

Standing Straight

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A man had been drinking at a pub all night. When he stood up to leave, he fell flat on his face. He tried again, same result—flat on his face. So, he crawled outside, stood up again, and—boom—down he went. Finally, he crawled the four blocks home, crawled through the door, and crawled into bed.

The next morning, his wife stood over him shouting, “So, you’ve been out drinking again!” He said, “Why do you say that?” “The pub called,” she said. “You left your wheelchair there again.”

Sometimes we are crawling through life when God wants us to stand. Sometimes we’re living bent over, when Christ wants us upright. Sometimes we think our limitation—our age, our weakness, our past—defines us, when God has a different word: *freedom*.

That’s the good news in Luke 13 today: the story of a woman bent over for eighteen years, set free by Jesus. Luke paints the picture vividly: a woman bent over, unable to stand up straight. For eighteen years, she had lived looking at the ground. No eye contact. No straight spine. No freedom. In her culture, this wasn’t only a physical disability. It was social exclusion. People saw her as cursed, maybe punished. Her body carried shame as much as pain.

Many of us know what that feels like—not literally bent over, but spiritually stooped. Life weighs on us until our posture slumps:

- Bent under guilt from past mistakes.
- Bent under grief that never seems to end.
- Bent under age, feeling “too old to matter anymore.”
- Or bent under self-doubt, thinking, “I’m too young. I don’t know enough.”

But Luke tells us Jesus *saw her*. He saw her when others overlooked her. He called her forward when others kept their distance. He laid hands on her when others would not touch her. And immediately, she stood up straight and began praising God. This isn’t just about posture. It’s about liberation. Jesus frees us not only from sickness, but from the spiritual weight that bends us down.

Here's where Jeremiah comes in. When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, Jeremiah's first response was: "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy" (v.6). God said, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'... for you shall go to all to whom I send you" (v.7).

Jeremiah thought he was *too young*. Many of us today think the opposite: *too old*. But whether young or old, the excuse is the same: *I'm not enough*. I don't have the strength, the skill, the years, or the energy.

Yet God says: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I consecrated you" (v.5). That means your worth doesn't depend on age, ability, or circumstance. If you're still breathing, God has purpose for you. If your heart is still beating, you're still called to praise, to pray, to encourage, to witness.

The woman bent for eighteen years may have thought, *I'm too old for healing, too broken for change*. Jeremiah thought, *I'm too young for service, too inexperienced for this call*. Jesus says, *Stand up straight. You are free. You are enough. You are mine*.

But here's where the story turns dramatic. The synagogue leader was indignant. He scolded the crowd: "There are six days for work! Come and be healed on those days, not the Sabbath." Imagine the absurdity: this woman has been bent for eighteen years, and he's worried about what day she gets healed!

Jesus calls him out: "You hypocrites! Don't you untie your ox or donkey and lead it to water on the Sabbath? Then why shouldn't this woman, a daughter of Abraham, be set free on the Sabbath?"

Jesus reframes the Sabbath. It's not about restrictions, but restoration. It's not about rules, but liberation. Sabbath is the perfect day for healing because Sabbath is the day of freedom.

The synagogue leader wanted to keep her bent over with rules. Jesus set her free with grace.

That's still the struggle today. Sometimes we let traditions, routines, or even our own inner critic keep us bent over:

- "I can't change now."
- "I'm too set in my ways."
- "I've missed my chance."

But the gospel says: if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

Let's notice—this wasn't just spiritual. Jesus healed her *body*.

Sometimes the church gets squeamish about bodies. We talk about "souls" and "hearts" but forget that God made flesh, bones, muscles, eyes, ears. Jesus healed blindness, paralysis, leprosy, bleeding. He fed hungry stomachs. He washed dirty feet.

The kingdom of God is not escape from the body—it's redemption of the body. That means our aches, pains, diagnoses, and limitations matter to God. They are not the end of the story. Even if we are never healed in this life, resurrection promises that one day, we will stand straight, strong, whole, and new.

When Jesus touched this woman, he showed that liberation is not abstract. It is as real as a spine unbending, as real as shoulders lifting, as real as eyes seeing the sky for the first time in years. That's the kind of God we serve—a God who cares about our whole selves.

But healing the body was only part of it. Jesus healed her spirit too. Notice her response: she stood up and *praised God*. That's liberation—being able to lift your head, open your mouth, and praise. The weight is gone. The shame is gone. The chains are gone.

When God lifts us up, we discover we are more than our failures, more than our excuses, more than our age, more than our aches. We are beloved children of God, set free to praise.

So what does this mean for us?

For those who feel *too young*: God says, don't underestimate what the Spirit can do through you. Speak, serve, lead, even if your voice trembles.

For those who feel *too old*: God says, don't underestimate your witness. Your years of prayer, your quiet encouragement, your stories of faith—they are powerful. Moses was 80 when he led the Exodus. Anna the prophetess was in her 80s when she proclaimed the Messiah in the temple. The bent woman in Luke was healed after eighteen years of waiting.

For all of us: whatever keeps us stooped, Jesus invites us to stand. Whether it's guilt, fear, age, or doubt—he lays hands on us and says, “You are set free.”

I imagine that when the woman first stood up straight, she had to get used to it. Eighteen years of looking down, and now she could look people in the eyes. Eighteen years of shame, and now she could look to heaven.

Some of us have been living bent over so long we hardly know what it feels like to be free. But Jesus calls us to straighten up—not with pride, but with dignity. Not with arrogance, but with praise.

Straighten up, because you are a beloved child of God.

Straighten up, because Christ has set you free.

Straighten up, because the Spirit still calls, whether you are young or old, weak or strong.

Remember that man from the pub? He spent the whole night crawling when he had the means to stand—he just forgot his wheelchair.

How often do we crawl through life, forgetting the freedom already given to us in Christ? Jesus has already said, “You are set free.” The Spirit has already breathed life into you. The Creator has already known you, consecrated you, and called you.

So why crawl, when you can stand? Why slump, when you can praise? Why say “I'm too young” or “I'm too old,” when God says, “I am with you”?

People of God, straighten up. Walk tall in the Spirit. Live as those who are free. For the gospel is not about crawling through the shadows—it is about standing straight in the light of Christ.

Thanks be to God. Amen.