

265 God is Our Sustainer

I received some news recently that shocked me. This led me to meditate and pray and think about the fact that God is our sustainer. That's going to be our topic for today because He's the one that helps us. In fact, after I received this news, it took about a day or two to recover my spiritual equilibrium and I was helped by singing "How Firm a Foundation."

There are several different melodies to it. Some people sing it to the tune for, "O Come all Ye Faithful." This is how the first verse sounds: "Fear not, I am with thee. Oh, be not dismayed, for I am thy God, I will still give thee aid. I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand. Upheld by my gracious, omnipotent hand."

I'm not going to sing all the verses, but here are a few more, "When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow. For I will be with thee, thy trouble to bless and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply. The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design. Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine."

I was home by myself that morning, and I got to bellow it out and sing it aloud. It helped to clear the air and not focus on the problem that was besetting me or the situation or the news that I'd received, but to contemplate God's sustaining ability to carry me through. To be with me, and to sustain me. That's why we're going to talk about today, God is our sustainer.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for being our sustainer. We have no idea. At least, I don't have any idea how much you sustain us. Your grace that is sufficient every day, and Jesus' prayers for us every day. Thank You for the spirit of God's work in our hearts, It says in Scripture that Jesus "is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power." (Hebrews 1:3) Our very existence is being upheld by God. Thank you for opening our eyes a little bit. Open them a little bit more today as we contemplate You as our sustainer, the one Who holds us up and keeps us going. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I am enjoying and being edified by studying God's attributes. I am pulling together themed studies focusing on God's names and His nature. These topical studies are going to appear in the new book coming out called, "Come into His Presence." So far I have over 40 of these studies now. I enjoy them. I enjoy pulling them together. They're providing the basis for these podcasts.

When I have an idea about a new insight into God's nature, the first thing I normally do is do a search in the concordance on my computer. For this podcast, I look up the words sustain, sustainer, sustained. Sometimes I look in a thesaurus which again, I look up synonyms for sustain such as upheld or preserve or lift up.

Other days I'll use a search engine which might lead me to one of the Bible programs like the Bible Hub or Knowing God, I think is another one. They bring out the Hebrew or Greek root words, and they have cross-references and verses that are similar. That helps me to do develop my framework.

Then I just read through all the passages, pray, and pull it all together. Once I have a whole bunch of scriptures, then I start looking for patterns in the scriptures and ways I can group them. I'm going to begin today's study with how God sustained the children of Israel through the Exodus. This description is found in Nehemiah 9.

I don't think I need to spend much time on the context, but this was the children of Israel, a slave nation, who had been in slavery and in bondage. They'd been worn out. They had just witnessed these incredible miracles, but they were still in bondage to this massive nation, this world power, Egypt. God divided the sea before them.

It continues, "You cast their pursuers into the depths as a stone into mighty waters. By a pillar of cloud, You led them in the day and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes, and commandments.

"You made known to them your Holy Sabbath. Commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses, your servant. You gave them bread from heaven, for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst." Skipping a few verses, "Forty years, You sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell." Now, that's incredible.

Sadly, we've gotten so used to this story, we miss some of these details. But what if we go through a period in our country where we're not allowed to buy or sell unless we have a Mark of the Beast? What are we going to do for three and a half years? I'm not taking the Mark of the Beast. I don't look forward to the idea of starving to death.

The children of Israel had absolutely nothing, yet God miraculously sustained them for 40 years in the wilderness. He provided water. He provided food. He helped their clothes not to wear out there. They didn't even need new shoes. It was amazing. This helps me and encouraged my faith if we have to go through difficult seasons of tribulation.

By the way, I just finished reading the Book of Revelation so this is very real to me. I'm also reading in the Minor Prophets about the Day of the Lord in my Old Testament readings, and when you put them together the picture is sobering and I need to get my eyes fixed on Jesus.

It says in Luke, "When these things begin to take place, straighten up, and raise your heads." I like that translation. Straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing there.

The temptation is to get our eyes down, and to look at the problems, and then look at the lacks and what we don't have. Instead, Jesus says, "Straighten up and raise your heads."

I remember Peter in Matthew 14:29–31, "Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to you on the water. He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me.' Jesus immediately reached out His hand and took hold of him, saying to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"

Peter saw the wind and lost sight of Jesus. I want to make sure that I keep my eyes up, that I keep doing what He says, straighten up and raise your heads.

Jesus also says in Matthew 6:31–34 NLT, "Don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need. 'So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.'"

