

**Biblical Principles for Living Series**

# **THE STORMS OF LIFE**

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## DEDICATION



It is a joy to dedicate this book on the “Storms of Life” to my brother Eddy, or “Ed” as he is known by many. He is my “big brother” because he is both older than me and taller than me! As a result, I have *looked up to him* all of my life – physically, emotionally and spiritually! So it is appropriate that I dedicate this book to him for several reasons...

First of all, because we have been partners in the ministry of NDI ever since its inception nearly four decades ago. In fact, it was Eddy who first invited Patt and me to join him in Burlington where he was the Youth Director at the YMCA at the time. This was to have been just a temporary summer assignment for us before our deployment to the foreign mission field for life. But God had another mission field in mind for Patt and me in the Youth Culture of America.

So to paraphrase the Apostle Paul, NDI was “abnormally born” (I Cor. 15:8) during what we thought was a temporary hiatus in our tracking for the foreign mission field. And this birth also took place in the tumultuous and defining Civil Rights Era when America was forever changed racially, politically and

culturally. Little did we realize or imagine that God would use those early days of evangelism, discipleship and racial reconciliation through the “New Directions” musical ministry to open wider doors into other countries of the world. So without Eddy, NDI would never have been born!

Secondly, our partnership is another demonstration of the fact that God has often called brothers into ministry together. One of the first brother ministry teams recorded in the Bible was that of Moses and Aaron. Also, according to the Gospel record, the very first Disciples that Jesus called to follow Him were two sets of brothers: Simon Peter and Andrew, followed by James and John – all fishermen (Matt. 4:18-22). And there have been other effective brother partnerships God has raised up down through the centuries – like John and Charles Wesley.

In the realm of business there have also been many effective sibling partnerships like the “Wright Brothers,” Wilbur and Orville. In politics we think of George W. and Jeb Bush. In music the Smothers Brothers and Gatlin Brothers. In literature we think of the many fairy tales written by the Brothers Grimm. In the movies who can ever forget the infamous “Blues Brothers.” And in NASCAR there are several brother racing teams like Kyle and Kurt Busch, Bobby and Terry LaBonte, Michael and Darrell Waltrip, Jeff and Ward Burton and Mike, Rusty and Kenny Wallace. And in missions, NDI has been privileged to be in partnership with the twelve “VanWingerden Brothers” – along with their four brothers-in-law!

Also, during the difficult pioneer days of this ministry when things were very uncertain organizationally and

unstable financially, Eddy was always there to help support and sustain us. After he left the YMCA, he worked for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. But during the time he did as much promotion of NDI as he did the BGEA! And over and over again his love was there when needed. He demonstrated to me the love expressed in one of the popular songs of the day that the New Directions often sang, *"He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother!"*

Finally, this book is dedicated to Eddy since he has been deeply involved in Relief Work after the devastation of many storms that have assaulted America in the last several decades. He first did this for Franklin Graham and Samaritan's Purse. Later in his "retirement" he did the same for me and NDI. In the aftermath of hurricanes, floods and tornados, Eddy would quickly "move in" and live in tents, house trailers, motor homes, churches or cheap motel rooms to coordinate work teams and facilitate Disaster Relief, and he would stay there for as long as it took to get the job done. And through the years he did this in States like North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, George, Florida and the Gulf Coast.

So Eddy has been used by the Lord to help bring practical love and compassion to thousands of people whose lives were forever scared spiritually, physically and emotionally through the "Storms of Life." And he continues to demonstrate this ministry of mercy to people whose lives have been ravaged by the storms that have assaulted them as a result of debilitating sickness, terminal diseases, divorce, alcohol, drug addiction and depression.

So you could never have a better, wiser or more compassionate person come along side you in one of life's storms than my brother, Eddy! Therefore, it is a joy to dedicate this book to him – with the prayer that God will give him many more years of physical strength and spiritual wisdom to minister to those facing one of the "Storms of Life."

With love and admiration for my "big brother," Eddy,

JL.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

No book is the product of one person. As a speaker and writer, I am the product of everything I have read or heard up to the time of writing a particular book. So all of my personal experience and knowledge have been consciously or unconsciously reflected in this book.

Therefore, after my writing of this “stormy book” – it had to weather the technical assault and scrutiny of several other people before it could go to press! Typists, proof-readers and graphic designers at NDI have all had a hand in the production of this book. So as the Bible says, let me “...give honor where honor is due” (Rom. 12:10; 13:9).

First, I am thankful for Debra Phillips for her several typings of this manuscript – a tedious and tiring job even in the computer age! Secondly, I am indebted to David Miller and Daniel Newby for their careful technical read-through of the book for printing. Thirdly, I am very appreciative to Vincent Graves for his design of the cover as well as for his artwork and graphics throughout the book. Finally, I am thankful for my wife, Patt, who “married this book” for a final proof-reading while I was on one of my many overseas mission trips! Each of these people weathered all of these storms many times in order to get it into your hands!



Now it is your turn. So I encourage you to get on your best “storm gear” and head into these universal *Storms of Life* with me! And in each storm you will meet some very familiar Biblical characters who will “ride out the storms” with you.

Anchored in His love through the *Storms of Life*,

J.L.  
Founder & CMO  
New Directions International

## **DISCERNING LIFE'S STORMS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the last few years, America has experienced the ravages of some of our worst storms in history. Not only has our country faced the savage fury of hurricanes, tornados and floods, but many parts of our world have experienced similar stormy weather!

In America the names of hurricanes like Isabel, Andrew, Mitch, Katrina and Rita are forever etched in our memories – as well as on our landscape. Many of the worst hurricanes were “Category 5”, which distinguishes them as the most dangerous level of storm – and separates them from their less destructive Tropical Storm cousins.

In addition to the increasing number of hurricanes that have assaulted America, who can ever forget the great Asian Tsunami, one of the largest natural disasters in recorded history? This “monster wave” not only leveled untold number of houses and buildings, it swept hundreds of thousands of people to a watery grave.

As a result of each violent storm, lives were lost, businesses were destroyed, families were uprooted, farm crops were devastated in the fields and water sources were polluted. The work and dreams of a lifetime were dashed and devastated by a few hours

of intense wind, rain, assaulting waves, surging floods and spin-off tornadoes!

As each storm cut its destructive path through vast areas of land, it left millions of people without electricity, running water, food or basic sanitation. After each storm was over, billions of dollars would be spent in rebuilding, repair and cleanup!

As these storms approached our shores, thousands of hapless people could identify with King David when his enemies were moving against him like a raging storm. As he contemplated their coming angry assault, he cried out:

"Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly and be at rest – I would flee far away...I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the *tempest and storm*" (Psalm 55:6-8).

But just as there was no human escape for King David from the stormy assault of his enemies, there was no human escape for the millions of people in the path of these recurring hurricanes. And on a more personal level, there is no escape from our own individual "storms of life."

You see, every human being is either *going into a storm*, *is in a storm now*, or will soon *face a storm* in the future! The storm may be physical, emotional, mental, marital, or financial. Like a massive hurricane, it may be so all-encompassing in its devastation that it simultaneously impacts every area of life with its destructive powers. Sad to say, then, there is just no escaping the "storms of life" while we live on planet

earth! It is a *stormy world* that we live in – from the cradle to the grave!

But the Big Question is this: *How are we to interpret these tragic events?! How are we to brace ourselves for the ‘storms of life’?*

- How can we make any sense out of this type of natural disaster?
- Why do the righteous and unrighteous suffer equally at times like this?
- Is this the fickle finger of fate?
- Is this the diabolical work of Satan?
- Is this just an angry “Mother Nature” on a rampage?
- Or, is this the *active* or *permissive* hand of a sovereign God?

Even though we Christians must be careful in seeking to authoritatively interpret such events, *the Bible does give us very helpful and timely insights into the storms that assault our lives at one time or another.*

One of the most important foundational principles about the physical storms that assault our lives is found in Romans 8. There we read these instructive words:

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that *the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time*” (Romans 8:19-22).

In this passage we are reminded that the entire physical universe is “groaning” under a “...bondage of decay” that was never a part of God’s original created order. Apparently, before sin entered the world, there were *no storms*. Just as there was peace between God and man, there was tranquility in the physical world. But through the sin and rebellion of Adam and Eve, the original order of *spiritual unity* and *natural balance* was forever lost.

At the moment of their sinful rebellion, God should have cursed the man and woman, and ended His human experiment forever. That would have been perfect justice. But none of this caught God off guard. There are no surprises for an omniscient God! Knowing all of this in advance, God had already made provision for man’s salvation through that “...Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). So, in the face of man’s rebellion and sin, God extended mercy instead of judgment. Rather than curse the man and woman, God “...cursed the ground” in their place (Genesis 3:17). This was the very first act of substitutionary atonement in human history. That simply means that

something innocent – the Earth – was condemned in place of someone who was guilty – Adam and Eve. A sacrifice was made. A substitution was provided – and mankind was saved from spiritual and physical extinction.

Paul summarized this amazing act of grace when he wrote: “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it” – that is, God. Ever since that primal judgment, the natural order has been in “bondage to decay.” That means that the entire natural universe is degenerating, falling apart, coming unglued, running down hill, running out of time – as the second law of thermodynamics states.<sup>‡</sup>

Therefore, all of creation is in a continual state of “. . . *groaning*, as in the pains of childbirth right up to this present time” (Romans 8:21-22). Part of the manifestation of these “pains of childbirth” in the natural world is *storms*.

Jesus also testified to this truth when He spoke about eschatology – or “last things.” In fact, He said that there would be an *increase* and *escalation in intensity* of these disorders in the physical world – just like a woman experiences a greater frequency and intensity in birth pains leading up to birth. So, on the authority of Christ’s words, we can expect an increase in natural traumas like *famines, floods, earthquakes, forest fires, droughts* and *dust storms* as the “End of

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<sup>‡</sup> The *Second Law of Thermodynamics* states that all matter left to itself degenerates.

the Age” approaches. Concerning these natural disorders, Jesus specifically prophesized:

“Men would faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world. There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the *roaring and tossing of the sea*” (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:25-26).

But as we have already noted, Jesus said these traumas in the physical world would just be “...the *beginning* of birth pains” – not the *end* of them (Mark 13:8).

The bottom line is this: Until the Lord returns, we *can expect a lot more storms in greater frequency and intensity all over the globe* – which is not a very optimistic weather forecast!

And these storms remind us of another important principle...

**Principle**  
**“*Physical things are a parable of spiritual things!*”**

This principle teaches us that everything in the *physical* world was created by God to teach us something about the *spiritual* world. In other words, the natural world that we *can* see was designed by God as a window on the spiritual world that we *cannot* see. One is a parable and portrait of the other – but only if we have “eyes to

see,” as Jesus reminded His disciples (Matthew 13:13-15). That means that it takes *spiritual eyes* to discern and see *spiritual* truth, as the Apostle Paul reminds us (II Corinthians 2:14).

If our *spiritual blindness* has been healed through the new birth, then the entire physical universe becomes a *living parable* of the spiritual world around us. As a result . . .

