



May 2018

DEVO: "Standing Firm" #1- Prayer

By: Scott Cejka

Introduction:

We have all heard about standing firm with the whole armor of God fitted upon us. The book of Ephesians chapter 6 verses 10-18 has been taught and studied at length by many Christians. While these verses give us a perfect visual of a man fully dressed in armor and ready for whatever the day's battle throws at him, it does not reveal practical steps to obtain and put the armor upon ourselves. In this devotion we will explore practical ways to Stand Firm in intense devotion to Christ. By doing so we will obtain and put on the whole armor of God, to fight the good fight, and to finish the race well as Paul did. 2 Timothy 4:6-8 "6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

So how is it that a man is capable of standing firm against a world and an enemy that behave contrary to the word of God? While we live in this world, we are not of this world. Therefore we stand firm through the means of Grace.

Over the next seven devotions we will explore the means of Grace.

When we stand firm through the means of Grace - We persevere in true faith!

1. Prayer
2. Study of the Word
3. Worship
4. Holy Intimacy with God
5. Witness
6. Fellowship with believers
7. Daily resistance to sin

What is Prayer?

Prayer is our way of conversing with God. We can't have a relationship with God without prayer. "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7, NIV). We draw near to other beings through having relationship with them. Why would it be any different with God? Jeremiah 29:11-13 says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Wow that is fantastic! God's plan is to prosper us, to make himself available to be found by each of us. It gets even better than that: "Pray that the Lord your God

will tell us where we should go and what we should do" (Jeremiah 42:3, NIV). If we want the very best in life for ourselves, our family, and our Church, we need to pray "Lord, show me the way I should go, and what I should do?" For Proverbs 16:9 (KJV) says: "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." If we are with God and not against his leading, our steps will be directed by God often without us even realizing it. He can see our entire life from beginning to end, so who can possibly know more about our well being than God?

How should we approach prayer?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:6 (NIV): "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." The great thing about Jesus is that he not only instructed us with his words, he lived it out by example. "After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone" (Matthew 14:23, NIV). Maybe we have not received the results we are looking for because we have not remembered to follow Christ's example when praying. As Jesus shows us in Luke 22:42, we should ask for what we need but also surrender our thoughts over to God....not my will, but your will be done.

Prayers that relate to eternity:

We should also be praying that we do not fall into temptation, and that we would be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him. Remember brothers, the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. Matthew 24:44 (NIV) says: "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." Lastly, we are instructed by Paul to pray in the spirit on all occasions. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26, KJV).

Questions – Day #1

1. When is the last time you prayed "Lord, show me the way I should go, and what I should do?"
2. How pliable are you in God's hands; are you open to His leading or are you still trying to run the show yourself?
3. Are you achieving good results in your prayer life; are you going off to be alone - closing a door - and praying to God in private like Jesus did?



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DEVO: "Standing Firm" #2 - Study of the Word

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When we study the Word of God, we are studying the ways, thoughts, commandments, and nature. The Holy Bible is the only book in existence that is living. The word speaks to us one way today but tomorrow it will speak to us on an entirely different level. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus and increase in Godly wisdom, the Word reveals deeper truths and speaks deeply into our spirit. This means of grace is essential to continue going deeper in our walk with Christ right up until the moment that He calls us home.

It is important to note that grace is not here to help relieve us of our guilt over sin, but on the contrary, grace is the empowerment that God has given us to overcome sin. Man sinned in the garden, which put him under the displeasure of God, so that man could not approach God with confidence. Grace offered a means to reconnect with God, even though man was undeserving. This is the essence of grace. Look how quickly the plan for redemption was put in place to counteract the damage done by Satan. "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). Here we see the foreshadowing of our redemption already revealed in the 3rd chapter of the first book of the Bible written thousands of years ago!

