

Stand Your Ground

Ephesians 6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Introduction: Many of us, I suspect, had to read Spoon River Anthology, by Edgar Lee Masters, a classic collection of poems that chronicle life and scandal in a small midwest town. I liked the book overall, though I'm not sure if Masters ever wrote anything else to match it. Some of the characters I liked, some scandalized me, and a few I disliked. This is one of them, her name is Lucinda Matlock, and this is her story: *"I went to the dances at Chandlerville, And played snap-out at Winchester. One time we changed partners, Driving home in the moonlight of middle June, And then I found Davis. We were married and lived together for seventy years, Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children, Eight of whom we lost Ere I had reached the age of sixty. I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick, I made the garden, and for holiday Rambled over the fields where sang the larks, And by Spoon River gathering many a shell, And many a flower and medicinal weed—Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys. At ninety—six I had lived enough, that is all, And passed to a sweet repose. What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness, Anger, discontent and drooping hopes? Degenerate sons and daughters, Life is too strong for you—It takes life to love Life."*

To which I say, "take a hike, Lucinda. You have to be pretty self-absorbed to lose eight children and still say life is easy." The Bible takes a wiser view of life, I believe, and tells us to stand, and in doing so tells us that we have to take a stand to live. It will not be easy, and you have to stand together.

meaning of "to stand"

Different parts of the New Testament fill out what it means to "stand in the evil day." First of all, another part of Ephesians tells us to "walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (5:15-16) Every day has the possibility of challenge, and days of crisis are sure to come. "Standing" is an everyday event for a soldier, and for a Christian. Other parts tell us to "submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7) How we act reveals when we are ready to stand successfully, and that's outlined in the armor of God, so famous in this passage.

the armor of God

no armor in the back

We all know of the armor of God: shield of faith, sword of the Spirit, helmet of salvation, breastplate of righteousness, girded with truth, feet shod with the spreading of the Gospel of peace. There is much to be said about them, but for today I want to note that the shields used by the Roman Empire at the time could interlock, and worked best when soldiers stood together. Several decades after the Ascension of our Lord Jesus to heaven, there was a famous rebellion against the Roman Empire by a Queen named Boudica, leader of one of the tribes in what is now England. She had reason to fight, but I want to note what happened when a group of soldiers banded together. One group of Roman soldiers fought the roaring hoards of Boudica, and won. The Roman army, though badly outnumbered, because of their discipline, strategy and ability to work together.

Application: obedience and prayer

One application is that we can't retreat from life, and we're meant to do so. The armor does a good job of protecting you, if you face your enemy. There was no protection if you turned your back. There is no benefit in running and hiding from life. We were meant to take a stand. Another application is that the shields, as mentioned before, could interlock. A group of soldiers could form a line and make a strong defense. In fact, they would be hard to resist. Facing life together, praying together when possible, is a strategy to stand in life and be strong.

Conclusion: Contrary to that particular person in Spoon River Anthology, struggling with life does not make you weak. It means that life can be tough, and the Christian must be ready to stand; to stand and face life, to face against evil and be prepared with the armor of God. It also helps greatly to connect the shields by standing together and praying together whenever possible.