- *Physical storms* are a parable of *spiritual storms*.
- The storms in the *physical world* reflect the storms in the *spiritual world*.
- The *natural storms* remind us of the *supernatural storms*.
- The storms raging *without* often symbolize the storms raging *within*.

As you would imagine, then, there are *many* storms described in the Bible – and they are far from being alike. They are not the same in *origin*, in *intent*, or *result*. Some are just minor spiritual “tropical depressions” – while others are Category 5’s or above in their destructive power! In fact, there are at least six kinds of storms portrayed in the Bible that I have discovered. In the following chapters, let’s look at them separately and in some detail, so they can help us discern our own “storms of life.”



Get on your best weather proof “storm gear” and let’s walk into the “eye of the storm.” Through God’s Word and God’s Spirit, let’s fly into the very vortex of some of the most significant and revealing storms in human history...



## THE STORM OF *DISAPPOINTMENT*

As soon as I mention this storm, you know immediately who I am talking about. The “*Storm of Disappointment*” is the storm that assaulted Job's life. Since the Book of Job is one of the oldest books in the Bible, this storm is one of the greatest storms of antiquity. We need to study it carefully. It is a storm that has often recurred through the centuries – which is why so many people can identify with Job's story. Perhaps you have personally experienced a similar storm in your own life. Maybe you are in the midst of it right now. If so, please read on.

After his livestock were plundered by the Sabeans; after fire from heaven had killed his donkeys and servants; after the Chaldeans stole his herd of camels, a sudden storm took the lives of his children. A messenger came and reported to him:

“Your *sons* and *daughters* were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a *mighty wind* swept the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead” (Job 1:13-19).

These multiple assaults and resulting tragedies of Job's story are enough to make any seasoned saint cry out to God, “*WHY??? This is not fair! Why are you allowing this to happen to me?!*” Five times in Chapter 3 alone, Job cries out to God, “*Why?!*”

Even though we don't know as much of the story as we'd like to know, we do know this: the storm that assaulted Job's life *was directly stirred up by Satan*. However, we also know that it was ultimately *permitted* by the sovereign hand of God.

As we analyze Job's storm, we need to realize that there are two scenes in the drama: one in heaven and the other on Earth. In fact, *the earthly drama is but a reflection of the heavenly drama*. As we read the story, we see that in *Heaven* there is *accusation* against Job – while on the *earth* there is *assault* against Job. His life is the earthly stage on which a heavenly drama is being portrayed – all without his knowledge, consent or understanding!

If God would have given Job advance warning of these coming stormy disasters – and *why* Satan was inflicting them on him with divine permission – it would make our reading of the book more palatable. But we cringe with anguish when we know what Job doesn't! We want to hit the pause button as we watch the story of Job's stormy life unfold – and tell him it will be OK! We want to reveal to him what God has revealed to us. We want Job to know in advance about this heavenly drama being played out in the theatre of his life – so his storm will not seem so unfair!

From the conclusion of the story, we know that God had permitted Satan to bring this storm against Job—plus a host of other tragic calamities – to show that His choice servant was no *fair weather follower...no prosperity Christian... no health and wealth believer... no sunny day saint!*

Even though Job's heart was broken, this “*Storm of Disappointment*” did not bring ultimate despair to his life. In spite of his anguish of soul, his irreplaceable losses, his unanswered questions, his mind-numbing confusion and deepening depression, we read that Job...

“...fell to the ground in *worship* and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; *may the name of the Lord be praised!*'” (Job 1:21).

So Job reminds us: You can have it all today – and suddenly lose it all tomorrow! There is absolutely nothing in this earthly life we can cling to with any sense of security and permanence. Everything this side of eternity is subject to decay, dissolution and death. As the Bible reminds us, all of our material possessions and “earthly treasures” are subject to the plunder of the moth, rust or thief (Matthew 6:19-21; James 5:1-3). And even our physical bodies are like the “...grass that withers” and dies. Or as Paul said, our earthly bodies are “wasting away” every moment that we live (II Corinthians 4:16). As much as we might wish for it, no amount of medical treatment can indefinitely postpone the inevitability of disease, decay and death. Science will never find the elusive “Fountain of Youth” or magical medical elixir that will stave off the aging process. None of us will get out of here alive! Death is still the ultimate statistic – with one per person! Regardless of your wealth, no one can successfully bribe the grim reaper from his deadly visit! And all of our “storms of life” are but the

sobering prelude to this reality. That's what Job painfully found out through his storms.

But note further what the Bible says about Job as he faced and responded to his devastating storms:

“...Job did not sin by *charging God with wrongdoing*” (Job 1:22).

Some of you reading this book have recently faced a Storm of Disappointment in your life...marriage...family...business. I am not going to offer you any cheap, easy, “Pollyanna” answers to your storms. I only assure you that a sovereign, loving God is *totally in control!* Your storm did not catch Him off guard. Neither did it go unnoticed by His Fatherly love and concern for you – whether or not you *feel* that love at the moment.

And if you will take your pain and loss to the Lord, He will ultimately verify His promise in Romans 8:28 to you which has brought comfort and peace to millions of Christians across the centuries. Listen carefully to the whole context of this wonderful verse:

“And we know that in *all things* God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”

As you prayerfully ponder this incredible promise, please note that there are at least four truths we see in this portion of Scripture:

First, *sovereignty*: This great truth about the nature of God is the foundational anchor of our soul. It reminds us that not everything that happens to us is “good”

from our human perspective. However, God is greater than the “all things” that come into our lives. And, He sovereignly works *in* and *through* “all things” – whether they are good or bad, for *our good* and *His glory*. So only an all powerful sovereign God can transform the “good, the bad and the ugly” into something beautiful! Only He can ultimately trans-mute even “bad things” into our good and His glory! That’s saving and sanctifying sovereignty!

Secondly, *surrender*: This promise that God gives us through Paul is not a blanket principle for all people. This is not an “unconditional promise” for every member of the human family. No. It is a “conditional promise” that is *only* for God’s sons and daughters. It is only for “...those who *love* God,” as the verse reminds us. There is the presupposition that we have fully surrendered our lives to Him for this truth to apply to our lives. There is the prerequisite that we have laid at His feet *all that we are* and *all that we have*. Once we have made that *total surrender*, then we do not have to surrender to any of the other “all things” that come into our lives. Once you have fully surrendered to Jesus Christ, you need not surrender to anything else.

Thirdly, *service*: Not only must we have surrendered to *His love*, we also must have *submitted to His will*. It means that we have made the major spiritual paradigm switch from “...my will be done” to “Thy will be done.” Because of our surrender to Him, we are no longer living for *self* – we are living to *serve*. This verse presupposes that we have matured spiritually to the degree that we realize that we were “saved to serve.” That it is His eternal Kingdom – rather than our petty kingdoms, that we are seeking to build.

Therefore, this is a conditional promise only for those who "...have been called *according to His purpose*." So, we must be consciously and obediently seeking to accomplish *His will* for our lives – not our own – for this verse to apply.

Fourthly, *sanctification*: Paul goes on to say this about how God is using "all things" that come into our lives – whether they are good or bad:

"For whom He *foreknew* He *predestined* to become *conformed* to the image of His son..."  
(Romans 8:29)

We know from this verse then that God is working through "all things," including the Storms of Disappointment, to *conform* us to the image of Jesus Christ. Only our Sovereign God can turn stormy chaos into spiritual Christ-likeness! As painful as it is to us, God oftentimes has to destroy the worldly and deface the temporal in us in order to "...conform us to the image of His Son." That's because His ultimate goal for us is that we perfectly reflect, for all eternity, the nature and image of the Lord Jesus. Before He is through with each one of His children, they will "...be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). That means He will be able to look into the face of each of us and see the perfect mirrored reflection of the Lord Jesus! And while we may often lose sight of this transformational goal, God never does. That's why Paul exhorted the saints at Corinth:

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (II Corinthians 3:18).

So our Sovereign Abba Father can even use our Storms of Disappointment to “...transform us into His likeness with ever-increasing glory.” Only God can transform what is *gory* into *glory*!

Therefore, we can make the following comparisons and contrast between how God sovereignly uses the “Storms of Disappointment” in our lives – regardless of their source:

### **SATAN’S STORM**

### **GOD’S STORM**

*DESTRUCTION*  
(Tear down)

*CONSTRUCTION*  
(Build up)

*CONSTERNATION*  
(Confusion and doubt)

*DEMONSTRATION*  
(love, faith,  
confidence)

*DEFORMITY*  
(Image deformed)

*CONFORMITY*  
(Image restored)

*DISAPPOINTMENT*  
(Point of disappointment)

*APPOINTMENT*  
(Point of His appointment)

*DESPERATION*  
(In flesh)

*AFFIRMATION*  
(In spirit)



Therefore, through our “Storms of Disappointment,” we can say with Job: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!” (Job 13:15)

Like Job, our storms can take us from the *pit of despair* to the *heights of praise*! By God’s grace, we can rise above our storms and move from...

ADVERSITY	→	ADORATION
WOES	→	WORSHIP
TREPIDATION	→	TRUSTING
PERPLEXITY	→	PRAISE

When we are facing a “Storm of Disappointment,” we should not ask:

*“God, WHEN am I going to get out of this?!”*

but rather...

*“God, WHAT do you want me to get out of this?!”*

Let’s summarize some of the stormy lessons we have learned from how Job responded to these spiritual and physical assaults on his life.

He felt his life was unfairly buffeted by the devastating storms that assaulted him – and humanly speaking he was right! But Job learned that while life is oftentimes *foul*, God is always *fair*. Job learned to discern the

hand of the Lord in his storms. Note what he says about the *foul weather* he faced:

“He bruises me with a *storm*” (Job 9:17)  
“Your forces come against me *wave upon wave*”  
(Job 10:17)  
“You snatch me up and drive me before the *wind*;  
You toss me about in a *storm*” (Job 30:22)

Even though Job’s Storm of Disappointment raged for a long time – and even though he did not understand fully what was going on – he did ultimately “*weather the storm.*”

Job came out of his “Storm of Disappointment” a stronger person. He did not *doubt in the darkness* what he had *learned in the light* about God.

Even in his storms he affirmed: “Though He slay me, yet I will trust Him!” (Job 13:15).

The spiritual turning point in Job’s storm was when he said:

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold and whom my eyes shall see and not another” (Job 19:25-27).

Even in his partial understanding of what was happening to him, Job knew that God was working out His sovereign purposes. Therefore, Job said:

“When He has tested me, I will come forth as gold”  
(Job 23:10).

Therefore, the story of Job teaches us that God uses the “Storms of Disappointment” to *test us, purge us, purify us, refine us and conform us* to the image of Christ.

Remember: Our “*Storms of Disappointment*” are God’s “*Storms of Appointment!*”



## THE STORM OF *DISOBEDIENCE*

Just like the “*Storm of Disappointment*” brings to mind the person of Job, the “*Storm of Disobedience*” immediately brings to mind the name of *Jonah*. His oft-told story is one of the briefest and best known in the Bible.

