

Suffering and Finding God's Presence at Every Bend in the Road

BY DAVID JEREMIAH

If we could map our routes through life, we would opt for a smooth ribbon of freeway, with no bumps, construction zones, or detours. But life has a way of taking unexpected turns—forcing us to take alternate routes.

Without warning, we are met with a serious and unplanned detour. It comes out of left field, unannounced, and unexpected. In that moment, we know the road ahead will not be easy.

These kinds of moments confront us with life's harshest realities. They force us to move in directions we never wanted to go and would have gone to great lengths to avoid because they are characterized by pain and suffering. They confront us in the form of death, divorce, illness, disease, accidents and more. Most of the time they change our lives forever.

But friend, no matter what we are facing as we look down that long stretch of road, God offers hope.

We're Not Alone

During our darkest moments, God is there. When we are at our lowest point, a place where even those closest to us cannot walk with us, it is God who walks at our side. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me," declares Psalm 23:4.

In the depths of discouragement, when we're so depressed we're ready to flee all human companionship, God is the only One who will not let us go. "Where can I go from your Spirit?" David ponders in Psalm 139:7-10. "Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me."

We Can Take Comfort in His Word

So how do we feel the presence of God when we so desperately need it—when we feel devastated and deserted? The psalmist tells us that in our very lowest moments, God's Word has power to refresh us. "My soul clings to the dust," he says. "Revive me according to Your word." (Psalm 119:25).

• A R T I C L E •

When we read the Bible through the lens of pain, we see God's handwriting with fresh, poignant meaning. His words can breathe hope back into our damaged lives.

God Cares That We Suffer

Our sufferings *do* matter to God. In fact, Scripture tells us we are exceedingly precious in His sight. Zechariah 2:8 says, "he who touches you touches the apple of His eye."

Many of the sufferings that come our way are not from the hands of God; they only pass *through* His hands. And in that passing, God takes full measure of them. He takes careful note of any pain being inflicted on the apple of His eye.

God Will Give Grace

As God permits pain in the lives of His children, He also bestows equal measures of grace never experienced outside of suffering. Heartache can result in intimacy with God. In trials and tragedies, we enter into a fellowship with Christ's sufferings.

You can't always prepare for life's disruptive moments nor can you always avoid them. You may never even discover the answers to all your questions. But this you can know: God is with you. He wants to wrap you in His presence where you can feel His love. And, as you take an unexpected detour, no matter how deserted you may feel, you'll discover grace you never knew before. That grace will take you through your journey.