

He Is With You

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[0 : 00] When I first heard about the sermon series, I thought, there are so many songs, how do I choose one? I wasn't even going to choose one. But when I'm feeling empty or disconnected, my go-to playlist is always casting crowns.

All of their songs speak to me in some way. But as I was listening to the radio in my office one day, I heard Mandisa singing the song Waymaker, which you all know was our opener for our last sermon series.

But as I was listening to this, I immediately went to Mandisa's song, He Is With You. For years, I've actually wanted to sing this song for you all, but I knew I would not be able to make it through.

And hopefully today, with the help of the praise band, I'll be able to do that. I was able to get through it last night. But before I forget, a special thanks to Tom, because Mandisa's music is not available anywhere.

So he came up with the accompaniment for this. So thank you, Tom. Anyway, the song He Is With You. It's a song that's based a bit on Ecclesiastes.

[1 : 18] And it speaks to the fact that there's a time for everything. It starts out saying there's a time to live and a time to die, a time to laugh and a time to cry. There's a time for war and a time for peace.

There's a hand to hold in the worst of these. It's a reminder that God's with us through it all, even the difficult times. The song goes on to say He's with you in the conference room when the world is coming down on you when your wife and kids don't know you anymore.

He's with you in the ICU when the doctors don't know what to do. And it scares you to the core. He's with you. We may weep for a time, but joy will come in the morning, the morning light.

He's with you when your kids are grown, when there's too much space and you feel alone, and if you're worried if you got it right or wrong. He's with you when you've given up on ever finding your true love, someone who feels like home.

He's with you. When nothing else is left and you take your final breath, he is with you. There was a time I couldn't listen to this song without crying because it speaks so much to my life.

[2 : 35] Quite a few years ago, I went to a Women of Faith event, and Mandisa was performing, and that's the main reason I went. And as she sang this song, I wept through the whole song as a friend of mine held my hand.

For many years, God's been with me. From my years of wandering, to two failed marriages, to finally meeting my husband, Roy, but a year later finding out I was in congestive heart failure and my heart function was down to 15%.

To watching my kids leave the nest and wondering if I was a good mom. This song reminds me that God was with me through it all.

Whether I felt his presence or I was shutting him out, he was with me. And no matter what I do or what my future holds, God will be with me.

And he'll be with you too. And even as we take our final breaths, he will be with us. That was a powerful song.

[3 : 42] Thank you so much, Linda. Today's first Bible reading is from Isaiah 43, 1 through 3. But now this is what the Lord says.

He who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel. Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.

The flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt for your ransom.

Cush and Siba in your stead. The next reading is from Ecclesiastes 3, 1 through 8. And it will sound very familiar. There is a time for everything.

[4 : 43] And a season for every activity under the heavens. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to uproot. A time to kill and a time to heal.

A time to tear down and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them.

A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to search and a time to give up. A time to keep and a time to throw away.

A time to tear, a time to mend, a time to be silent, and a time to speak, a time to love, and a time to hate, a time for war, and a time for peace.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I lost part of my life. But let me find, oh, here it is.

[5 : 46] All right. We have all my seasons here. All right.

So I don't know about you, but when I was in school, we sat in alphabetical order. My last name is Stierheim, so I sat in the back of the room.

And my friends Bill and Jeff always ended up being next to me. And Teller, sorry, was always behind me. Mike was a huge jokester.

And as a matter of fact, his quote in our yearbook said, You can call me arrogant, but remember, I'm better than all of you. So I went to Amherst, and we had one middle school and one high school.

And so Jeff and Bill and Teller and I were together every single day. Until one day, Teller wasn't there. He and another student had been in an accident coming home from the wrestling match the night before.

[7 : 13] And he was gone in an instant. I remember being stunned. I had just seen him at the match. He was way too young. And I had had some losses in my family when I was younger.

But this was a first. This was a friend. This was someone who was 16 years old. This was someone I knew. And I know that there's times when we think that we have everything under control, and we set that dial to cruise, and we just ride.

And then there's those times where we have to stop, and we have to take a breath. And it's in those moments that we realize that we have less control over things than we thought.

And it's hard to understand why things like that happen the way they do. There's a time for every matter under heaven, and we need to try not to get so distracted by the bad stuff.

Hard times come and go, but it's all under God's love. Amid life-sweeping changes, we can wonder what's worth doing and worth having.

[8 : 25] Sometimes life throws us that curveball. But this too shall pass. And what helps to get through is to remember to worship and rejoice in God, who is with us always.

Worshiping helps us recognize something outside of ourself. It allows us to live in gratitude for the very life that God has given us. And to try to be a good person.