Ezra was a man who studied God's word. Ezra 7:9b-10 says: "for the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel." God can use you in wonderful ways if you will devote yourself to the study of his word every day. Study of His word will draw us closer to The Word - Jesus, empower us to keep from straying off the narrow path, and enable us to overcome sin through His amazing grace. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Questions – Day #2

1. Would you like the hand of God to be upon you? Today is a great day to study the word deeper. Read Romans 8 now or at lunchtime.
2. How important is reading the Bible to you? What is holding you back from feasting on its wisdom at least once every day?
3. Can the means of grace from day 1 (prayer) be highly effective without study of the Word? Why or why not?



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DEVO: "Standing Firm" #3 - Worship

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Psalm 95:6-7, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care..."

We worship God because he is our creator, without whom we would not exist. We bow down to his authority as a flock that is under his care. Jesus is our good shepherd and we give him thanks and praise today and every day for his goodness and love.

Psalm 100:1-3, "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

We should worship him every day privately. Then when we assemble together at the church building, it is only natural that we worship God together as the body of Christ. Since God's purpose concerning man is to seek and to save that which is lost, to be worshipped by man, to build a body of believers in the image of His Son, and to demonstrate His love and compassion for all the world, one of the primary reasons for being of the Assemblies of God is: To be a corporate body in which man may worship God.

1 Corinthians 12:13, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

Hebrews 10:24-25, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

In other words, let us not skip going to church on Sunday. Your presence at church will spur someone else on. Even if you feel depressed or are having difficulty in life, we have to look past ourselves and consider that God might use even a broken vessel to further his kingdom. You may just receive your miracle there too!

Questions – Day #3

1. Have you worshiped God in private or do you leave it all to Sunday? Do you think God would like to hear your worship more than once a week?
2. Do you ever listen to Christian music in your car when you drive? You are just sitting there anyway right? This is a great time to sing along and worship Him from your heart.
3. Giving thanks and praise to God is one way to worship. Take an inventory of the good things God has placed in your life; then offer up some shouts of thanks and praise today.



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DEVO: "Standing Firm" #4 - Holy Intimacy with God

By: Scott Cejka

Today we examine the 4th means of grace: Holy intimacy with God. As we studied earlier, we must have a relationship with God through prayer. We should also be studying the Word and worshipping him. Holy intimacy is obtained when we spend time in private with our Lord expressing our concerns, questions, needs, and even our wants to him. As noted in an earlier devotion; Matthew 6:6 says: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen."

However, it goes beyond prayer with God. Both Enoch and Noah 'walked with God' (Genesis 5:24; 6:9). They didn't just sit, kneel or stand with God (the kind of actions we would often associate with spending time with God), but they were also in communion with God when doing something else. While you are doing other things – working, eating, exercising or relaxing – you can be in communion with God at the same time.

Our goal should be to have holy intimacy with God every day through prayer and walking with God - that is - walking in his ways. To walk in God's ways includes several things as revealed in Psalm 25. Verses 4-5 show the heart of a man who longs to know God's ways; "Show me Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day." It means to wait on the Lord, because His timing is not always our timing. It means being teachable to grow in understanding God's truth. It includes humility (v. 9), because God gives grace to the humble, but he resists the proud (James 4:6). To walk in God's ways means to obey Him (v. 10). It means to fear Him (vv. 12, 14). It means to look to the Lord continually (v. 15). It requires walking with integrity and uprightness (v. 21).

Questions – Day #4

1. In what ways are you walking in God's ways with holy intimacy?
2. In what ways are you walking in your own ways instead of God's ways?
3. Take a few minutes to pray to God and ask him as David did: "Show me your ways O Lord; Teach me Your paths."



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DEVO: "Standing Firm" #5 - Witness

By: Scott Cejka

Proverbs 12:17, An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies.

Proverbs 19:9, A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will perish.

A truthful witness gives a valuable testimony. Whether it is a witness to a crime or a witness to salvation, the truth is what matters most. Jesus is the essence of all truth, and no deceit is found in him.

In John 1:6-13 we read, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

Had John given false witness, the path planned by God would not have been straight for the Lord, and the hearts of men would not yet been ready to receive him.

