

“Stand By Me – Hymn Background and Scriptures”

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Jesus Calms the Storm - Mark 4:39 - Used by permission - Good News Productions International and College Press Publishing

"And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?' And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Hush, be still.' And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They became very much afraid and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?' " (Mark 4:37-41)

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"When the storms of life are raging, Stand by me (stand by me);
 When the storms of life are raging, Stand by me (stand by me);
 When the world is tossing me Like a ship upon the sea
 Thou who rulest wind and water, Stand by me (stand by me)."
 -- Charles Albert Tindley, 1905

This article describes the background and scripture allusions for the gospel hymn, "Stand by Me," by Rev. Dr. Charles A. Tindley.

Consider. Are you going through a personal storm today? The same Jesus who rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still," can calm your personal storms.



Rev. Dr. Charles A. Tindley (Ref. 2)

Hymn Author and Composer. The Reverend Dr. Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933) was an American Methodist minister and was one of the founding fathers of American gospel music (Ref. 1, Ref. 2). He was the son of a slave, and he taught himself to read and write. After the American Civil War he moved to Philadelphia as a young person where he found employment as a hod carrier (brick carrier) (Ref. 1). He and his wife Daisy attended the Bainbridge Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia where Charles became the sexton (janitor) (Ref. 1, Ref. 3).

Tindley was never able to go to school (Ref. 1). He was self-taught, never graduating from college or seminary, yet he acquired and read more than 8,000 books (Ref. 4). Tindley learned Hebrew through the help of a Philadelphia synagogue, and he learned Greek by taking a correspondence course through the Boston Theological School. Tindley qualified for ordination in the Methodist Episcopal Church by examination (Ref. 1). After serving churches in Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland, Tindley

later became the pastor at the same church in Philadelphia where he had been a janitor ([Ref. 1](#), [Ref. 4](#)). Under his leadership and powerful preaching, the multi-racial congregation grew from 130 members to more than 10,000 members ([Ref. 1](#), [Ref. 3](#)). Tindley was awarded honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees by Bennett College (North Carolina) and Morgan College (Maryland) ([Ref. 1](#)).

Life was not easy for people in the northeastern United States at the turn of the 20th century. The area near Tindley's church was economically depressed, especially for African Americans during this time ([Ref. 4](#)). The hymn "Stand By Me" speaks to the difficulties that many of Tindley's parishioners faced ([Ref. 4](#)).

Charles A. Tindley composed and published over 40 gospel songs ([Ref. 1](#), [Ref. 2](#)). His best-known gospel songs include "Stand by Me" ([Ref. 5](#)), "Leave it There" ([Ref. 6](#)), and "We'll Understand It Better By and By" ([Ref. 7](#)). His song, "I'll Overcome Some Day" ([Ref. 8](#)) was the basis for the American civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome," popularized in the 1960s ([Ref. 2](#)).

"Stand By Me" Scripture Allusions. Below I describe several phrases from the "Stand by Me" hymn text and their scripture allusions. To see the complete set of all five verses of the hymn text, please click either on the attached [lyric sheet](#) or [hymn sheet](#).

- ***"When the storms of life are raging, Stand by me" (hymn, verse 1).*** [Verse 1](#) refers to the event described in three of the Gospels where Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves and the sea becomes calm ([Matthew 8:23-27](#), [Mark 4:35-41](#), [Luke 8:22-25](#)).
- ***"Thou who rulest wind and water, Stand by me" (hymn, verse 1).*** Scripture tells us that Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still" ([Mark 4:39](#)). In Jesus' early ministry, Jesus' disciples did not know fully who Jesus was. They were afraid and said, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" ([Mark 4:41](#)) God is the only one who can still the roaring sea ([Psalm 65:5-7](#)).
- ***"When I do the best I can, and my friends misunderstand" (hymn, verse 3).*** Rev. Tindley may have had [2 Timothy 4:9-18](#) in mind. The

Apostle Paul wrote about his friends deserting him when he was on trial. "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But *the Lord stood with me* and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth" (2 Timothy 4:16-17, italics added). Benson's Commentary states that it was astonishing that none of the Christians in Rome stood with Paul in court for his defense (Ref. 9). However, the Lord Jesus Christ stood with Paul, and the Lord stands with us today through our trials.

- ***"When my foes in battle array undertake to stop my way" (hymn, verse 4)***. When the Apostle Paul was in Jerusalem, such dissension arose that the Roman commander sent troops to take Paul away from his opposers (Acts 23:10). Luke, the writer of Acts, reports that the Lord encouraged Paul. "But on the night immediately following, *the Lord stood at his side* and said, 'Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also' " (Acts 23:11, italics added). The Lord Jesus Christ stood with Paul, and the Lord stands with us today to give us courage in our battles. Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).
- ***"Thou who savèd Paul and Silas, Stand by me" (hymn, verse 4)***. Luke tells us about the time the chief magistrates in Philippi threw Paul and Silas into prison. When Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise in the prison, God rescued them by sending an earthquake which opened the prison doors and unfastened their chains (Acts 16:11-12, Acts 16:22-30). Consider how the Lord Jesus Christ releases us from our chains to sin when we turn to him in repentance and faith.

Listen. The music for "Stand By Me" will encourage you. Watch one or both of the music videos below.

- Elvis Presley (1966):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Aqu8aLqHcU>
- Wyeth Duncan (2010):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v24qf16zP58>

Apply. Thank Jesus for the times he has stood by you during the challenges you have faced in life. Ask Jesus to stand by you, to give you strength and courage, and to calm the storm you are going through today.

References

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3. <http://www.dubois-theward.org/history/congregations/tindley-temple/>
4. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-stand-by-me>
5. <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/s/t/a/n/standbym.htm>
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