We find our meaning through life's changes. That's exactly what we see in our reading today. The book of Ecclesiastes. It's an ancient Hebrew book written to help understand how to live in a world that's sometimes beyond our understanding.

It's believed that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes near the end of his life when it was his return to faith. We're told in 1 Kings that Solomon was led astray from the Lord by the false gods of his wives.

It could be his final reflections on life and whatever conclusions he's made. But why should we care? We should care because Solomon's words are here to show us that wealth, success, and prosperity do not satisfy us.

[9 : 40] We read Job with amazement. Job was a man that had everything going for him. He loved God. He loved his wife. He loved his kids.

And God blessed him. However, one day Job loses it all. And for centuries we've read Job's story. And we see that not because in the end that his wealth was returned to him, but because in the midst of horrendous circumstances, Job remains faithful to God.

That message of Job is that even when we have nothing, God is everything. But what if we're given everything? Where's God when we have it all?

So Ecclesiastes is the answer to that question. Solomon was a man who God had given everything to. He was living the life. He had great power.

He had more influence on religious matters than anyone. He was known to have immeasurable knowledge and incredible wealth. He had almost 1,000 wives and concubines.

[10 : 50] And it says that he had 35,000 servants that were divided into three sections so that they rotated taking care of him. He was the man.

He had it all. And God also granted him a peaceful reign on the throne of Israel for over 40 years. So one would think that Solomon lived the good life and died the most happiest man alive.

But then we come to Ecclesiastes. His final words to us are that all is vanity. Everything's meaningless. Solomon's goal is to simply show that a life without God is a life without purpose.

He tells us there's nothing better for a person than to find their enjoyment in God and that God is with us always. Today's passage is probably the best-known passage in the entire Bible.

It's the inspiration for the song today and the song Turn, Turn, Turn performed by the birds. And I heard that as I was writing this. The poem simply states, King Solomon powerfully describes the seasons of life emphasizing the importance of embracing God's perfect timing.

[12 : 16] He acknowledges the undeniable truth that's marked by those seasons of joy and sorrow, growth and decay. Just as there are appointed times for everything under heaven, we too are subject to the ever-changing circumstances of our daily lives.

We all experience times of planting and uprooting, times of tearing down and building up, times of weeping and laughing, mourning and times to dance.

These progressions serve as a reminder of our mortality, reminding us to treasure each season and find comfort in knowing that they're all a part of God's magnificent plan for us.

That everything has its appointed time. There's a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to search and a time to give up.

A time to keep and a time to throw away. These verses highlight the significance of learning to trust in God's divine timing, even when it's not so easy to understand his ways.

[13 : 28] His timing is perfect. He orchestrates every season in our lives for his glory and his good. There's an ebb and flow, a balance to what God gives us.

When we go through some of these seasons, we feel those feelings that come with it. We learn what we can. We improve how we can. And we trust that we're not there to endure it alone.

That we will be found. God knows what we're going to do, what we're going to feel, even before we do. And he's there to carry us through the dark times.

Next to my bed, I have a copy of the footprints poem. And it says, One night I dreamed a dream. As I was walking along the beach with my Lord, across the dark sky flashed scenes of my life.

For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me and one to my Lord. After the last scene flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints of the sand, and I noticed that at times along the path of my life, especially at the very lowest and saddest of times, there was only one set of footprints.

[14 : 49] This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it. And I said, Lord, you said once I decided to follow you, that you would walk with me all the way.

But I noticed during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life that there was only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you the most, you would leave me.

And he whispered, My precious child, I love you, and I will never leave you. Never, ever. During all of your trials and testings, when you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.

As followers of Christ, we're called to embrace the season that we're currently in, acknowledging that it serves a purpose in shaping our character and deepening our faith.

Whether we find ourselves in a season of abundance or lack, in a time of joy or sorrow, we have to remember that God is with us every step of the way.

[15 : 56] Rather than spending our energy resisting or resenting our current season, let us learn to see the beauty and the opportunities that God gives to us.

By doing so, we allow God to mold us in the people we were created to be, to love us as we were meant to be loved, and to allow us to share that love with others.

So that brings me back to my collection of the times in my life. What if we're not ready? What if our life is so full, our hands are so full, what if we're juggling so much that we miss God's call for us?

Think about it. Think about what your life would be like if you went through life planning each and every step on your own. If you ignored God. If we were given the right to plan our lives, I'm sure we would all choose to have nothing unpleasant.

But that would ruin us. There's a time for everything, and timing matters. And the time that matters the most is God's timing. If we live within God's timing, then our faith will grow and deepen, even in the midst of difficulties.