People with any church background at all have known the story of “Jonah and the Whale” since childhood. From Sunday school they learned that Jonah faced a “whale of a storm” in his life! However, the Bible does not specifically say he was swallowed by a “whale,” but rather by a “great fish” (Jonah 1:17). It certainly could have been some species of whale since they are the largest known “sea creatures” in the ocean – and certainly have the capacity to swallow a grown man. Regardless, there was definitely “something fishy” about Jonah’s storm!

You know his story well. The essence of his saga was that *Jonah was fleeing from God* – which quickly brought him into some “stormy weather.” God had told him:

“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2).

However, Jonah “...*ran away from the Lord* and headed for Tarshish” (Jonah 1:3) – which was in the exact opposite direction of Nineveh. As a result,

Jonah is distinguished in the annals of Biblical revelation by being the only prophet who tried to run from God. However, he quickly found out that he could not outrun an omnipotent and omnipresent God – who was always many steps ahead of him! Jonah learned the hard way that God is always the *First* and *Last!* He is both the *First* to be anywhere as well as the *Last* to leave. So Jonah found out that you can never go anywhere that God is not already eternally present.

The Psalmist David found out the same thing, and penned these words:

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are here; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light becomes night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You” (Psalm 139:7-12)

David discovered, just like Jonah had, that there was no place in God’s universe where you can successfully flee from Him. It matters not whether you flee to the *heights* or the *depths* – or to the “far side of the sea” as Jonah did – God is already there ahead of you. He is already there waiting for your arrival!

When Jonah tried to flee from God, he foolishly ran in the opposite direction God had sent him. He thought that God would not be there since it was far from where He told him to go. Therefore, he went to Tarshish instead of Nineveh.

As you reflect on Jonah's story, here are some important things to understand about the ancient city of Nineveh. Perhaps these historic facts will help you better understand Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh in obedience to God's commission.

- It was founded by *Nimrod*, who was a “mighty warrior on the earth.” We are also told that he was a “mighty hunter” (Genesis 10:9; I Chronicles 1:10). But it is important to understand that Nimrod was not a “hunter of animals” – but a “hunter of men!” His name in the Hebrew basically means “to rebel.” So Nimrod was characterized by rebellion, aggression and violence – as were his descendants. He was definitely one of the great early warriors and kingdom builders of the Bible – and was “bad to the bone!” Without a doubt, then, Nimrod was one of the great rebels of antiquity – and his rebellion was primarily directed against God (Genesis 10:8; 11:1-4).
- Nineveh was located on the Tigris River. It was only second in size and importance to “Babylon the Great,” which is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 10:10. And the only city mentioned in the Bible more than Babylon is Jerusalem. So these two cities stand in history in juxtaposition to each other in every way. One represents the “city of God” and the other the “city of man.” While Jerusalem had God and the temple at the heart of

the city, Babylon had man and the tower of Babel at the center. One is the “Great Harlot,” the other is the “Beautiful Bride.” So the Bible is a “Tale of Two Cities” – and the battle between Jerusalem and Babylon is not settled until Chapters 17 – 21 in the Book of Revelation. Nineveh was a satellite city to Babylon. No wonder God said to Jonah that Nineveh’s “...*wickedness* has come up before Me.” While *worship* would go up from Jerusalem; *wickedness* arose from Nineveh!

- Because Nineveh was built by Nimrod – a “mighty warrior,” he made sure it was a highly fortified city that was very well protected from every side. It had both outer walls and inner walls surrounding the city. The inner walls were 50’ wide and 100’ high! Understandably then, the Ninevites felt impregnable as a people – and lived securely and self-indulgently inside the safety of their city walls.
- Nineveh and the Ninevites were known in antiquity for:
  - Wickedness (Jonah 1:2)
  - Evil and Violence (Jonah 3:8)
  - Carefree and luxurious living (Nahum 2:8)
  - Blatant idolatry (Jonah 2:8; Nahum 1:15)
  - Witchcraft and immorality (Nahum 3:4)
  - Economic prosperity (Nahum 3:16)

Because of these gross sins and abominations, God summarized Nineveh as a “...city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder.” As a result of their blatant degradation, God said that “...nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal” (Nahum 3:1,

19). But, in grace, He still sent Jonah to preach repentance to them.

- The city was located 500 miles northeast of Samaria, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. So, it would have taken Jonah more than a month to walk there, covering an average of 15-20 miles per day. But instead, Jonah headed due south in the opposite direction to Tarshish – which was over 2,500 miles away! Tarshish was probably located in southern Spain. Jonah was serious in his attempts to get as far away from Nineveh as he possibly could!
- It is crucial to also understand that prior to Jonah's commission to go to Nineveh, God had used several national disasters to prepare the city for repentance. History records that there were two great plagues that had hit the city in 765 BC and 759 BC. Then on June 15, 763 BC, there was a total eclipse of the sun. The people considered this some divine omen of the displeasure and wrath of God. So these natural disasters may explain in part the ready response of the people to the preaching of Jonah when he finally got there.
- Remember also that there were two Minor Prophets in the Old Testament that dealt almost exclusively with Nineveh: *Jonah* and *Nahum*. But these two Minor Prophets had a "major message" for the people of Nineveh. And interestingly, both end with a question about the nature and fate of that city.
  - (Jonah 4:11) "...Should I not be concerned about that great city?"



- (Nahum 3:19) “...for who has not felt your endless cruelty?”

With that brief Biblical and historic background about Nineveh, let's get back to Jonah's story...

When Jonah sought to flee from God, it is important to note that things went rapidly *downhill* for him from that point on! The Bible summarizes his *downward* journey this way:

"He went *down* to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port (Tarshish). After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord...Jonah had gone *below* deck, where he lay *down* and fell into a deep sleep" (Jonah 1:3).

Note a couple of crucial things about the first part of Jonah's story. Not only did "He go *down* to Joppa" – Jonah "...*found* a ship bound for that port." Once you start "*fleeing* from the Lord," you can always find the ways and means to get you where you want to go. There are always vessels waiting to take you to the "far country" – whether it is a boat or a BMW!

Next note that we are told that Jonah "paid the fare." This little phrase reminds us that the devil never gives any "free rides" – even to the "far country." When you are fleeing from God you still have to pay the "full fare." While Satan deceives you into believing that it is a "free trip", he always charges you dearly before the trip is over. And ultimately the price you pay always ends up being far more than you expected. That's why the Bible calls the devil a "thief" who

comes only to “*steal and kill and destroy*” (John 10:10).

While we are not told how *much* Jonah had to pay for his rebellious trip, we do know that he “paid the fare.” Jonah found out that there were no free rides to Nineveh – just like there are no free rides to hell! When you are fleeing from God, you end up paying the highest price of all – you pay with your own soul!

After Jonah bought his ticket, Jonah went “...*below deck* where he lay down and *fell into a deep sleep*.” Since Jonah immediately went “below deck,” it is obvious that he was trying to “lay low...stay out of sight...keep from being seen...maintain a low profile.” So in his darkened cabin below deck, he probably “jumped into bed and covered his head” – just like a frightened little boy desperately trying to hide from his father who is searching for him!

What a sad picture! A disobedient “man of God” fleeing from God! In the process, Jonah went *down* spiritually as well as geographically. In that place of disobedience, he fell *fast asleep* – exhausted from fleeing from God!

Jonah is a good example of the principle that rebelling and running from God always leads to physical, spiritual, mental and emotional exhaustion – which usually results in depression. Imagine! Jonah is not just an average Jew. He is a dedicated servant of God, a prophet, a preacher, a spokesman for the true and living God. By his own testimony he said to the other sailors in the midst of the storm: “I am a Hebrew and *I worship the Lord*” (Jonah 1:9). So here is this “worshiper of the Lord” *fast asleep in disobedience!*

Talk about blowing your witness! At this point Jonah's *worship* and *witness* had zero credibility with the pagan sailors! So not only did Jonah go *down*. His testimony went "*down the hatch*" with him!

Remember this principle: You *never* go up *fleeing from God*. Neither does your credibility and integrity increase in the eyes of the watching world. Everything rapidly goes downhill with you when you start fleeing from the Lord.

Also, the further *down* you go, the harder it is to ever go back up again! The longer you stay at the place of disobedience, the more comfortable you get there. Eventually your conscience becomes anesthetized as you continue to rationalize and justify your acts of rebellion. Soon you can "sleep like a baby" in a place of direct disobedience to God. The longer you put off repentance – which means a "change of mind" that results in a "change of direction" – the more deadened your conscience becomes. Or, as the Bible warns, the conscience can be "...seared as with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4:2).

As you know, when you "sear" something, you cauterize it with extreme heat to the degree that the nerve endings in the tissue are killed. Then there is only dead scar tissue. As a result, there is no more feeling in that part of your skin. The Bible warns that you can do the very same thing with your conscience. You can kill it just as certainly as you would "...sear it with a hot iron." Then in this deadened and desensitized state, the conscience will justify any other false belief or behavior you want to become involved in. Therefore, the longer you wait and postpone your repentance, the more soundly you can sleep

spiritually in a bed you should not be in – just like Jonah! So please remember: *Time has a way of numbing you in your disobedience!*

**PRINCIPLE**

**“You never go *up* fleeing from God. Rebelling against God and running away from God is always a *downhill* journey.”**

Here Jonah is, the servant of God, *sound asleep outside the will of God!*

I have met a lot of Christians just like Jonah. They too are comfortably *sleeping outside the will of God!* They are *stumbling, slumbering* and *sleeping* on their way to Tarshish! They have become spiritually numb while *living in direct disobedience to the revealed will of God!* Now they are “fast asleep” in a state of active rebellion against God. They have started on a *downward journey* toward their own Tarshish. And all the while there is a sovereign storm brewing that has not come up on their radar screen yet! But it will. And it will be devastating!

Perhaps there are some of you reading this book in Jonah's condition. Maybe you are in bed with him right now! You have become a shipmate with him – traveling on the “Carnal Cruise Lines” to Tarshish! You are “laying low” below deck – sound asleep outside of God's perfect will for your life.

Your fleeing from God could be because of some relationship, some secret affair, some business deal, some indulgence, some habit, some well-hidden lust. It all began with some disobedient thought that you

did not “take captive” and “make it obedient to Christ” (II Corinthians 10:5). And because you did not take the thought captive, over time it took you captive. Then, at some point, you began to act on that disobedient thought. As a result, you started on your own journey to Tarshish. And ever since you took that first step of rebellion, it has been a *downhill journey!*

**WARNING:** You can get comfortable outside of God’s will! Like Jonah, you too can go fast asleep in a state of disobedience. That’s because you can have a false peace. Our three great spiritual enemies – “the world, the flesh and the devil” – will all unite to lull you into a sense of false peace. I hear it all the time in counseling from people who have already made up their minds about some disobedient course of action. “I have peace,” they say, “about what I am doing. I feel that it is the right thing for me. After all, God wants me to be happy!”

So, with that “satanic sedative,” their conscience is stilled to the degree that they can “sleep like a baby” in the lap of disobedience! Like Jonah, they too go fast asleep on their “Carnal Luxury Liner” headed for Tarshish!

