



# A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: FEBRUARY 2024

*by Lee Shipp*

## STAND IN THE SEASON

Paul describes relentless warfare in Ephesians 6. He depicts it as a wrestling match against cosmic forces. Interestingly enough, his instruction for us is more to stand than to fight. Running, not standing, is a natural temptation. The conflict is enough to crush us. Stand. Don't quit. Don't bow. Don't run. Don't give up. Stand. Stand in the power of His might. Stand in the victory given to us by Jesus.

Anybody living any reasonable amount of time certainly feels the emotional trauma of life and people; they certainly have battled the temptation to run, thinking that they cannot take this place anymore. Even faithful examples of those living victorious lives testify to the overwhelming burden of life and people. Paul even testified that he would have fainted were it not for the mercy of God. The ministry God laid on him was more than he could bear. God's supernatural supply of mercy and grace sustained Paul; he finished the race.

We fight hell. Is that not enough? Do we have to fight our brothers too? It is hard enough dealing with the world and those through whom Satan works. Do we have to suffer from offenses, gossip, slander, and coldness among the brothers? Do we have to run? Do we have to forsake friends we have known all our life? Do we have to abandon one another in a season we can hardly tolerate anymore?

## TOUCHY PEOPLE

This life is emotional. The conflict of life cuts deep. We feel it. The wounds make us sensitive to the touch. Yes. Touchy! That's what we become. And when people touch that sensitive place, we run. We look for change. We tend to run. We desire a better place. That's what we are good at: running, leaving, forsaking. Our generation is the "quitter generation" (2 Timothy 3).

I understand the desire to run. I have wanted to run many times. I have wanted to quit. But the mercy of God would not let me. I have fought hell. I had fought hell when it was wearing a dress and jeans, hiding inside a particular man or woman.

Throughout my life in ministry, I have been an emotional wreck. Through it all, God has sustained me. I take refuge in His love and presence; He never fails to give me the mercy and faith to continue. It is God's mercy that upholds me, constraining me to move forward: not to quit, or give up, or run away, or forsake my church family and friends. I have walked through many dark seasons. I have been haunted by long seasons of pain and despair. In them all, my faith hears the voice of the Holy Spirit telling me to "Stand ..."

Instead of standing, running is an effort to find your own way. It is an attempt to light your path when faced with a situation you do not like. We are tempted to light our own fire when we find it hard to trust God. Walking by sight seems more reasonable than walking by faith. When we walk by sight, we succumb to the temptation to take matters into our own hands. We lean unto our own understanding. We renavigate our course to a route that seems more plausible than the one God had us on.

## RENAVIGATING

I remember a time when I was following the navigation system in my truck. I typed in my destination and set the course. While traveling, the GPS wanted to send me down a different path. I knew this path was longer and more complex. I didn't understand the GPS instructing me to take this route. The GPS is wrong, I thought. I knew better. I knew the way I was going was much more direct. So, I ignored the GPS and followed my own experience. I ended up trapped, sitting on the interstate due to an accident in front of me. The GPS had navigated a better course for me, but I relied on my own experience and suffered a delay, costing me hours.

We often do this with God. We do not like the way God is leading us. We know a better way. Experience tells us the route we want is correct; God's way is wrong. We renavigate our lives from God's plan, and down the road, we find ourselves trapped in an accident God was sending us around. We eventually realize how foolish our decision was.

Some lament the wasted years stuck on hell's interstate. Others lost friends because they left and did not stand. God's purposes were delayed and put on hold. Other people got into relationships that robbed them as they ran from the friends who really did love them. Some married the wrong person and found themselves suffering from loneliness and regret.

Receive this counsel from God's Word. *"Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow"* (Isaiah 50:10-11).

## **WALKING IN THE DARK WITH GOD**

Can you walk in the darkness with God? Can you trust His voice when you cannot see? Will you succumb to the temptation to light your own fire, to run? Or will you instead listen for His voice?

Don't light your own fire. In other words, be careful not to renavigate your life. For example, the Bible says the Holy Spirit puts you in the Body where it pleases Him. Be careful when you want to leave a place. The decision to leave is not your decision but the Spirit's decision. If He puts you where it pleases Him, be sure it will not always please you. Indeed, there will be seasons when you want a different place. However, if you stand, He will lead the right way, maintaining lasting friendships and joyful purposes of life.

2 Timothy 3 describes this generation of believers as quick to run away, who don't keep their word, and who are self-seeking. The attitude of people in the last days is expressed in the notion that if it is no longer fun here, I will leave and find another place. If you hurt my feelings or get cross with me, I'm out of here! It does not matter what the Holy Spirit wants; I want out!

I have watched them walk out. Oh, how painful it is. You did life together. You loved each other ... and then they were gone! Without even saying a word. If they had just said something like, "I hate you. I cannot stand the sight of you. When I see you, my skin crawls." That would be better than the silent exit.

## **BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU LIGHT YOUR FIRE**

Prepare yourself. If you are determined to light your darkness, you will see things God never intended for you to see. It is going to cost you. It will consume you with sorrow. Running and not standing always leads to regret and sorrow.

People who move from their place by the influence of emotion or devils end up attacking the place they left, which was so good for them. There are proper

ways of moving with God. Walking in the Spirit will always be for the good of the Body.

## **STAND IN THE EMOTIONAL SEASONS OF DESPAIR**

How bleak are the seasons when we feel unloved, disrespected, and alienated. Don't let a devil move you. Don't let your emotions move you. I have never suffered more than by being a servant of Jesus. My self-pity and depression would get the best of me. Many times, I wanted to run. I was tempted to take another church where I thought I could have a fresh start- maybe there I would not experience so much pain and rejection.

My heart has been shattered numerous times as I watched marriages crash because of a season when a spouse didn't feel loved. If only they had stood in His might's power through that difficult season. That season would have ended. The marriage would be living in joy. Churches are forsaken because of an emotional season of loneliness. Numerous young professionals move from one church to another because of a season where they do not seem to connect. They run to another environment and experience the same disconnect, eventually ending up lonely in a bar.

Stand. Anybody can be faithful when life is right, when everything is going well. But the true test of our faith is our ability to stand in the darkness. The darkness is the only test of whether you are faithful to friends, family, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Standing and not running is evidence of your hope in the Lord and the power of His might.

Is the trail dark? Stand!

Is the road long? Stand!

Is the night black? Stand!

A strong wind of the Spirit may be blowing even now to drive out the gloom. The Son could be rising on your night season. The purpose of your life could be revealed in a burning bush on your morning drive. This you can be sure of: if you stand, you win!