[17 : 13] If we live only by our own sense of timing, then we're left on our own, and in the end, we lose everything. I think it's important for people of faith to remember, because there's a tendency for us to think that if we have enough faith, we will always be happy, that our lives will be good.

Even if we're not feeling it, we paste that smile on, and we fake it. So I know it's hard for you guys to know this, but sometimes I've been described as terminally perky, bubbly, and sometimes it comes across as inauthentic.

But it's because I have great faith in the path that God has put me on, that the love and care that He's shown for me, that I know that even when I'm in what feels like the deepest, darkest depths, that God is always with me.

God helps me through everything, just as He helps you. If you need to take time and be blue, that's okay. If you need a season of rest, that's okay.

But you need to be real. You need to let God know that you need help. He's waiting to hear from you and to give you the people around you to support and care for you.

[18 : 41] You weren't meant to go through this alone. Then we'll help you pick yourself up. Because we have such a very limited period of times, we have to make the most of it.

We need to see every day as a gift from God and enjoy that all He's given us. We gratefully receive everything that God has given to us. Enjoy it and offer it back to God in grateful service.

We need to make the most of this very uncertain life. When demands at work or at home have you feeling like you're about to crack? Stop.

Take a breath and take a cue from nature. Channel your inner palm tree. Here's the thing about palm trees.

Even in the fiercest of storms, a palm tree will stay rooted to the ground. Devastating winds will destroy everything else in its path except for the palm tree.

[19 : 50] Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Because it's flexible. During a hurricane, the palm tree will bend until it's parallel to the ground.

And when that storm passes, it will rise back up until it's standing tall and it's even stronger than it was before. Our lesson from Ecclesiastes tells us to try and maintain their perspective that those hard times come and those hard times go, but they won't always be bad.

And we will end up stronger in the end. God has a preferred future for each of us. It may be raining now, but later there will be sun.

There are seasons of sea time watering and harvest. Seasons of testing and breakthrough. And those difficult seasons are necessary for the good times to come.

Just think about it. If the farmer doesn't plant the seeds, he won't have a crop to harvest. If your faith is never tested, you will never have a testimony to share about God's goodness and his love and his faithfulness.

[21 : 08] You'll get there. It's the promise of God that can keep us going. So embrace those seasons of life, knowing that God has a divine purpose and a perfect timing for each one.

Because when we are firmly rooted in Christ, just like that palm tree, regardless of the season that we're in, we'll be able to be stronger.

We'll be able to find his goodness in everything because we're in it with him. It requires us to be patient and obedient, especially during the seasons wherein our fruit is not yet in season.

But if we keep close to Christ throughout every season, our leaves won't wither. It's up to us to trust in his sovereignty, finding contentment and joy in every stage.

So may we be encouraged today to let go of our desire for control and walk hand in hand with the one who holds time itself.

[22 : 17] The one who was there holding our hand through it all, even amid the ebb and flow of those changing seasons. So let us pray for the wisdom to live in harmony with God's plan, trusting his faithfulness every step of the way.

And let us remember the words at the end of the song. He's with you when your kids are grown, when there's too much space and you feel alone, and you're worried if you got it right or wrong.

He's with you when you've given up ever finding your true love, someone who feels like home. He is with you when nothing else is left, and you take your final breath.

He is with you. Heavenly Father, we truly worship and praise you. You are our great creator who has made everything beautiful in its time and appropriate to complete your plans and your purpose.

Thank you that you've made us in your image and likeness, and that in your grace, you have set eternity in the hearts of all people. Help me to surrender to your sovereign will, to establish you on the throne of my life, and to trust you to fulfill your perfect plan and purpose and be with us in each of our lives.

[23 : 47] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So we have a few opportunities coming up in the next couple weeks. On the 20th, we will be only having one service.

It will be 11 o'clock. It will be outside in nature. Following that, we will have our church picnic. We will have music, fun, games.

So we hope that you join us for that. There is a sign-up sheet in the back of the sanctuary. And then we have more pictures coming up. So if you were not one of the few people who had your picture taken for the directory, you can go online.

If you cannot come any of the times that are available, just see me. And we do have a new Bible study coming up. So all of those are in your bulletin. So go ahead and take a look and see what opportunities you can share God's love with the people here and in our communities.

So may God use you for his purposes that are much bigger than anything that we could ever plan. May you rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

[25 : 00] May your thirsty tongues be quenched in the rivers and pools that spring up in the desert, in the wilderness of your lives. And may trees sprout up to lend you shade from the scorching sun.

throughout your lives. May people see, know, and consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this.

That the Holy One of Israel is our creator and our redeemer. So please go in peace. Amen.