

# Standing Up Under Pressure

by Tom Macartney

---

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of looking up to Jesus, refusing to question God's goodness, accepting the fact of suffering, trusting Him to overrule everything, remembering we are at war, being wise to our weak points, letting our will be 'a man of action', closing and guarding our ranks of fellowship, and filling our hearts and minds with God's word to overcome pressure and stress.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:11, John 16:33, Acts 7:54, 2 Corinthians 12:8, Ephesians 4:3, Ephesians 6:10, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 12:1

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Faith And Suffering"

---

## Description

Tom Macartney preaches about the growing stress and pressure in today's world, emphasizing that Christians have the grace to endure and triumph over challenges. He highlights the importance of looking up to Jesus, refusing to question God's goodness, accepting suffering, trusting God's sovereignty, recognizing the spiritual warfare, being wise to personal weaknesses, acting in faith, fostering unity in fellowship, and immersing oneself in God's Word for strength and guidance.

---

## Transcript

Many people today are finding themselves under growing stress and pressure as the rising tide of lawlessness engulfs the world (2 Thess. 2). That no Christian need break-down under pressure is clear, because the Lord has provided grace sufficient to see us through; "My grace is sufficient for you," but that many do in fact break-down is also sadly clear. We shall not now attempt to go into the many reasons for this. Strangely (at first sight only) the earnest Christian is especially conscious of this pressure, because he is, of course, a special target of the enemy. How are such to triumph in the thick of the battle? Here are some keys to victory.

### 1. Look up to Jesus enthroned

Stephen illustrates this in his triumph over the ultimate pressure of martyrdom. Surely this is how all the martyrs triumphed, and it provides us with a key to triumph under pressure of every kind.

"But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see heaven open, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:54-60).

Running with steadfast endurance the race set before us is only possible as the eyes of our hearts are ever, "Looking up and away from all else to Jesus ... enthroned in heaven" (Heb. 12:1-3). Paul further unfolds this secret in his triumphant conclusion to Romans 8:31-39. See also, Isaiah 40:26-31.

## 2. Refuse to question God's goodness

A major feature of the enemy's strategy is to try to undermine our confidence in the Lord, by introducing doubts into our minds. Why has the Lord allowed this to happen? Where is His promised love and faithfulness in this situation? How long is this trial going to drag on with prayer unanswered? Perhaps the Psalms provide the best examples of this turmoil of mind that often accompanies pressure situations, and also the answer to it (e.g. Psalm 13 and Psalm 142; and Psalm 77 to which we shall return.) See also 1 Pet. 1:3-8 and 2 Cor. 1:8-10.

"Concerning this thing, I begged the Lord three times to take it away. But He said to me, My grace is all you need" 2 Cor. 12:8, 9.

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" Job 13:15

## 3. Accept the fact of suffering in this world

"In Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

'Triumphalism' - the idea that Christians should always be consciously and visibly 'on top', and freed from every ill - is unknown in scripture and bound to crack under real pressure. Let us beware of it, or we risk becoming disillusioned or dishonest. Nowhere are we promised a joy-ride to heaven. Quite the contrary. We are promised tribulation (beyond the common trials of life) and called to follow Him in the way of the cross (Acts 14:22; Luke 9:23), yet with His peace, joy and triumph in our hearts in spite of trying circumstances.

'Interventionism' - the idea that it is always the Lord's will to intervene (e.g. in healing), or to change difficult circumstances - is a mistaken view. He is more concerned to change us. Consider Timothy's frequent spells of illness, and their implications. (1 Tim. 5:23).

## 4. Trust Him to overrule everything for good

"We even rejoice in our sufferings, for we know that suffering produces endurance, and that produces a tested and approved character" (Rom. 5:2-4).

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Paul's positive approach to his sufferings and trials (a mark of maturity) stands in sharp contrast to our murmurings. His catalogue of his sufferings (listed that we may see what the Lord brought him through) is surely both a challenge and an encouragement (2 Cor. 6:3-10; 11:23-33). His grace can not only make our trials work out to our eternal blessing, but also to our present usefulness. Consider Joseph, Gen. 50:20; and also, 2 Cor. 1:3, 4; Rom. 8:28.

## 5. Remember we are at war

"Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2 :3, 4).

The Christian is engaged in a spiritual warfare. The issues at stake are tremendous - the honour of God's Name and His purposes in His Son. We know that victory has already been gained at the cross, but it has yet to be fully revealed. The battle is still going on and will do so until the coming of the Lord. So, we must live now on a war footing, relying on His victory, yet always wearing our God-given armour and prepared for enemy attack. The roaring lion and old serpent, and his forces, are still in the field.

"Be strong in the Lord, strengthened by His mighty power ... Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil ... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm" (Eph.6:10-20).

