

# Short Sermons on Standing Strong

## Good News

“There are many who say, ‘Who will show us any good?’” (Psalm 4:6). These words of David appear to characterize the pessimistic outlook so easily developed among disciples today. The front page of newspapers and the top stories on the Internet or television seem to focus on violent crime, chilling accidents, corrupt politics, the bad economy, and immoral conduct of celebrities. Conversations at work and home dwell on difficulties, and it’s enough to discourage anyone. Where can we turn for better news?

In the midst of his troubles, David turned to the Lord who eased his distress (v.1 - “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer”) and heard his prayer (v.3 - “But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly; The LORD will hear when I call to Him”). Instead of hoping for temporary good from altered circumstances, he found unceasing encouragement in God. “Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us” (v.6). The result was a gladness of heart that surpassed any earthly prosperity or success (v.7 - “You have put gladness in my heart, More than in the season that their grain and wine increased”).

Throughout David’s life, before and after he became king of Israel, he was never without opposition. But at the end of the day, he could say, “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (v.8). Pondering the truths in Psalm 4 about God’s care for us is a good way to begin and end days that are filled with gales of bad news. God is a safe dwelling place in life’s storms.

## Comfortable and Suitable Scriptures

On February 10, 1675, 50 colonial families in Lancaster, Massachusetts, feared possible Native American raids. Joseph Rowlandson, the Puritan minister of the village, was in Boston pleading with the government for protection, while Mary, his wife, stayed behind with their children. At sunrise, the settlers were attacked. After some of the settlers were killed, Mary and other survivors were taken captive.

Mary experienced both kindness and cruelty from her captors. The Native Americans, aware of the religious nature of the settlers, gave her a Bible they had confiscated. Later she would write in her memoirs about God’s “goodness in bringing to my hand so many comfortable and suitable Scriptures in my distress.” God’s Word was her great comfort until she was ransomed by the colonists on May 2.

As the nation of Judah waited to be taken into captivity by a foreign power (Isa. 39:5-7), the despair of its people must have been great. But even in that dreadful anticipation, God’s words brought comfort: “The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good!” (v.8). If you feel you have been taken captive by circumstances beyond your control, read and meditate on the Word of God. It is the one true source of comfort.

## Praying Day and Night

Heman is the poet who wrote Psalm 88. His lot in life was unrelieved distress. “My soul is full of troubles,” he lamented (v.3). He was fed up with suffering. He looked back and remembered poor health and misfortune. He looked around and saw adversity and abandonment. He looked up and found no solace. “I am distraught,” he complained (v.15). He was “adrift” (v.5), “in darkness” (v.6), “afflicted” (vv.7, 15), and “cast off” (v.14). He could see no light at the end of the tunnel; no resolution of his sorrow.

Heman’s honesty warms the heart. Christians who never seem to have struggles are puzzling: do they really have no burdens, or are they so strong they don’t need to talk about it. On the other hand, there are those who talk incessantly about their hardships. It is hard to spend time with those who talk all the time about their troubles, but it does the heart good to know that others are struggling with life under the sun.

Yet, there’s more to Heman than mere bluntness. He also had a stubborn, intractable faith. Despite his many problems, he clung to God and cried out to Him “day and night” (vv.1,9,13). He didn’t stop praying. He didn’t give up. And even though he didn’t sense it at the time, Heman acknowledged God’s lovingkindness, faithfulness, and righteousness (vv.11-12). Folks like Heman strengthen our grip on God’s wisdom and remind us to never stop praying. Prayer is the soil in which hope grows best.

## Who Can We Trust?

According to lie-detection experts, "Our natural tendency is to trust people." However, not everyone is trustworthy all the time. Signs that someone may be lying include fidgeting, lack of eye contact, and noticeable pauses in speaking. Even with these clues, experts warn that it is still quite tough to tell deceivers from honest people.

Joshua needed to know if he could trust the Gibeonites. When they discovered that God wanted him to get rid of some neighboring nations (Josh. 9:24), they pretended to be from a faraway land. They arrived in worn-out tunics and patched sandals, claiming, "Our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey" (v.13). The Israelites were suspicious (v.7), but they "did not ask counsel of the Lord" (v.14); and Joshua unwisely made a peace treaty with the deceivers.

Many want our trust: salespeople, financial advisors, or estranged family members. If we wonder: "Can I trust you?" we shouldn't decide quickly, based only on what seems right to us. It's better to seek counsel from God's Word (Psalm 119:105), from godly people (Prov. 11:14), and from God Himself in prayer (James 1:5). Wisdom from above will help us decide who to trust.

## Six Word Biographies

Write someone's biography in six words. When asked to do this, Pulitzer Prize winner Ernest Hemingway wrote this poignant biography: "For sale: baby shoes, never used." Imagine the sad story behind those six words.

There are several six-word biographies of Bible heroes. For example: David, of whom God said: "A man after My own heart" (1Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). Paul's auto-biography: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:1). Paul's description of Timothy: "My true son in the faith" (1Tim. 1:2). Mary: "The virgin shall be with child" (Matt. 1:23). And Jesus: "Became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Short biographies of people of faith should cause us to wonder: What six-word description would best describe me? Would it be positive or negative? Would it be "Not an easy person to love" or "A shining light for the Lord"? How will your biography read?

## Standing for the Wrong Things

Does it bother you to see how much attention is paid in today's culture to people who stand for all the wrong things? Perhaps it is entertainment stars who get headlines while embracing immorality in their music, movies, or programs. Or it could be civil leaders and presidents who openly thumb their noses at moral living standards.

It would be easy to fret about this and become bitter, but Psalm 37 teaches a better way. "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity" (v.1).

While it is right to be "salt and light" (Matt. 5:13-14) in this tasteless, dark world, attempting to counter sin by reflecting Jesus' light wherever possible, we cannot let negative forces cause us to live in anger and wrath (Psalm 37:8). Instead, we must rely on God to have the ultimate say about evildoers: "They shall soon be cut down like the grass" (v.2). Beyond that, we should take David's approach: (1) "Trust in the Lord, and do good." (2) "Feed on His faithfulness." (3) "Delight yourself also in the Lord." (4) "Commit your way to the Lord." (5) "Rest in the Lord" (vv.3-7).

We may not like what we see and hear from much of society, but remember this: God is in control. Trust Him to do what is right. And don't fret. Don't despair because of evil; God will have the last word. Psalm 37:12-13 - "The wicked plots against the just, And gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him, For He sees that his day is coming."