Jesus warned about that kind of “false peace” when He said:

“My peace I leave with you, *not as the world gives...*” (John 14:27).

Therefore, the world, the flesh and the devil can conspire and give you a *false peace*...a false sense of security...a false sense of well-being...and

an unrealistic sense that everything is OK when you are headed toward spiritual peril!

But let me assure you, when that happens to a Christian, God has dramatic ways to wake you up and shake you up! He has unmistakable ways to get your attention! That's because *He loves you too much to ever ignore you*. As your Abba Father, He is far too concerned for you to just overlook your disobedience. God will never look the other way as you sin against Him. He will never close His eyes as you thumb your nose at Him. The all-seeing eye of God will never close – or even blink! The Bible assures us that He "...will neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:3). He simply loves you too much to ever ignore your rebellion and your running! He will stir up a storm with your name all over it as His "wake-up call!" And you may never see it in advance on your radar screen. The storm just seems to come out of nowhere and hit you with devastating force!

Listen to what God did for Jonah:

"Then the Lord sent a *great wind* on the sea, and such a *violent storm* arose that the ship threatened to break up" (Jonah 1:4).

You know the rest of the story. The sounder Jonah slept, the stronger the winds grew. As the storm became more and more severe – and developed into a "Cat 5" – lots were cast to see who the possible troublemaker was.

We can only imagine what Jonah must have been thinking when he was watching the lots being cast?! As Jonah watched them "shake the dice," perhaps he

smugly thought: "There is no way I will be found out. They don't have any idea who I really am or what I am doing. I have them totally fooled into thinking that I am just an ordinary business traveler on their ship to Tarshish. They will never find out the true story!"

Or, he might have had other less secure thoughts. As he watched the clouds continue to darken around the ship, and as he heard the sails flapping by the gale force winds beating against them, his confidence might have begun to slip. Perhaps his heart began to beat faster. Beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. His palms began to sweat as he watched the sailors get out the lots for "divining the storm." And the words of the boat captain were still ringing in his ears that had shaken him out of his sound sleep: *"How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish."* With sleep still in his eyes and fear in his heart, Jonah anxiously watched the lots being cast!

As you know, the lots fell on Jonah. The witness against him was decisive. We don't know how the lots did it because the Bible does not tell us. Perhaps it was something like the familiar children's game of "spin the bottle" – when the neck directly stops in front of you. It is like a "finger of accusation" pointing at you. Something like that happened between the lots and Jonah. We don't know how. But somehow everyone on the ship knew that everything pointed to Jonah as the problem. The account simply says: "They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah." He was clearly identified as the spiritual stow-away who was "on the run." He was finally fully exposed as the trouble-maker who was rebelling against God – and creating a stormy havoc for them in the process!

This fact reminds us of the truth of Proverbs 16:33: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”

So God’s sovereignty even determines the “*roll of the dice*.” There is absolutely *nothing* outside His sovereign control in His universe! No matter where we run, we are always on His turf. And nothing is too big or too small for His providential concern – especially when it has to do with the loving chastening of one of His rebellious children!

Once Jonah was “found out” and God had exposed him, the sailors asked him:

“Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country?” From what people are you?”

Now that his cover had been blown and his “secret sin” initially exposed, Jonah finally “comes clean.” He gave what must have been a rather embarrassing testimony:

“I am a Hebrew and *I worship the Lord*, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”

The Biblical record says that the news that they were unknowingly carrying a religious fugitive fleeing from God “terrified them!” So they asked him the BIG QUESTION: “*What have you done?*”



Finally Jonah fully confessed that he and he alone was the problem. And that it was the "...God of heaven, who *made the sea*" who had stirred up this storm to get his attention.

All the while, "the sea was getting *rougher* and *rougher*." And the more tempestuous the sea grew, the more the ship "threatened to break up." The wooden hull of the ship just could not withstand the torque and twisting from the angry waves much longer. At any moment it would "break up" and be torn apart – sending everyone to a watery grave!

Hit the pause button for a moment in Jonah's story. Notice how rebellion and disobedience swell like waves of the sea – producing greater and more destructive results to the people living with us and around us. Our broken relationship with God always causes other people's lives to "break up" in some way spiritually and emotionally. Not only does our sin break God's heart, it breaks the heart of others who love us – especially our family.

The Bible reminds us that "...none of us *lives to himself alone* and none of us *dies to himself alone*" (Romans 14:7). Or to quote the famous poem, "No man is an Island." That means that none of us live in *independence* and *isolation* from others. Everything we do – and I mean *everything* – affects other people for good or for ill. Our every thought and action send out some kind of spiritual, emotional, mental or physical "shock waves" that impact others living around us.

Therefore, there is no such thing as “private sin” or “personal rebellion” that does not adversely affect others we live with. And the closer they are to us, the more quickly and adversely our sin and resulting storm impacts them. In a moral universe there is no inconsequential sin or dormant disobedience. Every thought or act in some way adversely affects others. It always causes some kind of “break up.” Jonah found that out the hard way! He thought his rebellion and running from God would not hurt anyone else – especially the sailors on the “ship of life” with him. He wrongly thought that his sin was a private matter between him and God alone. He naively thought his was just a harmless “secret sin” that would not hurt anyone else. No one else was involved. Or so he thought.

But now life had caught up with him. He could not outrun circumstances any longer. He had been found out, fully exposed, stripped naked, laid bare, revealed as the rebel he was. His running was over. It was now time to “face the music” and “pay the piper.” It was reaping time. He had “sown the wind” and was now literally “reaping the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7). It was now time for him to “face it like a man”...accept his punishment...take his licks...stand before the bar of justice. The period of mercy and grace was over. He was literally stopped dead still in his wet tracks!

As the storm rapidly increased in intensity, Jonah had become an apprehended and condemned criminal. The ship that he thought was his vehicle of escape had become his floating prison – and he was now literally on “death row.” So in his condemned and hopeless state, Jonah told the sailors to be his executioners. He instructed them to “...throw him into

the sea” – with the assurance that if they would do that, the sea would become calm again. His loss would result in their gain. His execution would result in their escape. His death would result in their life.

It’s interesting that Jonah was unwilling to save them the trouble – and just *jump* overboard! At that point, most of us are just like Jonah. We all have an aversion to facing the consequences of our sin. We would rather always let someone else “fix it.” We want others to bail us out, clean up our mess, do the dirty work, solve our problem – rather than squarely face it ourselves! So Jonah asked them to do his dirty work for him. He asked them to “pull the trigger!”

Finally, Jonah was fully exposed as the rebel he was. He was completely “found out.” His secret sin was fully revealed through the circumstantial evidence of lots being cast. Now there was nothing for him to do but to “fess up.” So Jonah said: “It is *my fault* that this great storm has come upon you.”

Those little words are the hardest to say in any language! “*It’s my fault!* I am the problem! I have no one to blame but myself! It has been my sin and rebellion that got me into this mess! It has been my stubbornness that has hurt others! This storm is my fault alone!”

It is interesting that after his confession of guilt, the sailors still tried to “save his skin.” They did not want to throw him overboard. They tried their best to save him from the punishment he rightly deserved. Instead of immediately throwing him overboard, “...the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not

for *the sea grew even wilder than before*" (Jonah 1:8-14).

As you ponder Jonah's stormy plight, let me ask you: Has your rebellion gotten other innocent people caught up in your storm? Are others suffering because of your disobedience? Is your spouse's ship about to sink because of you? Are your parents, friends, and business associates taking a beating because of your fighting and fleeing from God? Is there a storm raging around you that is hurting others because of your sin?

If that is the case, then their only hope is for YOU to do what Jonah finally did – fess up...come clean...humble yourself...admit your faults...confess your sin...repent of your rebellion – and *take your punishment!* Only then will God begin to quiet the storms raging against your life that is buffeting you and baffling others. Only then will the winds of adversity begin to still in your heart as well as in the hearts of those around you.

When all of their well-intentioned efforts to "save his skin" failed, the sailors finally threw Jonah overboard. It was even too late for Jonah to "walk the plank!" The storm had now become too ferocious. They had to act fast to save their own skin. So they reluctantly threw him overboard. But as they did so, they fearfully cried out to the Lord:

"O Lord, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O Lord, have done as you pleased."

Contrary to their prayer, Jonah was not “an innocent man.” He was as guilty as sin! And now he was paying the price for his rebellion with his own life.

So with that pagan prayer of desperation, the sailors “...took Jonah and threw him overboard, and *the raging sea grew calm*. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him” (Jonah 1:14-16).

Jonah went *down* into the sea and then further *down* into the belly of the great fish that the Lord had provided to swallow him (Jonah 1:17).

Remember again, when you are fleeing from God it is always *down*! Oftentimes we have to go down to “rock bottom” before things begin to turn around and go up again. We have to be completely “swallowed up” by the consequences of our sin and rebellion before there can be a turn around. Like Jonah, the very thing that “swallows us” can become our salvation – but only if we will fully repent and cry out to God at that point of desperation.

Thus chapter one of Jonah’s story ends with this statement: “Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17).

For those three days and three nights, God had Jonah’s undivided attention! He was trapped. He could not run any further. He could not go down any deeper. He was quite literally below sea level. Jonah was now at “rock bottom” in a “watery grave!” At that point of extreme desperation, Jonah cried out to God in repentance. He had a 72 hour prayer meeting! Never before in his life had he prayed with such

fervency! His life literally “hung in the balance” as he prayed for God’s intervention.

One thing is for sure: both *fox-hole* prayers and *fish-belly* prayers are the same. They are deadly serious! There are no atheists or agnostics in either situation! God had Jonah right where He wanted him. He was all wrapped up in seaweed in the gut of a great fish! And in that immobile slimy state, God further tenderized Jonah’s conscience – as well as his skin – with the acidic gastric juices from the fish’s digestive tract! Suffocating in the damp darkness of the fish’s stomach, Jonah began to repent and cry out to God! Listen in on his prayer...

“In my *distress* I called to the Lord, and He answered me. From the *depths* of the grave I called for help, and You listened to my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all Your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, ‘I have been banished from Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.’

The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains *I sank down*, the earth beneath barred me in forever.”

In the very depths of the sea, God finally and fully got Jonah’s attention! But it was only after Jonah “sank down” to rock bottom, that God got his undivided attention. Finally, Jonah cried out to God – and wonder of wonders, God heard and answered his prayer! If I would have been God I would have said:

“Brother, stew in your own juices – or rather in the fish’s juices! You got yourself into this mess, now live with it – and die in it!”

Aren’t you glad I am not God?! Jonah is glad also! With incredible love, mercy and grace, God listened to Jonah’s prayer. And even in the “depths of despair,” God gave Jonah hope. You can hear rising hope in his prayer.

“But You brought my life *up* from the pit, O Lord my God. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered You, Lord, and my prayer rose to You, to Your holy temple...I with a song of thanksgiving will sacrifice to You. What I have vowed I will make good. *Salvation comes from the Lord*” (Jonah 2:6-9).

