



But the Lord Stood With Me

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Theme: The Gift of Adversity

Suddenly and painfully, a chapter closed. I didn't write the ending. The conclusion didn't include all the supporting characters. It felt rushed, it felt wrong, and I felt alone.

I had been surrounded by a crowd of smiles and promptly abandoned when it was time for tears. I wondered how, for all the friends I'd known and loved, the number who showed their role when the time of need struck was so microscopically small. Had I wasted years on those who would stand in the light with me but scatter at the sight of shadows? It's hard to pinpoint the location of God's purposes on a road as dark and lonely as this.

It's hard to know where you stand with people, but we can know where we stand with God. We can know that He stands with us. Love is a blessing when it's beautiful and becomes a burden that no one wants to carry when it's heavy. Adversity looks nothing like a gift when it strikes, but there are lessons to learn and strength to grow into when God is with us through it. When human love disappoints us, we have to be reminded of the fallible nature of that love: it is human.

Toward those who deserted him at his trial, Paul took a gracious position: “At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them.” (2 Timothy 4:16) If comparing the exact nature of my sufferings to Paul’s, mine seem about as bad as dropping a cone of ice cream. At this point, Paul was in prison and nearing the violent end of his life. He had been through all types of suffering and taught through this letter and the example of his life that, in Christ, the suffering would not be in vain. My “lighter” sufferings and his would both not be in vain. Not everyone Paul had walked with still stood by him, but this was no hindrance to God’s will and no less a chance to grow in God’s grace and to bring Him glory.

“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me,” Paul wrote, “so that I might fully preach the word and all the Gentiles might hear it.” (2 Timothy 4:17) We’re strengthened through perseverance, whether people rally around us or abandon us. Like Paul, we’re strengthened in grace to endure, serve, and suffer in our earthly lives. We’re strengthened through the hardships we walk through (or are knocked into). We can see how solid God’s foundation is when what we thought was rock turns out to be sand. By His strength, we keep walking the dark, bumpy road—all to say, “But the Lord stood with me.” What a testimony.

Though men deserted Paul, One remained who is greater than any friend on earth can be. His Savior stood with him, strengthening him to “fully preach the word.” He was lonely, friendless, and accused, yet not without eternal hope and not without purpose. God would be glorified and the Gospel would be heard anyway.

Throughout history, God has strengthened His people even through their suffering and shown that our sky-high expectations for the support of man will disappoint us. C.S. Lewis put it this way: “God always allows us to feel the frailty of human love so we’ll appreciate the strength of His.” Any strength we receive for life and ministry is by the power of God’s grace toward us. Sometimes that strength first comes packaged as pain and a guarantee to be popular and loved well among men doesn’t come with it.

I found God more precious in the valley, as we often do. Even in that low, lonely place,
He stood with me and strengthened me.

I was heartbroken and confused, but the Lord stood with me.

I was abandoned and cast out, but the Lord stood with me.

I was disappointed and losing hope, but the Lord stood with me.

And I say what Paul says next in 2 Timothy 4:18, “To Him be the glory forever and ever!
Amen.”

May it be the same for you.