



The Lord in All Circumstances

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The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi about the presence of Christ, **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.** Philippians 4:13
Yes, we can rely on the Lord to be with us.

There is a living story on how God is with those who are struggling with issues of health. Several years ago, Eldon Moore, was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease or ALS. This is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects the motor neurons from the brain to the spinal cord and from the spinal cord to the muscles throughout the body. The progressive degeneration of the motor neurons in ALS eventually leads to a person's paralysis and eventual death. The first signs of the disease for Eldon came in late 2006.

In January 2007, Eldon had a fall down the basement stairs at his Kansas farm and landed on his head. He was airlifted to a hospital in Wichita, Kansas for observation and eventually surgery to drain blood from the exterior of his brain. A few months later, he and wife, Olivia, went to the Mayo Clinic where he was diagnosed with ALS. Since that time they would have their ups and downs.

Their Christmas letter reflected on the valleys and mountain top events in their life during 2007. It said that they are thankful for the many prayers, visits and cards from family, friends and long ago classmates around the country. Even throughout the increasing struggles and tears, there was lots of laughter and joy. Over all, they were blessed with love. I prayed for them daily. He died on a beautiful morning on September 11, 2010.

Friends, any person or family in any type of situation will go through the struggles and challenges of life as well as the strengths of Spirit. This congregation has gone through extreme struggles before and after August of last year. Together, God has walked with you and reminded you of the power of His gracious presence. We must remember that God is with us no matter what the situation or circumstance.

The assurance of Psalm 55:22 confirms that the Lord is with us in all situations: **"Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved."** [NRSV]

As people of faith, we are to remember that the Lord is always with us. Sometimes, though, we get so caught up in a situation that we forget the Lord is our companion. Our emotional focus on pain, distress, anxiety, brokenness, or death drains our spiritual insight. Those are the times that the Lord is already there ready to carry our burdens.

God has a way of making his presence known in the joyous times of life and through the storms of life.

There is a story by an unknown author about “a little boy who was eagerly looking forward to the birthday party of a friend who lived only a few blocks away. When the day finally arrived, a blizzard made the sidewalks and roads nearly impassable.

The lad's Father, sensing the danger, hesitated to let his son go. The youngster reacted tearfully. "But Dad," he pleaded, "all the other kids will be there. Their parents are letting them go." The Father thought for a moment, then replied softly, "All right, you may go." Surprised but overjoyed, the boy bundled up and plunged into the raging storm.

The driving snow made visibility almost impossible, and it took him more than half an hour to trudge the short distance to the party. As he rang the doorbell, he turned briefly to look out into the storm. His eye caught the shadow of a retreating figure. It was his Father. He had followed his son's every step to make sure he arrived safely.”

The Lord assures us that he will not abandon us and will constantly be a part of our lives. **28“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.** [Matthew 11:28 (NRSV)]

The writer of Psalm 116, David, was challenged and threatened at many times in his life. He brought his struggles before God. The peace and guidance he received from this relationship opened his heart to the care and mercy of an ever present God.

David wrote, **1I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. 2Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.** Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 (NRSV) He came to a greater awareness of God's presence in his life as he experienced deliverance from anxiety and suffering as well as the threat of death.

David's life is transformed by his renewed vow to be grateful when he proclaimed, **17I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD. 18I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, 19in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!**

Friends, the Lord is with us in all the circumstances of life. I would ask you to recall events in your life when you felt most alone or filled with questions of faith. Can you call up the feelings and thoughts that troubled you the most? Were there questions of where was God in the painful times? How could God allow such things to happen?

As we reflect on those events in our minds and heart, may we remember that God was there carrying our burdens and God is with us today. Yes, the pain of those events still lingers in our memories and questions persist. Nevertheless, it is important for us to find comfort and rest in the loving arms of God.

Yes, the Lord is also inviting us to be with others and reach out to them in their hour of struggle and need. The Gospel lesson from Matthew teaches us how Jesus went about the countryside proclaiming Good News and curing the people. He knew what the people were going through in life and his presence would always be with them and us.

