

Boldness in the Face of Threats

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness” (Acts 4:29).

Scripture: Acts 4:23-31

Song: “Speak the Name”

Kobe Bryant, the late professional basketball star, had a reputation for playing better when faced with challenges. When fans of opposing teams heckled him from the stands, he seemed energized by their disdain, and played some of his best games in those environments. When opposing players hinted that they would stifle his offensive prowess, Bryant played with a competitive fire that proved the opposite. Any threat, perceived or actual, emboldened Bryant.

Soon after Jesus’ ascension, His followers faced very real threats from Jewish leaders who wanted to silence the testimony of Jesus. Yet the disciples’ response to these threats was not one of fear or defeat. Instead they asked God for more of what got them into trouble to begin with: boldness to continue speaking His Word!

Even today, sharing the truth of Christ can be risky. We may face pressure to stay silent, and we may be threatened with negative consequences if we do not comply. Let us be encouraged by the early followers of Jesus who viewed threats as an opportunity to seek God for increased fervor in sharing the only message that saves.

Father, I know that Your Word cannot be stopped. So no matter what threats I may face in proclaiming it, embolden me to continue sharing Your truth so that people can come to know You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

October 17–23. **Lakeisha D. Blake** is an entrepreneur living in Fayetteville, North Carolina. She enjoys singing, writing, and spending time with loved ones.

God Can Handle It

When [God's people] said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD" (1 Samuel 8:6).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 8:1-9

Song: "Have a Little Talk with Jesus"

"I can't pray. I'm too angry," said a young man in my eighth-grade English class. Each day, we ended class with a prayer, and it was his turn to lead us. A few minutes earlier, I'd had to reprimand him for disobeying a classroom rule; that's why he was upset. I took a few moments to consider his honest admission and then responded, "You can talk to God even when you're angry. He can handle it."

Samuel the prophet understood this truth. Israel's request for a king displeased him, but rather than taking out his displeasure on the people, he brought it to God in prayer. Communion with the Lord expanded Samuel's view as he received insight on how God felt about Israel's demand for a king. Samuel also received specific instruction on how to proceed with the people's request. Samuel's response to the people would be directed by God rather than directed by his own displeasure.

We experience a range of emotions in our interactions with people, and none of these emotions is off-limits to God. In prayer we can share our hearts with Him and receive the direction, comfort, and perspective that come only through fellowship with Him.

Father, thank You for being a safe place for me when I am troubled by what others do. It is comforting to know that I can always bring these concerns to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

He's Coming

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign” (Revelation 11:17).

Scripture: Revelation 11:15-19; 15:2-4

Song: “Face to Face with Christ, My Savior”

Many joyous events take place within a family over time. Babies are born. Children grow up and get married. Milestones, such as graduation and retirement, are achieved. We anticipate these occasions for months and sometimes years. The family of God is no different. With great joy we celebrate baptisms, commissioning into Christian ministry, and the Lord's Supper. There is one event, however, that we have been anticipating since the days of the early church, and it will be the most joyous of all: the second coming of Christ.

Earlier in Revelation, Christ is referred to as the one “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (Revelation 1:4). Knowing Christ in this way is familiar to us because we are living between His first and second appearing. Yet today's passage reminds us that a day is coming when Jesus will no longer be the one “who is to come.” He will return to the earth in His resurrected body and begin His reign.

The routines and demands of daily life can dull our excitement about this great day, but Jesus' promise to return for His church still stands. These songs of praise from Revelation help us to recapture the hopeful expectation of the fulfillment of this promise.

Father, Your Word assures us that Jesus' return is imminent. Help me to live with a perspective that is shaped by the hope of His coming. In Jesus' name, amen.

Mighty One

The seas have lifted up, LORD, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea—the LORD on high is mighty (Psalm 93:3-4).

Scripture: Psalm 93

Song: “Mighty Is Our God”

Hurricane Matthew roared through the Sandhills of North Carolina in October of 2016. The day after the storm finally passed, I was stunned to see the devastation left by the floodwaters. A long-standing motel had been washed away. Homes in certain areas were completely submerged. Power outages lasted for days. Debris littered the streets, making them impassable. It took months, and in some cases years, to rebuild what the floods destroyed. Hurricane Matthew was a terrifying experience that showcased just how destructive floods can be.