You know well the rest of the story. Once Jonah fully repented from the depths of his watery grave in the belly of the great fish, God heard and answered his prayer. As a result, “The Lord commanded the fish and it *vomited Jonah onto dry land*” (Jonah 2:10). That shows us the painful truth that not even a fish can stomach a backslidden preacher! He was too distasteful to digest!

In His disobedient state, Jonah was:

...*dishonoring* to God,

...*dishonest* to himself,

...*disillusioning* to the sailors,

...*distasteful* to the fish!

Let me assure you, then, that the *disciplinary storms* that God sends into our lives as a result of our *willful disobedience* can be devastating. Sitting in fish vomit is not a pleasant experience! But God often has to let us have that "distasteful experience" as a smelly reminder not to rebel against Him again.

Think about vomit for a moment. I know it's not a pleasant thought, but it is important for Jonah's story – and yours. All of us have vomited at one time or another in our life. It is not a fun experience. I personally hate to vomit! There is a lot of "heaving" and "hurling!" That's because there is something sick and sour inside of you that must come out – or you won't get better. So your body rejects it and ejects it! As it does, there is a continuous eruption of the contents of your stomach with projectile force until everything sick and sour in you is cleaned out. There is a gastronomical storm raging in your belly! You cannot keep anything down as long as there is something alien and ailing in your gut. It cannot be digested. Your stomach will not pass this festering potion along to your intestines. So it must come back "up and out" – the same way it went in! Your stomach just will not "settle down" until everything foul and alien is cleaned out. The liquid remains of all you have eaten have a terrible smell coming back up! It leaves a lasting impact on your olfactory organ, or sense of smell – as well as on your memory!

Because Jonah was *sick spiritually*, he made the fish *sick physically!* In the same way, our sin and rebellion always make other people "sick to their stomach" – or rather "heart sick." It is even more sobering to realize that *our sin makes God sick!*



When we are “*lukewarm Christians*,” we are nauseating to the God. Listen to His sobering words:

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So because you are *lukewarm* – neither hot nor cold – I am about to *vomit you out of My mouth*” (Revelation 3:15-16; NKJV).

It is bad enough to make a fish vomit. But it is exceedingly spiritually dangerous to make God “sick at His stomach” by our disobedience! To be vomited up by a fish is bad enough. But to have God “vomit us out of His mouth” is eternally perilous!

Just as the fish could not get better until Jonah repented, so too our family and friends cannot get well again spiritually and emotionally until we “make things right with the Lord.” That usually means that through *confession* and *repentance*, we vomit up all of the sin and sickness in our lives as a result of our disobedience and rebellion against God. That’s why a *catharsis*, or *cleansing*, always follows *confession*. It is a purifying purging of the spirit that results in spiritual, emotional and mental healing.

Jonah then, was part of that sick vomity soup that came forth out of the big fish with such force that he landed on dry land. He was saved. He was literally “born again” from the bowels of the fish. He was given new life. He was resurrected from the dead – which is why Jesus used Jonah’s miraculous rebirth as a sign and symbol of His own resurrection from the dead (Matthew 12:38-40).

Jonah ended his prayer from the fish's belly by acknowledging that "Salvation comes from the Lord." The word *salvation* basically means "deliverance." Jonah was "delivered" from the fish's belly. He was saved. He was given a *second chance*.

As a result of his salvation, we read that "...the word of the Lord came to Jonah a *second time*: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message that I will give you.' So God's message did not change. It was the exact same message the *second time* that Jonah received the *first time*. That's because God never changes (Malachi 3:6). He never moves an eternal centimeter from His will. His will is perfect (Romans 12:2). It's non-negotiable. It is eternally fixed (Psalm 119:89). Because God never changes, His will never changes. It is due north on the moral compass of the universe. Therefore, God's will can never be improved upon. It can only be rejected or affirmed – but it cannot be improved. Affirming it is the only way for *holiness* and *happiness* in life!

Like so many of us, Jonah had to find that out the hard way. As C.S. Lewis said about his own life, Jonah "...took a very circuitous journey to reach the obvious."

When you find yourself in this Storm of Disobedience you know in your heart of hearts what is going on! You don't really need the "toss of the dice" to reveal your rebellion and disobedience. Your heart has been tossing for weeks and months to tell you that you are out of God's will – that you are on a rapid *downward journey* to self-destruction!

In Jonah's case, the other sailors had no idea what was happening, but Jonah knew perfectly well that this was *no capricious storm!* This was God's *disciplinary storm* to get his attention and get him back on course – even though it took fish vomit to “grease the skids” and get him there!

Are you experiencing that kind of storm in your life right now?

If so, please remember this sacrosanct principle: *The only place to get back into God's will is right where you got out of it!* The problem is that we all want a detour around that point of departure. But on God's roadmap for your life, there is no such detour. There is no such bypass. You must go back to where you got out of God's will – and get back in at that point through *repentance* and *restitution!* There is just no other way back home.

**PRINCIPLE**

**“The only place to get back into God's will is the place where we got out of it.”**

What is the Nineveh of your life that you are fleeing from? A call, an apology, a repentance, a forgiveness, a restitution, a gift, a vow? In your heart of hearts you know what it is, and so does God. His Holy Spirit has been whispering – or shouting – it in your conscience for a long time. But you have not been listening. You have just turned up the music in your life to try and drown out His “still small voice” or “gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12). You have increased your frenetic and frenzied pace of activities to keep

you mind off of His will. In a thousand ways you have been saying an emphatic “No!”

Quit running . . . turn around . . . face it . . . say an “unqualified yes” to God! As His word says: “Today, if you hear His voice, *do not harden your hearts*” (Hebrews 4:7). You see, the *harder you run*, the *harder your heart becomes* – and the *harder the blows* God has to bring against your life to stop you and soften you. So the greater your rebellion against Him, the greater will be His storm against you!

My friend, please do not force God to keep you in His Storm of Discipline. Don’t continue to sink to the depths of disobedience and despair. You have gone down far enough. Stop! Humble yourself. Repent. Confess. Come clean. Be cleansed.

Why force God to take you to the extremes that He had to take Jonah to? But, if He must, He will. That’s because *man’s extremity is often God’s opportunity*.

And remember: Fish vomit is not a very pleasant experience for you or others around you! You are to be the “...fragrance of Christ” (II Corinthians 2:15) – not the odor of vomit!

Jonah, then, is our example of a person of God who went through a Storm of Disobedience. It was all because of his rebellion and fleeing from God’s will for his life. But Jonah found out a painful and expensive lesson: *There is nowhere in God’s universe that you can successfully flee from Him*. The harder you run, the further you flee, the longer you rebel, the greater the “Storm of Discipline” He will bring against your life.

Our friend, Jonah, learned the hard way that “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs” (Jonah 2:8). You see, an idol is anything that gets between you and God and between you and other people. It is anything that replaces God as “first place” in your life. An idol is the anything that we “worship” with our affections and attention more than God. An idol can be a wrong relationship, an attitude, a habit, a lust, sex, alcohol, drugs, work, money, materialism, position, power, prestige – anything that you value more than you love God. Often the good things are the biggest enemy of the “best thing.” When secondary things are put in primary place, God sees them as “worthless idols” rather than “worthy ideals.” They cause you to “...forfeit the grace that could be ours.” How often then, does the *good* cause us to miss the *grace*!

**Principle**

**“An idol is anything that gets  
between you and God,  
or you and other people.”**

If it takes the extreme of fish vomit to get your attention and break your addiction to the “worthless idols” of this life, then God will give you a good dose of it. He will “rub your nose in it” until you never forget how distasteful your sin and rebellion are! But He will still hear and answer your prayer of repentance – even in that slimy and smelly place of sin and rebellion! Because of His love, mercy and grace, He will give you a “second chance” – just like He did with Jonah.

But also remember that rebelling and running are *very* costly. Like Jonah had to “pay the fare” for his sin, you will have to do the same to one degree or the other. What you have spent, given up, lost, thrown away in the “far country” can never be regained. Never forget this principle: “*God will forgive your sins, but nature never will.*”

That was a sobering principle that my parents drove home to me growing up – and especially when I was a teenager! They did not teach it in a legalistic, negative or threatening way. They just wanted us to know that we do indeed live in a moral universe controlled by a holy God. So I never forgot it. That truth became one of the great “watch dogs” guarding my life. It became the “guard rail” that often kept me on the “path of righteousness” when I was being tempted to stray. Since that principle helped keep me from overtly rebelling and fleeing to the “far country,” I taught it to my own children when they were growing up. By God’s grace, it did the same for them that it did for me. I have taught it to adolescents and teenagers all over the world for their salvation and freedom.

**Principle**  
**“God will forgive your sins,  
but nature never will.”**

So this inviolate principle teaches us that we live in a *moral universe* created by a sovereign God who is holy – and He expects the same standard from His children. Therefore, we just cannot “break His laws” with impunity. It’s impossible. We only “break ourselves” against His perfect laws of liberty. And when

we do so, *something is always lost*. Contrary to what the world teaches us, when some things are lost, they are gone *forever!* At least in this life.

You see, you can never erase your experiences. There is no Rewind or Erase buttons on the controls of your life. Neither are there any magic Time Machines that allow us to go back and relive our experiences and “do things differently.” Once you do something, the “die is cast.” Experiences are irreversible and un-erasable. You can never restore your virginity once you have given it away. You can never regain your innocence. You cannot restore life to an aborted baby. You can never forget your memories. You can never turn back the clock of time. *Sin always leaves scars* – on your heart...in your mind...in your emotions...in your memory...in your body...in your relationships.

But because of His marvelous grace, God will still forgive you. He will still give you a *second chance*, a *new birth*, a *resurrection*, a *new beginning*, a “*new direction!*” What He did for Jonah, He will do for you.

## EPILOGUE

So Jonah survived his “*Storm of Disobedience*.” He finally repented. He ultimately submitted to God’s will. He reluctantly went to Nineveh and preached God’s message there. As a result, God mightily used him in spite of his unwillingness and reluctance.

Undoubtedly Jonah’s bedraggled appearance after 3 days in the fish’s belly dramatically impacted the people of Nineveh. Imagine for a moment what he must have looked like. He had been on the run from

God so he was traveling light. Jonah probably had little more than the clothes on his back. So when he was thrown overboard, he did not get to take his suitcase and cosmetics down into the sea with him! He had no life preserver. He had no change of clothing. No deodorant. No comb for his hair. No razor to shave with. If he was wearing sandals, they were lost when the sailors threw him overboard.

So what Jonah was wearing when he was engulfed by the waves and the great fish, he was still wearing 3 days later when he was regurgitated onto dry land. We can be relatively sure that there were no seaside resorts there with a shower and spa for his bathing and rejuvenation! No. Jonah walked barefooted into Nineveh with the cogent smell of fish vomit still matted in his hair and on his clothing. No doubt his skin would have also been ashen and blistered from being immersed in the acidic gastric juices in the fish's gut. What a ghastly sight he must have been! And what an odor! No wonder he got the people's undivided attention!