It is equally important that we give true witness to the saving amazing grace that was extended to us. We had a choice to make given the circumstances and sinful nature that we had lived in up to that point in our lives. Having made the right choice, the choice for Jesus, our lives have been transformed. We no longer wallow in sin and death, but instead continue to taste freedom from sin and live in the light of God. Not that we are perfect, however, we have been given a great means of grace, and we must not neglect to witness to others who are willing to listen.

Questions – Day #5

1. When is the last time you witnessed to a non-believer?
2. Our witness is the word of our testimony. Currently saved believers' faith can be edified when we witness to other believers. Who can you witness to in the church this week to edify a brother?
3. When you give your testimony do you focus too much on how horrible a sinner you used to be instead of on the transformative power of Christ and what it has meant to you?



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DEVO: "Standing Firm" #6 – Fellowship with Believers

By: Scott Cejka

A secular song from the distant past said that people who need people are the luckiest people in the world. Now we know brothers, that luck has nothing to do with anything good that happens to us. It is that we are blessed by the Lord when we prosper, and so we say, "I am blessed." However, we can pull a little gem from the song lyric; "people who need people." God clearly made people to interact with each other. As iron sharpens iron, we help knock the rough edges off each other and unify as the body of Christ by coming together in worship and fellowship.

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:8-11, NIV).

"Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified" (1 Corinthians 14:1-5). We can see here that there are so many functions of the body of Christ. If we do not come together in fellowship how can the body function properly?

Truly God made His people to need each other. Through relationship with Jesus and one another, we are the most blessed people in the world!

Questions – Day #6

1. Has it been a while since you attended an event at our church outside of Sunday service?
2. If you fellowship with the body of Christ, do you think you might experience some sort of positive personal growth?
3. Instead of figuring out how you might grow through fellowship, offer up a prayer to the Lord, and ask him to connect you with the right people at the church. You may be surprised how God answers these kind of prayers because he works in very mysterious ways.



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DEVO: "Standing Firm" #7 – Daily Resistance to Sin

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"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18, NIV). Oh, what a wonderful, righteous savior we have! He took upon himself all of our sins and gave us the grace to overcome sin through Him. He sent his Holy Spirit as promised to teach and lead us in the path we should go.

Living free from sin is the theme of Romans chapter 6 because we are now dead to sin and alive in Christ. We died to sin, so how can we live in it any longer? We know that our old self was crucified with him and that just as he was raised from the dead, we too will be raised to life as co-heirs with him. We are not to offer the parts of our body to sin, but instead offer them to God. Instead of being slaves to sin, we are now slaves to righteousness. The conflict of a regenerative Christian is the conflict of a person in union with Christ and the Holy Spirit against the power of sin. For those who attempt to obey God's commandments without the saving grace of Christ find themselves unable to accomplish the good intentions of their heart. Only in Christ will God provide a way out of temptation so that you can stand firm under it. "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We are now under the law of the spirit of life which sets us free from the law of sin and death. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Paul emphasizes in Romans 8 the necessity for continual warfare against all that would limit God's work in our lives. We are warriors, fully fitted with the whole armor of God who stand firm till the end. No matter what happens we stand! "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

No force nor power under heaven can change God's word, Hallelujah! Come, Lord Jesus! We thank you, Lord, for everything you have done and the means of grace that are available to us every day to keep us on the narrow path, so that we may enter heaven through you, the narrow gate, that leads to eternal life with God.

Questions – Day #7

1. Which of the 7 means of grace have you not utilized lately to keep you on the path of life?
2. What particular sin keeps poking its nose into your life? Remember sin has no right to you any longer. Pray to God that he reveal to you the way out of it.
3. Recap of the 7 means of grace we discussed: Prayer, Study of the Word, Worship, Holy Intimacy with God, Witness, Fellowship with Believers, Daily resistance to Sin.

* I pray that we all continue to grow in Christ. All credit and glory goes to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for this devotional. God bless you brothers - Stand Firm.