The Gospel story goes, **³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.**

The disciples then as well as us today are sent out to care for the people with a heart for the Lord. We are called to reach out to those who are hurting, who are lonely and filled with fear. We each have felt the presence of God in our lives and in all the situations that life affords us. We know that God is there. We know that God is here.

We, as Christian laborers in the world, reluctantly venture out to share the good news because of what others might think. I am not sure I want to do that! Going out conjures up images of folks walking or biking in two's and coming to our front door. Yes, the sharing of our faith in Jesus Christ can be frightening especially when someone comes to our door to share their faith. And we can ask ourselves, How am I to share my faith with them too?

I can remember many a time answering the door and inviting two Mormons or two Jehovah Witnesses into my home. They knew that this may be there one chance to welcome a new soul into their church and their faith. I ask questions and they give me answers. After a bit, I share with them my faith in Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. It is at that point that they realized that I am well versed in my faith and we had prayer together.

The words of Jesus reverberate in my mind, **³⁷“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”** Into God's harvest. Indeed, the Lord is with me and with you in all circumstances of life even when we are challenged to go into the field and to help winnow the wheat. We are called into some circumstances in life where we make God's presence known and God's love surrounds us all. Its in those times that we should have no fear. Have no fear.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we have a companion who is always with us in life. Who is always there for us and we can call upon his name at any times. Jesus be with me. Jesus be with us.

The following poem was sent to me in the 2007 Christmas letter that my late brother-in-law, Eldon and sister, Olivia sent which came from the ALS newsletter. This poem is written by Jane Eggleston and titled “It's in the Valleys I Grow”.

Sometimes life seems hard to bear,
Full of sorrow, trouble and woe
It's then I have to remember
That it's in the valleys I grow.

If I always stayed on the mountain top
And never experience pain,
I would never appreciate God's love

And would be living in vain.

I have so much to learn
And my growth is very slow,
Sometimes I need the mountain tops,
But it's in the valleys I grow.

My little valleys are nothing
When I picture Christ on the cross
He went through the valley of death;
His victory was Satan's loss.

Forgive me, Lord, for complaining
When I'm feeling so very low.
Just give me a gentle reminder
That it's in the valleys I grow.

Continue to strengthen me, Lord
And use my life each day
To share your love with others
And help them find their way.

Thank you for valleys, Lord
For this one thing I know
The mountain tops are glorious
But it's in the valleys I grow."

God is with us and will always be with us. In hours of joy and in hours of struggle.

Our closing prayer this morning comes from the Book of Common Worship. Let us pray. Grant unto us, O God, the fullness of your promises. Where we have been weak, grant us your strength; where we have been confused, grant us your guidance; where we have been distraught, grant us your comfort; where we have been dead, grant us your life. Apart from you, O Lord, we are nothing, in and with you we can do all things." In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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Scriptural support:

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 (NRSV)

¹I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.

²Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

¹²What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?

¹³I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,

¹⁴I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones.

¹⁶O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.

¹⁷I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁸I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,

¹⁹in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

Matthew 9:35-10:1-8 (NRSV)

³⁵Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

¹Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

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Father's Day Stories.

A three-year-old boy went with his father to see a litter of kittens. On returning home, he breathlessly informed his mother that there were 2 boy kitties and 2 girl kitties.

"How do you know?" his mother asked.

"Daddy picked them up and looked underneath," he replied, "I think it's printed on the bottom."

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The little girl was sitting in her grandfather's lap as he read her a goodnight story. From time to time, she would take her eye's off the book and reach up to touch his wrinkled cheek. By and by she was alternately stroking her own cheek, then his again.

Finally she spoke, "Granddaddy, did God make you?"

"Yes, sweetheart" he answered, "God made me a long time ago."

"Oh she said," then "Granddaddy, did God make me too?"

"Yes, indeed honey" he assured her. "God made you just a little while ago."

"Oh" she said. Feeling their respective faces again, she observed, "God's getting better at it now isn't he?"