Jonah was literally resurrected from the salty watery grave of the fish's bowels! He had the appearance of a dead man walking. When Jonah went into Nineveh, he was a man who had been "born again" and "raised from the dead" – which is why Jesus used Jonah's resurrection as a prelude and parable of His own. As I pointed out earlier, Jesus said that Jonah's death-like descent into the bowels of the sea would be the only "sign" of His own death, burial and resurrection. Note the parallel that Jesus drew between Himself and Jonah:



“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40)

So Jonah became a living, breathing, walking “sign” to the people of Nineveh. God had literally brought him back from the dead to preach repentance to them. And because Jonah repented before God, the people of Nineveh did the same thing. *His repentance led to their repentance.* National revival broke out from the highest to the lowest – from the King to the common people. Everyone repented in “sack cloth and ashes” (Jonah 3:6). To show their seriousness before God about this, they even covered their animals in the ashes of repentance. As a result, God extended His grace to them rather than pouring out His judgment and wrath. We are told that God “...had *compassion* and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened” (Jonah 3:10).

Sadly, this was not what Jonah was hoping for. He had such racial resentment against the Ninevites that He wanted God to destroy them – even after they had truly repented. We are told that “...Jonah was greatly displeased and became *angry*.”

Every wise psychologist or counselor knows that one of the primary things that produces anger is *blocked goals*. We become internally or externally angry toward anyone or anything that blocks us from reaching some desired goal. For Jonah, his goal was the total destruction of the Ninevites, his avowed enemies. He had zero interest in their salvation. So when he did not get his way, he became angry. He was furious with God. He raged against God! But

being totally impotent to expunge his anger on God, Jonah turned it inward – which resulted in *spiritual depression*.

**Principle**  
**“Anger results from blocked goals;  
and anger turned inward results in  
depression.”**

As a result of his anger, Jonah prayed one of the strangest, but most honest, prayers recorded in the Bible:

“O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still *at home*? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that You are a *gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love*, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, *take away my life, for it is better for me to die, than to live*” (Jonah 4:1-3).

There are several important things we can learn from Jonah’s prayer. First, his rebellion began while he was “...still *at home*.” It always starts there, doesn’t it? It’s always because we begin to entertain some wrong attitude and understanding about God and His will. We begin to believe we know what is best for ourselves – and for the world we live in. We don’t like the way God is running things and we start running from Him. We start obsessing over what “we want to do.” And we become so fixated on it and “our happiness” – that we will do *anything* to “get our way.” We begin to increasingly resent anyone and everyone who seems to block our will. But ultimately our battle

is with God and we rebel against Him. We become our own highest authority. Soon it doesn't matter who we hurt in our rebellion to "do our own thing." Like Jonah, we begin to believe that we would rather *die* than do God's will! And we soon find ourselves in a violent Storm of Disobedience.

The story of Jonah reminds us of the wisdom of C.S. Lewis' statement that "Man is not just a sinner who needs forgiveness, he is a *rebel* who needs to lay down his arms." Because of sin, all of mankind is in *moral rebellion against God*. Many of us Christians, just like Jonah, continue our moral rebellion against God even after our conversion! So our Storm of Disobedience becomes God's Storm of Discipline to bring us to repentance and restoration.

Secondly, we can see that Jonah *believed* the right things about God. He knew that God was gracious, loving and compassionate. He knew that God was not some kind of capricious and vindictive God who delighted in pouring out His wrath and punishment upon the disobedient. But He also knew that God could not compromise His holiness and righteousness which were grievously affronted and offended by the blatant sin of the Ninevites. They either had to repent, or He had to punish. So He sent Jonah to preach to them so they would not perish. Jonah clearly knew all of this – which is why he said he was "...so *quick* to flee to Tarshish."

Jonah believed all of the *right* things about God. Knowledge was not the issue. The problem was not with his theology, but with his obedience. Like so many of us, Jonah was not suffering from a lack of *information* – but from a lack of *application*. His

*beliefs* were right while his *behavior* was wrong! Jonah brought great suffering and pain upon himself, not because he didn't know what to do, but because he didn't do what he already knew.

If you read the "Rest of the Story," as radio commentator Paul Harvey would say, you are struck by Jonah's continued "bad attitude." Even though he ultimately did God's will, he did not do so with joy. He continued to be *angry* with God. He continued to want his own way. He continued to struggle with self-centeredness. He continued to be preoccupied with his own happiness. He continued to want his own *physical comfort* more than he wanted the *spiritual comfort* of the people of Nineveh.

There were lingering immaturities and irrationalities in Jonah's life. They seemed to be the legacy of his earlier life of rebellion and fleeing from God. Did Jonah ever mature past this? Did he ever grow up spiritually and emotionally? Did he get over his spiritual depression? We don't know. The Bible does not tell us.

Our last picture of Jonah is not very positive. We find that he "...sat down at a place east of the city" (Jonah 4:5). Rather than rejoicing and celebrating in Nineveh with the people over their national repentance and revival, Jonah was pouting! He was having a "pity party." He was whining over "poor little me!"

Jonah's last recorded words are sadly insightful: "I am *angry* enough to *die*" (Jonah 4:9). That doesn't sound like much maturity to me! He was still angry with God. There was no joy or happiness in his life. So as a seasoned counselor, I would have to say that Jonah

had a serious case of *spiritual depression*. Unable to take his own life, he told God “Now, O Lord, *take away my life* for it is better for me to die, than to live.”

Sadly, Jonah’s story ended with him sitting under a wilted vine in the blazing sun. There was a scorching east wind blowing. As a result, Jonah was both faint in body and faint in spirit, lamenting the loss of his creaturely comfort. He was totally despondent. He was literally in suicidal depression!

The short little book of Jonah ends with a powerful and searching question that God posed to him and to us:

“Do you have a right to be angry about the vine? You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprung up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. *Should I not be concerned about that great city?*” (Jonah 4:9-11)

Jonah, like so many of us Christians in the west, was far more concerned with his *own comfort* than he was with *God’s compassion*. He had given up and had sat down. He went limp. He lost his proactivity for God. He had become so totally preoccupied with the preservation of his little vine that was giving him shelter and comfort, that he cared little or nothing about the plight of the Ninevites. Their pending doom meant nothing to him. His temporal comfort was far more important to him than the eternal destiny of more than 120,000 lost people in Nineveh! And yet, he was reputedly one of God’s people. A prophet of

God. But one that was totally preoccupied with his own comfort and well-being. What a timely warning to each of us!

It is my prayer that through our study of Jonah and his “*Storm of Disobedience*,” that God would help us rise above our own petty little vines. May He give us a fresh vision of the lost in the Nineveh’s of this world to the degree that His love and compassion toward them will become more important than the passionate pursuit of our creaturely comforts!

And unlike Jonah, *may our lives end with an exclamation point rather than a question mark!* May we live out our lives on the cutting edge of what God is doing in the world to the degree that our lives become one long celebration of His love and compassion! May we not spend our lives as “sitting saints” when God has sent us to a lost and dying world! §

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§ For your further study of the Book of Jonah, here is an outline of the cogent little book.

Thomas Carlisle's little poem entitled "You Jonah," closes with these lines – that I too close this stormy study with...

*"And Jonah stalked  
to his shaded seat  
and waited for God  
to come around  
to his way of thinking.  
And God is still waiting for a host of  
Jonahs  
in their comfortable houses  
to come around  
to His way of loving."*



## THE BOOK OF JONAH

### *The Reluctant Missionary*

1. *REVELATION OF JONAH*: “Go...preach...” (Jonah 1:2; 3:2) Here is a clear Old Testament “Great Commission.”
2. *REBELLION OF JONAH*: “Jonah ran...fled from the Lord” (Jonah 1:3) As Jonah was “fleeing the responsibility of his Commission”— his journey was *downward!* He went “down to Joppa...down into the boat...down into the fish...down into the sea!”
3. *REBUKE OF JONAH*:

God gave Jonah a two-fold rebuke:

- *Storm*: “Great wind...violent storm” (Jonah 1:4)
- *Sailors*: “Captain went to him...sailors asked him” (Jonah 1:6-8). Here we see how he was a “poor witness” to these pagans through his disobedience!

4. *REPENTANCE OF JONAH*:

... “*It’s my fault...*” (Jonah 1:12)  
... “*Jonah prayed...*” (Jonah 2:1)  
... “*I called to the Lord...*” (Jonah 2:1)  
... “*I remembered You...*” (Jonah 2:7)  
... “*I will sacrifice to You...*” (Jonah 2:9)  
... “*What I have vowed I will make good*”  
(Jonah 2:9)



5. *RESURRECTION OF JONAH:*

“The Lord commanded the fish, and *it vomited Jonah onto dry land*” (Jonah 2:10)

6. *RESTORATION OF JONAH:*

God is the God of “second chances” – and “third” and “fourth” and...

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah a *second time*: ‘Go...preach...’” (Jonah 3:1).

“Jonah *obeyed* the word of the Lord...went to Nineveh” (Jonah 3:3).

7. *REBUKE OF JONAH:*

His message was one of Judgment without any mention of God’s grace!

“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4)

8. *RECEPTION OF JONAH:*

“*The Ninevites believed God*. They declared a fast ...the King decreed: ‘Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish.’” (Jonah 3:5-9)

9. *RESENTMENT OF JONAH:*

“Jonah was *greatly displeased* and became *angry*...’O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live!’ Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city” (Jonah 4:1-3).

Here we see Jonah totally consumed with his own comfort – like so many American Christians. Seeking to live a totally self-centered life – unconcerned about the plight of those in need right before his eyes!

10. *REFRESHMENT OF JONAH:*

“The Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and *Jonah was very happy about the vine*” (Jonah 4:6).

Note God’s mercy and grace to Jonah once again! He provided shade and comfort for Jonah. But like so many of us, Jonah was more concerned with his own happiness than with their healing!

11. *REMORSE OF JONAH:*

“When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, ‘It would be better for me to die than to live.’ But God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?’ ‘I do,’ he said. ‘I am angry

enough to die.’ He wanted to die and said: ‘It is better for me to die than to live...I am angry enough to die’” (Jonah 4:8-9).

Once again we see how fickle Jonah’s faith was. He went from elation to depression. One moment he was happy under his little vine. The next moment he was literally in the “pits of despair” having a “pity party!”

## 12. *REPROOF OF JONAH:*

“You have been concerned about this vine...But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left...Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (Jonah 4:10-11)

As the story closes, we still see how Jonah was more concerned about himself than about others. He is preoccupied with:

- his shelter
- his vine
- his shade
- his comfort

Like so many Western Christians, Jonah was far more concerned about his physical condition rather than their spiritual condition! This is a picture of carnal, worldly Christianity, which is:

- self-absorbed
- self-oriented
- self-centered
- self-serving

As a result, we are always building BIGGER and better “church shelters” for us to enjoy – while all around us there are millions of Ninevites who are eternally perishing!

The Book of Jonah shows us God’s *compassion* in contrast to our *comfort*.



## THE STORM OF *DISCIPLESHIP*

This storm is radically different in nature from the previous one we looked at in the story of Jonah. While his storm was a “*Storm of Disobedience*,” this one is just the opposite. This one is the result of *obedience* – not *disobedience*.

While many Biblical characters faced this type of storm as a result of their faith and fidelity, I have chosen the life of the Apostle Paul as the primary example of this “*Storm of Discipleship*.”