#### 6. Be wise to your weak points

We need wisdom to know ourselves, our particular make-up and temperament, and where we are most vulnerable by nature. Satan will exploit these against us. For example, some people (often the serious-minded) are prone to depression, and pessimistic by nature (by heredity). Others are exuberant and optimistic by nature (often the easy-going). Again, some are inclined by nature to take a back seat and so fail to play their part in the life of the church, whereas others who have plenty of natural drive tend to run the show and push others aside. Each type needs to realise that the divine nature we have received through new birth is selfless, positive, balanced and calm. We also need wisdom in distinguishing between being spiritually ill - the result of something wrong in our relationship with the Lord or fellow-believers, which must be put right (Eph. 4:17-32); and a-physical or mental condition - the result of, for example, exhaustion, overdoing it, ill-health or a temperamental weakness, which requires a practical or medical answer. The first calls for repentance; the second, possibly, only for rest. Satan specializes in confusing Christians, wearing them out and getting them down under a spirit of condemnation. Consider the psalmist in Psalm 77. In verses 1-9, he is clearly in a state of depression. Then, in verse 10, there comes a turning point as he recognises that his depression is a tendency in his temperament and says: "This is my weakness; but I will remember ... the Most High" (perhaps the best and most helpful translation). So, by an act of will (verse 10-12), he says: "I will turn away from myself, my doubts and my problems, to the Lord". Note that in the first nine verses he refers to himself about 20 times, whereas in the last ten verses, to the Lord about 20 times. So, the moment he turned from himself to the Lord (verse 10), the depression lifted and the sun broke through the clouds (verses 11-20)! "For God did not give us a spirit of fearfulness, but a spirit of power, and love, and self-discipline and sound judgment." 2 Tim. 1:7.

#### 7. Let your will be 'a man of action'

We are affected too much by our feelings and thoughts. Our wills are more important. It has been well said: "The will is the automatic pilot that keeps the soul on course. The will, not the feelings, determines moral direction." Paul is speaking to the will when he says: "Be strong in the Lord... Put on the whole armour of God." Do it! Act! James does the same (4:7): "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." It is the will that resists. See also what Peter says in 1 Peter 4:1; 5:8, 9. The will and faith must work together. Paul sums it up in Phil. 2:12, 13: "Work out your own salvation ... for God is at work in you." The active co-operation of our wills (captured at conversion) is crucial throughout the Christian life.

Note: what we are saying is quite different from so called positive thinking, much in fashion today, even among Christians. This is rooted in self-effort and human nature. We are speaking of acting in real dependence on the Lord.

#### 8. Close and guard your ranks of fellowship

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit" (Eph.4:3).

In a battle, isolated soldiers (or isolated groups) are easily picked off one by one. It is also essential for an army to operate as one if victory is to be assured. Surely, this is why our enemy works overtime to divide Christians and churches. Divide and conquer, is his watchword. Our personal survival in these days of pressure may well depend upon the prayers of others with whom we are bound together in fellowship. We must close our ranks and guard our lines of communication with all who are truly the Lord's, and particularly with those whom He has put next to us in His family, i.e. those with whom we meet in regular fellowship. Real 'togetherness' depends upon mutual confidence and trust. To maintain this will call for every effort, and walking in the light with Him and with one another. (See 1 John 1:6, 7.)

#### 9. Fill your heart and mind with god's word

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach, admonish and encourage one another with all wisdom" (Col.3:16).

How shall we counter the persistent attacks of the enemy upon our hearts and minds, designed to thrust his thoughts and ways upon us, through the world in which we live (for example, through the media, especially the T.V.), and through our own fallen natures? The Holy Spirit answers these attacks through His word. Jesus said: "He will teach you all things, and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). This is why we should meditate on His word day and night (Psalm 1:2), and hide (like a treasure) His Word in our hearts (Ps. 119:11). How can the Holy Spirit bring to our remembrance what we have seldom or never read?

Through the scriptures our lives are cleansed (Eph. 5:26), our hearts are searched (Heb. 4:12, 13), we are armed for battle (Eph. 6:17), we are guided in the pilgrim way (Psalm 119:105), we are enriched (Psalm 119:72, 127), and empowered for witness (consider Stephen, Acts 6:8 - 7:59).

Note especially, the liberating power of the word (as we live in obedience to it), in Psalm 119: "Give me life, revive me (by Your vitalizing touch), O Lord, according to Your word" (verse 25 + verse 50, 93, 107, 149, 154, 156 ++). Have we not often found when in a tight corner, it is His word the Lord uses to set us free? His word liberates from everything, within us or around us, that seeks to crush, paralyse or hinder the abundant life which He has given us, the power of His resurrection (John 10:10; Phil.3:10; Eph. 3:16, 20).

In the last analysis, it is God's Word, not our fluctuating experience that will see us through, for the one is unreliable, the other a Rock beneath our feet.

"Man shall live on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4)

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/tom-macartney/standing-up-under-pressure/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**