

At the Hymn Society conference last year we had a whole lecture about this hymn, from the President of the Hymn Society of the United States and Canada. It is often thought of as an American hymn, and the tune is described as "American traditional melody". Robin spoke chiefly about the several different versions of the tune, but the words are also a bit of a mish-mash. They started off as an early Quaker song, and were altered in both the 19th and 20th centuries. There are several different versions on the Internet; the one by Pete Seeger comes nearest to what is in the new A & M Hymn Book! Most display a sort of quiet confidence, which is what we need when life hurts; to know that "God is with us always".

Unfortunately, this hymn, like *Amazing Grace*, is over-sentimentalised by American solo singers, who stray wildly from the written tune and any regular rhythm. So one way out, which we tried in Canterbury, is to sing it to the beautiful Welsh folk tune *Bugeilio'r Gwenigh Gwyn* (*Watching the wheat*) which was also written at the beginning of the 18th century, so is appropriate, and fits perfectly.

My life flows on in endless song  
above earth's lamentation:

I catch the sweet, though far-off hymn  
that sings of new creation.

Refrain No storm can shake my inmost calm  
while to that rock I'm clinging:  
Since love is Lord of heaven and earth,  
how can I keep from singing?

Through all the tumult and the strife  
I hear that music ringing;  
it finds an echo in my soul;  
How can I keep from singing? Refrain.

What though my joys and comforts die?  
The Lord my Saviour liveth!  
What though the darkness round me close?  
Songs in the night he giveth. Refrain.

The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,  
a fountain ever springing.  
All things are mine, since I am his!  
How can I keep from singing? Refrain.

## Where is God when life hurts?

### FOOTPRINTS



**One night I dreamed a dream.  
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.  
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from 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 of my life flashed before me,  
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,  
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,  
there was only one set of footprints.**

**This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.  
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,  
You'd walk with me all the way.  
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of  
my life,  
there was only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave  
me."**

**He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you  
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.  
When you saw only one set of footprints,  
It was then that I carried you."**

Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great. **Job 2 v 11-13**

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. **1 Peter 5 v 6-8**  
I am with you always. **Matthew 28 v 20**

**Where is God when life hurts?** A reflection from Revd David Blackwall.

We hurt – losing a loved one, redundancy, unexpected illness, limitations of old age or worrying about coronavirus. We hurt in many ways – physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually – and we get caught in the hurt.

Where is God in this?

God is there – always there – 'I am with you always', even if we don't recognise it. Perhaps that could be because we tend to build a shell around ourselves – and that shell needs to be cracked?

Neither we nor God can change what has happened in the past – but we can change how we approach the future.

Job in his illness stoutly defended his innocence when questioned by his friends. He got angry and was far from happy with God. It immobilised him and distorted his perception. God remained silent until Job humbled himself on meeting God. Then life changed.

Recently I went to a good friend who was dying. He was hurt by physical disability and mental distress and God was not working for him. When I suggested that he would find no peace until he stopped fighting, it struck a chord and cracked a shell that he had made for himself. You could see the tension drain away and he died shortly after.

Where is God when it hurts?

God is there ... and waiting. If we rail against God – feel let down, frustrated, angry with Him – then we are being honest. Even Jesus on the

Cross felt God was distant. Part of the cycle of grieving for humans involves naming the hurt and anger which is part of our processing. God may feel distant in this process but we remember if it is a process and ask does something have to change in us first before God's power, love, peace can be more *fully* effective?

Where is God when it hurts?

Sometimes, God works through the kindness, thoughtfulness, and the sacrifice of others.

When it hurts, may we humble ourselves before God, like Job, and open our hearts to his love, peace, joy, reassurance and hope. Maybe, that opening up of ourselves, the reorientation towards God again is the miracle ... Rejoice!

### **Further Reading or Viewing**

There are some people who have experienced trauma who have written about finding God again such as 'The Choice' by Edith Eger. 'Even in hell, hope can flower.'

### **Where is God? 2 minutes clips on You Tube.**

Rt Revd Steven Cottrel- Bishop of Chelmsford

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fw3-c0qlvzY&list=PLI6ySiyhM98pypx0Ui84u60ZZYqaCNI0n>

Dr Gemma Simmons CJ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxiULGAUu0Q&list=PLI6ySiyhM98pypx0Ui84u60ZZYqaCNI0n&index=3>

Rt Revd Graham Tomlinson – Bishop of Kensington

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlwM7kzpeEk>

### **Where is God? Longer clips on You Tube.**

Dave Adamson (an Australian pastor) *Where is God when it hurts?* He explores the theme of desert- the desert is where God lives and speaks. *Midba-* means desert *and* the place of the Word.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jjWsyZyAs0>

Philip Yancey (American pastor and writer) *Where is God when it hurts?*

The first chapter of this book is read. He explores approaching God when you are desperate. This chapter is based on the real life experiences from his pastoral care. Why us?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9KQwsyKZBE>