It only takes a cursory reading of the Book of Acts and Paul’s letters to see that his life of extreme obedience to the Lord often brought him into stormy weather. His radical obedience to the Lord Jesus after his conversion on the Damascus Road constantly put him in conflict with his countrymen, his religion, his culture, his personal inclinations, and the natural elements of life. Paul was literally a man who *lived in the storm!* In fact, he experienced far more storms in his life than he did fair weather.

In the eleventh chapter of his second letter to the saints in Corinth, we read about the “...three times he was shipwrecked” – with the result that he “...spent a night and a day in the open sea” (II Corinthians 11:25). And when Paul was in the open seas all day and night, he didn’t even have a life boat or life jacket! No survival pack. No flairs. How many of us would have kept going on seaward journeys for the Lord if

that would have been the case for us?! After making it through just one shipwreck, most of us would have “hung up our oars!” We would have become “landlubbers.” We would have stayed at home from that point on. But not Paul. Travel by ship was a necessary part of his commitment to Christ’s Great Commission – storms or not.

As we will continue to see in this chapter, he was not a “fair weather Christian.” He would not just serve the Lord when it was “clear skies” and “smooth sailing!” No. For Paul, the storms were never a deciding factor. The skies never got too dark and mincing for him. The waves were not an intimidating threat. The waters never got too rough for him. That was not where his security was. He rested in God’s sovereignty over all of the events of life – whether they were religious, political, economic or environmental.

The Apostle Paul would have made a good member of the US Coast Guard. That’s because, long before they were born as a sea-faring rescue organization, Paul modeled their motto: *“We MUST go out. We do not have to come back.”*

In Chapters 27 and 28 of the Book of Acts, we read about the prolonged and violent storm that came against the ship he was in on his way to Rome for trial before Caesar. Here is the account that was written by the historian, Doctor Luke, who was a frequent traveling companion with Paul, and was with him on this stormy journey. As you read this travelogue from his journal, note the great detail with which he wrote. Without the journaling and documentation of Doctor Luke, we would not have nearly the historic

geographical and inter-personal details that the New Testament records.

“When it was decided that we would *sail for Italy*, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to *sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea...*

“The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. From there we *put out to sea* again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because *the winds were against us*. When we had *sailed across the open sea* off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. *We made slow headway for many days* and had difficulty arriving off Crudus. When *the wind did not allow us to hold our course*, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. We moved along the coast with *difficulty* and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

“Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, *‘Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.’* But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul

said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

“When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of *hurricane force*, called the ‘northeaster,’ swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took such a *violent battering from the storm* that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither the sun nor stars appeared for many days and the *storm continued raging*, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: ‘Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail to Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the



ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, "Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you." So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.'

"On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, 'Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.' So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away.

"Just before dawn, Paul urged them all to eat. 'For the last fourteen days,' he said, 'you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food – you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.' After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of

them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. Altogether there were 276 of us on board. When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

“When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow struck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

“The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul’s life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety” (Acts 27:13-44).

The Bible says that “a wind of *hurricane force*, called the ‘Northeaster’” came against them! (It is interesting to note how even they had names for their hurricanes back then!)

This storm raged on for many days – fourteen days to be exact! A two week storm is bad news in any century. Whether then or now, nighttime storms are the worst! It seems that during the night hours the physical storms conjure up dark emotional and spiritual storms that seem to encompass and drag on forever. The longer they last, the thicker the darkness seems to be. You can almost cut it with a knife it is so dense and intense. Many Christian sages of past centuries called such times the “dark night of the soul.”

So this “Northeaster” that Paul was in was no small, short-lived, minor storm! It was anything but a “tempest in a teapot!” If they would have used our calibrations back then, this hurricane surely would have measured a “4” or “5” in intensity! It was so bad and so long that everyone gave up all hope of surviving. With the unrelenting rainy darkness all around them for many nights and days, they ultimately succumbed to despair:

"When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, *we finally gave up all hope of being saved*" (Acts 27:20).

But as radio commentator Paul Harvey would say, *"Here is the rest of the story!"*

God appeared to Paul and told him that this storm was not going to result in their *deaths* but rather in their *deliverance*!

Through this storm, Paul was set free from his chains. He was released from being a shackled prisoner so he could take control of the situation. No longer was

the ship captain in charge. No longer were the seasoned “salty sailors” making decisions. No longer was the Roman centurion, Julius, giving orders. Through this storm, God had given Paul the quiet authority of *lifesaving leadership*. As a result, they were all saved. Not one soul was lost. They were all delivered safely onto the island of Malta for a time of fruitful ministry there before going on to Rome.

*What does this storm teach us?*

Just because we are living in obedience, *things will not always be “smooth sailing” for us as Christians!* We will not always have “fair weather” and “blue skies” as followers of Christ. Oftentimes the closer we walk with Him and the more proactive we are for His Kingdom, the more frequent and more intense the storms are that assail us. So, as we walk the path of obedience, there will be many storms that will assault us. At unexpected times, the storms will blow in against us at work, in the classroom, in the political arena, in the business realm – even in the Church or Christian ministry. When you set sail for the kingdom of God – when you fix your compass on the true north of obedience – the storms will certainly intensify! Literally, *“all hell will break loose against you!”*

These storms are a part of what Bonhoeffer called the *“Cost of Discipleship.”* Yet, so many of us want *“cheap grace”* rather than *“costly grace,”* a grace where Jesus paid *everything* so we do not have to pay *anything*! Listen to how Bonhoeffer described cheap grace:

“Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of the church...it means grace sold on the market like

cheap wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price, grace without cost!...In such a church the world finds a cheap covering of its sin; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God. Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without Church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, pp. 45-46)

Bonhoeffer did not practice a life of cheap grace, it cost him everything. He was imprisoned and executed for his opposition to Hitler's Third Reich – one of the darkest political storms in modern history.

Unless we opt for a "comfortable Christianity" that dispenses cheap grace – which is *discipleship without the cross* – we can expect storms to periodically rage against our lives, marriages, families, businesses and ministries.

Listen to what the Lord said about this when He sent out the seventy. He warned them:

“Behold, I send you out as *sheep in the midst of wolves*...beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues...brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And *you will be hated by all on account of My name*, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved... Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. *Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.* For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. *And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.* He who has found his life shall lose it, and *he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.*” (Matthew 10:16-22; 32-39)

Jesus said that one of the signs of the *end times* would be that “...they would deliver you up to *tribulation*, and will *kill you*, and *you will be hated by all nations on account of My name*” (Matthew 24:9)

In the Upper Room, Jesus reminded His disciples at the close of His earthly ministry:

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but *because you are not of the world*, but I chose you out of the world, *therefore the world hates you*” (John 15:18-19).

The Apostle Paul gave the same warning that Jesus gave to young converts. When he went out to do follow-up work after his first missionary journey; he not only “returned...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith.” He also gave them this realistic warning: “Through *many tribulations* we must enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). To me that doesn’t sound like the instruction given in most of our new membership classes in Western churches!

In his farewell discourse to the Ephesian elders, Paul further testified to what the Lord had shown him about his own life of suffering and persecution:

‘And now, behold, bound in the spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the *Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city saying that bonds and afflictions await me.*” (Acts 20:22-23);

Listen to his own testimony in his letters to the saints in Corinth. In First Corinthians we get into the *head* of Paul. But in Second Corinthians we get into the *heart* of Paul. So when you read through his second letter

to them, you really get into the heart of his struggles and suffering for the Lord Jesus.

*“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (II Corinthians 4:8-12).*

*“We put not a stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way; in great endurance; in troubles, in hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, and sleepless nights and hunger...through dishonor...bad reports...regarded as imposters and yet we live on; beaten and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich, having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (II Corinthians 6:3-10).*

Unlike some Christians today who give you the idea that they always walk in victory and conquest, Paul was blatantly honest. He was no “Prosperity Preacher.” He did not preach or promote a “Health and Wealth Gospel.” He was more real and transparent in speaking about his “...conflicts without fears within” (II Corinthians 7:5). For Paul, faith in Christ did not preclude “...fears within.”



What a ministerial resume Paul had! How different it was from so many preachers and Christian leaders today. Note how he summarized his philosophy of ministry.

“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my *weaknesses*, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in *weaknesses*, in *results*, in *hardships*, in *persecutions*, in *difficulties*. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (II Corinthians 12:9-10)

Is it any wonder that in his last Epistle, Paul warned young Timothy: “Indeed, *all* who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus *will be persecuted*” (II Timothy 3:12).

Tragically, so many of us Christians today want to live ungodly, worldly, carnal lives – rather than Godly lives. We want to live “like hell on the way to heaven!” An obvious contradiction of lifestyles.

Past and contemporary history tragically testifies to the truth of Jesus’ and Paul’s predictions! That’s why there have been more Christian deaths in the Twentieth Century than in the previous 19 centuries combined! Things do not look too promising for the Twenty-First Century that is already experiencing terrorism, bloody warfare, tribal conflict and ethnic genocide on many fronts!

Concerning the increase in the martyrdom of Christ’s followers, noted mission researcher, David Barrett, wrote:

“The average annual rate of martyrdoms will jump to 500,000 by the year 2000, from the

present 335,000. This century's biggest killer has proved to be civil terror. Since 1990, 119 million innocent citizens have been tortured, shot, slaughtered, killed or executed by their own governments. The great majority have been Christians."

## EPILOGUE

When we stand against the prevailing winds of popular opinion, as we row against the destructive cultural and political currents that are sweeping others around in the tides of delusion to destruction, *we will face storms!* If we are "worth our salt" and "worthy of our light", we will also *cause some storms!*

However, these "*Storms of Discipleship*" can become for us what they were for Paul: "*Storms of Deliverance*" through which we are set free from the things that bind us: free from materialism...free from consumerism...free from peer pressure...free from cultural bondage...free from political deception...free from the vain philosophies that once took us captive (Colossians 2:8). As Jesus said: "If the Son sets you free, you will be *free indeed*" (John 8:34).

But our "*Storms of Discipleship*" can also become a "*Storm of Direction*" whereby God redirects our lives to people and places we never would have become involved with otherwise – just like Paul's ministry on Malta. Listen to the incredible ministry God gave Paul on Malta that he could never have imagined while he was going through his intense and protracted storm. Pick up his "soggy story" with me on the beach of Malta. And as you read this epilogue about their

“calm after the storm,” again note the great detail we are given because of the careful observation and documentation by Doctor Luke:

“Once safely on shore...the Islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and as he put it on the fire, a viper (\*), driven out by the heat fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, ‘This man must be a murderer, for though he escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to life.’ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

“There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. His father was sick in bed suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed” (Acts 28:1-10).

(\*) For a further study of this story, refer to my book *Vipers Attacking The Church*.

We can see from this epilogue that God's storms are never mindless or capricious – even though they may seem like it when we are going through them. They are always sovereignly designed and directed by God to accomplish His purpose *in us* and *through us*. So if it would not have been for this ferocious storm that Paul and Luke went through, the island of Malta would never have heard the Good News of Christ – from Publius to the peasants. And scores of people would never have experienced the healing power of Christ if Paul would never have been shipwrecked there.

