse eight he says he despaired even of life. He was ready to give up.

Paul says it's the end of my ministry. I don't know what trouble he was going through. Some people think it was the problems in Ephesus.

I don't know. All I know is that Paul had come to the end of his rope. Everybody's going through some kind of suffering, and everybody needs comfort.

The word comfort is used ten different times in this passage. It's unfortunate that it's translated comfort and consolation. Back in the days when this was translated, it had a little different connotation to it.

Today when you talk about comfort, it's mother picking up the baby and saying, there, there, it's all right. Pampering, pitying, sentimental kind of a thing. That's not what that word means.

When Paul says he's the God of all comfort, when he says that Jesus Christ abounds with comfort, he's not talking about sentimental, shallow kind of pity that pampers us and makes babies out of us. God never wanted to make babies out of us. He wants to make strong men and women out of us.

The Greek word means, as you know, one who comes alongside to help you. It's the same word that's used for the Holy Spirit. It's the Greek word *parakaleo*, called alongside.

And when Paul talks about comfort, he doesn't mean that God's patting us on the head. It means that God comes right alongside. If you're in the fire, He's in the fire.

If you're going through the water, He's going through the water, and He's there to strengthen you. Our English word comfort comes from a Latin, two Latin words, it means with strength. For *is fortis*, fortification.

So comfort means with strength. The psalmist said, He strengthened me with strength in my soul. Oh, how we need that.

Now, why does the Lord comfort us? Why is He the Father of mercies? God has all the market on mercy. If you want mercy, you have to come to God and get it. Why is He the God of all comfort? All kinds of comfort.

You're going through sorrow. He has comfort for sorrow. You're going through loss.

You're going through disappointment. Someone near and dear has stabbed you in the back, and God has comfort for that. He's the God of all grace.

He's the God of all comfort. Not some comfort, not some grace. When you come to God, you can get all that you need.

Now, why does He do this? Why does His comfort abound? Paul tells us that we might be able to comfort others. That's why. God's comfort is never given that we might selfishly say, oh, thank you, Lord, for comforting me.

God's comfort is given that we might be able to say, thank you, Lord, for comforting me, and I'm going to go out now and comfort somebody else. That's why you're going through difficulty. Someone's going to come into your life who needs to know that you understand.

Now, this doesn't mean that we have to experience all of the difficulties of life to help people. A doctor does not have to have cancer to be able to help a cancer patient. A dentist does not have to have an abscessed tooth to be able to help a person who has that.

What he's saying is, it's a marvelous thing. In verse 4, he says, the comfort God gives you in any trouble you go through, He can take and help anybody else no matter what they're going through. You don't have to be able to say, well, I know what it's like to lose a baby, but you can say, I know what it's like to have God comfort my heart.

You don't have to be able to say, well, yes, I've been through that, but you can say, I have been through the valley, and I've discovered that God meets my need. You see, we have the foolish idea and the selfish idea that a person has to go through exactly what we go through to be able to understand us. That's not true.

Human nature is human nature. Suffering is suffering. Difficulty is difficulty.

Battle is battle. And God is God. And when you receive the comfort of God, regardless of what you've gone through, others can tell it, there's a tenderness about you.

There's a sensitivity about you. It's not that shallow, sentimental kind of a thing that says, well, keep a stiff upper lip. Ever try that? Awfully hard to talk.

Well, buck up! What's that mean? Buck up. No, when a Christian comes on the scene and puts his arm around you, he says, look, God can see you through. That's why we're here, for that deeper companionship with others.

Suffering is not given to us to isolate us. It's given to us that we might be able to reach out and embrace others. Some Christians get so selfish in their suffering, they think they're the only ones who've ever been in a graveside.

They're the only ones who have ever been in an intensive care ward. They're the only ones who have ever had heartache and problems and difficulties. And I'm here to tell you that everybody's going through a battle.

But the difference is this. There are some of you who have tasted that deeper companionship with God, and you're able to reach out and have a deeper companionship with other people. And there is a fellowship in the valley that's different from the fellowship on the mountaintop.

There's a fellowship in the darkness when you're walking by faith that's different from the fellowship out there in the garden when the light and the sun are shining. And some people never taste of this because they let their sufferings crush them instead of build them. They let their sufferings defile them instead of cleanse them.

They find themselves getting full of pity and resentment, and they draw into themselves instead of reaching out and saying, look, you can help me and I can help you. I would remind you that in order for you and me to experience this deeper companionship with God, Jesus had to die and lose the fellowship of God. Do you know why God is with you when you go through the valley? Because He forsook His own Son when He went through the valley.

At that hour when my Lord bore my sin, He cried out, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? I've heard people say to me, Pastor, God's forsaken me. God's never forsaken anyone except His Son. He forsook Jesus that He might be able to say to you, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

And for the Lord Jesus to be able to help me have the deeper companionship with others, He was forsaken by others. He took the three disciples into the garden. They went to sleep.

He's crying out to God. He's bearing His soul. They're sleeping.

They arrest Him. The disciples leave Him. This deeper blessing of companionship costs Jesus Christ His life.

It's not cheap. This is why God sometimes doesn't allow some of His children to go through this experience because they would take it too lightly, too cheaply. They don't realize how costly is suffering and they'd waste it.

But if God has called you to go through the valley and there's heartbreak and heartache, it's because He's trusting you with a deeper blessing, a deeper companionship with God. Fear thou not, I'm with thee. A deeper companionship with others.

We receive the comfort of God and we share this comfort of God with others and they look at us and say, you know, you understand. You care. Where did you get that? And that's when you say, I have a Father who understands and cares and I'm just sharing with you what He shared with me.

Don't let the sufferings of life isolate you. Don't build walls. Let the sufferings of life involve you.

Build bridges and move into that enriching, enlarging experience of a deeper companionship with God and a deeper companionship with others. Thank you, Father. Thank you so much for the comfort and strength that you give.

Forgive us our complaining, our criticizing. Forgive us our self-pity. Forgive us, O Lord, when we have drawn into our own little world to protect ourselves when there's a great, big world that needs our encouragement.

Help us this coming week, tenderly, understandingly, lovingly to touch the lives of others and to be channels of your comfort and to let them know that you care because we care. O Lord, thank you that you are with us. Thank you so much.

I pray that you will help us now. Help those who have never trusted Christ to trust Him. Help those who are going through difficulty to trust and not be afraid for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

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