Such devastating events bring us face-to-face with our helplessness. We do all we can to prepare, but when natural disasters strike, there is no way of knowing just what they will do or how bad they will be. Thankfully, we have a God who is greater than nature.

Though the power of a hurricane is overwhelming to us, it is no match for the power of God. Today's psalm offers us the assurance that God is not tossed about by what happens on the earth. Instead, He reigns over it all from a position of strength, majesty, and might.

Father, I rejoice in knowing that Your throne is unshakable. When I face circumstances that overwhelm me, help me to remember Your great might. In Jesus' name, amen.

God Has More

The servant replied, “Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let’s go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take” (1 Samuel 9:6).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 9:3-17

Song: “So Good to Me”

From part-time tutor to managing director in only four months! I couldn’t believe it. What started as a desperate search for a part-time job had turned into a major promotion. My urgent financial needs had sent me searching for a job, but what I found was an unexpected career advancement that prepared me for future success.

Saul had an urgent need as well—to find his father’s lost donkeys. So he planned a trip to see the prophet Samuel and inquire about the animals. At the same time, God was revealing His plan to the prophet: that He had chosen Saul to be Israel’s king. While Saul intently searched for livestock, he had no idea that God had designated him to be a king.

God sometimes operates in similar fashion in our lives today. While we search for what seems urgent, He is orchestrating an outcome that is far more glorious. We are probably not looking for donkeys, but maybe it’s a new job, a spouse, physical healing, or a restored relationship. Whatever we are seeking, we may eventually find that what God has in store is more than we ever dreamed.

Father, my desire is to submit to Your plans. I want to embrace the opportunities You place in front of me—even when those opportunities take me by surprise. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Stay Awhile

Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to go on ahead of us . . . but you stay here for a while, so that I may give you a message from God” (1 Samuel 9:27).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 9:27–10:8

Song: “Stay”

At 29 years old, I moved back home with my parents after a painful season that left me physically, emotionally, and financially drained. While at home, I often asked God how long I would be there. Through sermons and Scriptures, I came to believe He was encouraging me to stay put. He did not seem as concerned as I was about how long that might be. Staying put was difficult, but as I waited, God’s plans for me became clearer.

Sometimes “stay” is a hard instruction to receive. Perhaps Saul felt that way when Samuel directed him to stay for a while so that he could get a message from God. Though Scripture does not reveal Saul’s feelings on the matter, it does tell us that Saul obeyed. By staying behind, he received what God had for him: the anointing to be king.

Scripture is full of stories of God telling people to go, but there are also instances when His direction is to stay. When this direction comes to us, we can feel left behind as we see others moving on. Yet when it is directed by God, staying behind is strategic and necessary, as it puts us in a place to receive what God has for us.

Father, thank You for Your faithful guidance as You unfold Your good plans for my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Partners in Purpose

Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched (1 Samuel 10:26).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 10:17-27

Song: "I Need You to Survive"

Harriet Tubman was a fearless American leader during the nineteenth century. She escaped slavery by journeying alone to the North. Yet she was not content to enjoy freedom while others remained in bondage. Tubman returned to the South several times to lead people to the North. On these dangerous journeys, she utilized the Underground Railroad, a series of escape routes and hideaways where fleeing slaves could find refuge. This network included many people who were committed to the anti-slavery movement.

What God did for Harriet Tubman in bringing together such a dedicated network of people, He had done centuries earlier for a man named Saul. He called Saul to the office of king but did not leave Saul to rule alone. Immediately after Samuel introduced him as the new ruler of Israel, Saul had a team of valiant men to accompany him. God had touched the hearts of these men, and they were ready to follow the new king.

God sees how our lives and callings connect to those around us. When He calls us to lead, we can trust Him to provide the people who will help us along the way. They will be people whom God has already touched and who are ready to follow the course He has prepared.

Father, I realize that I am not meant to carry out Your purposes alone. Help me to recognize the people You have put in my life as partners. In Jesus' name, amen.