I need these reminders from the Word of God. I also think of this incredible promise in Isaiah which I first ran across as I was reading missionary biographies. Back in those days I wasn't in the habit of reading the Old Testament through every year, like I am now. Several of these missionaries, when they would go through difficult experiences, would quote Isaiah 43, which says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." (Isaiah 43:2)

We have wonderful promises in Scripture. Another one is in Psalm 63:8, "My soul clings to you. Your right hand upholds me." Deuteronomy 33:27, "His everlasting arms are under you."

These passages provide some visual illustrations for us. His right hand is holding us up. His everlasting arms are underneath us. When we go through the fire and through water, they won't overwhelm us. They won't consume us. He'll be with us in the process.

Psalm 37, "Jehovah upholds the righteous." Isaiah 41, "Fear not, I am with you. Be not dismayed, I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." I did a Bible study one time on the right hand of God and it's powerful.

His right hand is going to uphold us. His righteous right hand is going to strengthen us and help us. It says in John 10, "I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

The theme which is emerging here. God's hands, God's arms. They're upholding us. They're keeping us and they're making it so that nobody can snatch us out of the Father's hand. Amen.

David knew these passages. "He reached down from heaven and rescued me; He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and were too strong for me. They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress, but the LORD supported me. He led me to a place of safety; He rescued me because He delights in me." (Psalm 18:16-19 NLT)"

In our culture right now, it is easy to see how things could go south really quickly, and we Christians will be in the minority. Yet if we turn off the news, walk out the door, and continue to meet with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we get encouraged again. We need to encourage each other because we all need encouragement, I need encouragement, and thank God that He gave us His word to remind us of this truth.

I've been doing a lot of praying for our government. One of the passages that I have been thinking about for His church and His kingdom is Isaiah 9:7, "Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end." Note that word, increase.

"On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it, with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will do this."

We could easily be tempted to think that God's kingdom is shrinking, that as it's under attack it's on the retreat. This passage says the exact opposite. It says that God's kingdom is going to increase, and He is going to establish it and uphold it, and His zeal is going to do this.

Just try to try to get your mind around the zeal of God. You and I have our passions and our desires, and we are aware of the things that push our buttons. God has zeal as well. God's zeal is going to see that His kingdom continues to increase and He's going to establish it and uphold it.

That helps me when I'm praying for God's kingdom and for God's people, because we're not in a state of retreat. His kingdom is an increasing kingdom and will eventually fill the earth. Amen.

I read this verse before about how He's upholding the universe in Colossians 1:17, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Deuteronomy 31:6, "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it's Jehovah your God who goes before you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

In your experiences walking through Christian bookstores, have you ever seen the nice little poem about the footprints in the sand? It had a picture of a man walking along the beach carrying a kid on his shoulder.

The theme of the poem, is the writer is talking to God and he says, "As I look back over my life, I notice that there are normally two sets of footprints. During the difficult times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. How come You weren't there when I needed You the most."

God says, "That's when I was carrying you. That's why there's only one set of footprints." I used to think, "That's a really nice thought, but is it biblical?" Then, I found the passage. Psalm 94:18 which says, "When I thought, 'My foot slips,' Your steadfast love, Oh, Lord, held me up." SO that's a biblical image."

When we are slipping, and when we're at our times of extremity and when we need Him the most, His steadfast love holds us up.

I'll close with three more passages.

"The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand." (Psalm 121:5)

"I lay down and slept; I woke again, for JEHOVAH sustained me." (Psalm 3:5)

"JEHOVAH upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down." (Psalm 145:14) Do these encourage you?

Scott: Definitely. I found one more, in Isaiah 35:3. "Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way. Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, and do not fear. Your God will come. He will come with a vengeance, with divine retribution. He will come to save you.'"

Let me read some of these verses again from our opening hymn. "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent word. What more can He say than to you He has said, 'To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?'"

"In every condition, in sickness, in health, in poverty's vale or abounding in wealth, at home or abroad, on the land on the sea, as thy days may demand, shall I strength ever be."

"Even down to old age, all My people shall prove My constant, eternal, unchangeable love, and when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn, like lambs they shall still on My bosom be borne.

"The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose. I will not, I will not desert to his foes. That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never, forsake." Amen.

Let's close in prayer. Father, thank you for your sustaining, your grace and your power, and your promises. Thank you for your arms that uphold us and your right hand that holds us. Thank you for your unchangeable eternal steadfast love. It's got us, got our back. Thank you for these wonderful examples in Scripture, how you sustain the children of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness. How you provided food and drink and their clothes didn't wear out. We're going to need that kind of faith pretty soon ourselves. Help us to have it, I pray. Help us to when we see these things happen, lift up our heads and look up. As it says in Psalm 40:11, "Lord, don't hold back Your tender mercies from me. Let Your unfailing love and faithfulness always protect me." Amen.