God's ultimate purpose is for the Gospel to be preached to the "...ends of the earth." God had said through the prophet Isaiah, that His glory must be seen in the islands of the sea:

"Sing to the lord a new song, His praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea...you *islands* and all who live in them...Let them give glory to the lord and proclaim His praise in the *islands*" (Isa. 42:10-12).

If God has to sovereignly commandeer a ship with two of his servants on board – and have them be shipwrecked on an island to reveal His glory – He will do it! While the boat captain and the centurion thought they were in charge of the ship, they found out that God really was. And He so orchestrated the events of that tempestuous storm to the degree that He exalted Paul, formerly a prisoner on board, to being the real captain of the ship who was telling everyone else what to do! In the end, God saved every passenger and prisoner on board, just so He

could exalt Paul to this position of authority. As a result, both physical and spiritual salvation came to all who were on board, as well as to those living on the island of Malta.

From the eternal perspective, then, that was a “Godly storm” because it ultimately glorified Him and accomplished His foreordained plan to minister His love and healing to the people of Malta!

Therefore, our “*Storms of Discipleship*” can become “*Storms of Demonstration.*” That means that the storms that we encounter can become opportunities for ...

...God’s *power* to be manifested through our *weakness*;

...His *victory* through our *surrender*;

...His *life* through our *death*!

There is a great old gospel song that is not sung much any more, that captures these *stormy realities* that frequently assault our lives. It was a favorite song of my father, and has been a lifelong favorite of mine. Its title is really a probing question: “*Am I a Soldier of the Cross?*” Prayerfully ponder the following verses.

“Am I a Soldier of the Cross?”

*Am I a soldier of the cross,  
a follower of the Lamb?  
And shall I fear to own His cause,  
or blush to speak His name?*

*Must I be carried to the skies,  
on flowery beds of ease,  
while others fought to win the prize,  
and sailed thro' bloody seas?*

*Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace  
to help me on to God?*

*Sure I must fight if I would reign;  
increase my courage, Lord;  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
supported by Thy Word. AMEN!*



## THE STORM OF *DISCOVERY*

This is one of the most positive storms in the Bible! While some of the other storms we have studied were initially more negative in origin and intent, the “*Storm of Discovery*” is definitely more benevolent in purpose. While it was still a very dark and dangerous storm, it proved to be one of *discovery* rather than one of *destruction*.

In the New Testament we read about at least two storms that the disciples experienced – and both of those storms became for them a “*Storm of Discovery*.” Through those storms the disciples discovered things about the Lord Jesus that they would never have known unless He would have manifested Himself to them in their storm. In addition, they also learned things about *themselves* through these storms that they would have never learned otherwise. We will look at the first storm the disciples faced in this chapter, and the second one in the following chapter.

Let’s sail, then, into the “eye of the storm” with the disciples to see what they discovered...

We read about the first storm in Matthew 8, Mark 4 and Luke 8. I am sure that you already know the story. But just in case you have forgotten, let me refresh your memory about some of the details leading up to their “*Storm of Discovery*.”

Jesus had just finished an intense time of public ministry. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record His famous *Parable of the Sower* at this point – which summarized the various responses to His teaching. In each case it was an issue of the *heart* – as every issue in life always is. Jesus pointed out that there were only four human *heart conditions* when it came to response to the “seed of His Word.” In a very earthy way, Jesus taught that every human heart is like one of four kinds of soil. There is the *hard soil*, the *rocky soil*, the *weedy soil* and the *good soil*. Or the *hard heart*, the *shallow heart*, the *overcrowded heart* and the *good heart*. Each responded to the Word in different ways, just as the crowd did that day. Jesus reminded His disciples that *the heart of every problem is the heart of man* (Matt. 15:19).

Matthew also recounted several miraculous healings that Jesus performed prior to this storm. He had healed a leper and made his skin as clean and unblemished as a newborn baby. Jesus also had a Roman Centurion seek Him out and ask for intervention and healing for his servant who was paralyzed and suffering terribly. Since Jesus performed this miracle long-distance, by just speaking the words of healing, it showed that His power and authority were not in any way affected by time and space. This was certainly another unmistakable demonstration of His deity.

He had also gone to Peter’s house for some rest – and probably a good home cooked meal. But upon entering the house, He found that Peter’s mother-in-law was sick with a high fever. Jesus just touched her hand and she was healed – and she immediately rose up and served Him.



In addition, Doctor Luke alone records that it was during this time that a group of women begin to follow Jesus and support Him because of His ministry of love, compassion, healing and deliverance to them (Luke 8:1-3).

Understandably, then, as a result of all of these intense and diverse ministries of teaching and healing, there were "...large crowds that followed Him" (Matthew 8:1).

Knowing that many in the crowds were just following Him because of the miracles and healings He had been performing, Jesus had given a brief parting and pointed teaching about the "cost of discipleship." In response to the apparent superficial desire of one man in the crowd who said that he wanted to follow Jesus wherever He went, Jesus said: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head" (Matthew 8:18-22; Luke 9:57-60).

To another who also wanted to follow Him, but only after his father had died so he could receive his inheritance, Jesus said: "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:20-22). Apparently after hearing these very weighty words about the high cost of following Him, both of these men were stopped dead in their tracks! No doubt they sadly turned back because the price of following Jesus was just too great.

With those words resonating in their own ears, the Twelve got into their boats to row across the Sea of Galilee. Before that very night was over, their own

discipleship would be tested in a way they never could have imagined! It would be a “stormy night” for them that would become a time of spiritual and emotional introspection and discovery. Let’s look at what they learned that night that might help us in our storms of life.

When we pick up on the story, the hour is already late. Jesus had told His Disciples to take Him across the lake. Exhausted from this intense time of ministry, Jesus got into the boat and fell fast asleep (Note in passing how this physical and emotional fatigue reveals the full *humanity* of Jesus – just as the storm will reveal His full *deity*.) But while they were en route across the lake, we read this account of their stormy experience. I will begin with Mark’s account:

"That day when evening came, He said to His disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind, they took Him alone, just as He was in the boat. There were also other boats with Him. A *furious squall* came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. (Note: Like Jonah, Jesus was also sleeping in a boat. However, unlike Jonah, He was *sleeping in the will of God* while Jonah was *sleeping outside the will of God!* Obviously two very different forms of sleep!) The disciples woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?'

He got up, *rebuked the wind* and *said to the waves*, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to His disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?'

They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!'" (Mark 4:35-41).

Let me share with you several lessons that I believe the disciples were beginning to learn in all of these events leading up to their impending "Storm of Discovery."

First of all, they had already seen and experienced, earlier in the day, the struggles of *family*. At some point during the day, the disciples had watched as Jesus faced the very difficult situation where His mother and brothers were seeking after Him – also wanting His time and attention (Luke 8:19-21). But they could not get to Him because of the crowds. Certainly it must have seemed to His earthly family that Jesus was putting the needs of others before their own. He was choosing to spend more time with others than with them.

On this particular occasion only Mary is mentioned, along with the children: "Isn't this the carpenter's Son? Isn't His mother's name Mary?" Contrary to what some people believe and teach, Joseph and Mary had more children than just Jesus. We do know clearly from the Gospel records that they went on to have several other children after the birth of Jesus, their first born. There were at least four sons and several daughters. Each time the sons are specifically mentioned, they are listed as James, Joseph, Judas, Simon – probably in that birth order after Jesus. In

typical Jewish custom, the daughters are just referred to as “His sisters.”

It is also interesting and instructive to note that Jesus’ siblings are only referred to in this specific manner after He had returned to Nazareth, which was His home town. It was where He’d grown up and apprenticed in the carpentry shop run by Joseph, that’s why Jesus was known as “...the carpenter’s son,” or as just “...the carpenter” (Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3-4).

Everyone in Nazareth knew Joseph, Mary and their children well. Like in most small towns, everybody knew everybody else. They were so familiar with Jesus that they could quickly name off His parents, brothers and sisters – as well as their family profession. And no doubt it was this degree of familiarity that prevented them from believing in Him as a prophet and miracle-worker – much less the long-awaited Messiah! We are told that “...they took offense at Him” and we read that “He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.”

In response to this hostility and lack of faith, Jesus quoted a popular slogan in reference to Himself: “Only in his hometown and in his *own house* is a prophet without honor” (Matthew 13:57-58). And the very fact that Jesus included the words “...in his own house” would indicate that at this time His family, as a whole, did not believe in who He claimed to be.

This “family visit” needs to be interpreted in that context. They were not coming to see Him because they believed in Him as the Son of God. In their minds, He was only the Son of Joseph – and nothing more. They feared that He had “gone off the deep

end” spiritually and emotionally! That He had totally “lost it,” as we say today.

Jesus’ own family, then, feared that He had completely lost touch with reality. In today’s psychological jargon, they would have accused Him of having a “Messianic Complex” accompanied by delusions of grandeur bordering on megalomania! But in more simple terms we are told: “When His family heard about this, they went to *take charge of Him*, for they said, ‘*He is out of His mind*’” (Mark 3:21).

No doubt this unbelief on the part of His own family was deeply, emotionally painful for Jesus. There are few things more difficult to handle than the sense that your family is not “with you.” That they do not really believe in you. It was one thing for His hometown neighbors not to accept His claims – but the doubt and unbelief of His own earthly family must have been very painful for Him! It would have also been embarrassing socially when they showed up expressing their unbelief in the midst of the growing love and belief of others. That would have been awkward to say the very least!

Let me pause here to say that, without a doubt, these kinds of family misunderstandings and tensions are some of the most difficult relational and emotional conflicts that every visionary Christian leader faces. On the one hand there is his or her deep sense of call from God that others do not always understand. They do not personally relate to the anointing and gifting by His Holy Spirit that has been sovereignly imparted. They often do not have the same passion for the God-given vision that they either do not “see” or do not

believe in. This level of family misunderstanding often brings deep emotional conflict and anguish to a leader.

By contrast, there are others outside the home and family circle who do believe in you...who do see your vision...who do share your passion and are willing to “sell out” and follow you whatever the cost. There are few leaders in history – whether spiritual or political – who have not faced some degree of this family tension. That’s what Jesus was facing at this point in His ministry.

At the end of the day, this family encounter for Jesus revealed the all-too-common relational tension between what your parents, spouse or siblings think of you *inside the home*, and what others think about you *outside the home*. It is the perennial conflict between the needs and demands of family, and the ever-pressing needs of other people. It seems that there is never enough time and energy to go around. You can never meet all of the demanding needs beckoning for your attention. Someone always gets the “short end of the stick” – and often it is the family.

Tragically, in ministry, the wife and children have to take a backseat to the concerns, crises and cries of others. It often means that the meeting of their needs gets postponed or preempted by other needy people whose lives are in crisis. But that’s why it is called *ministry* – and not a *job*, *position* or *vocation*. Ministry by its very nature means that your time, talent and treasure are not your own. All that you are and have belongs to others. You are called to “give yourself away” and expend yourself for others in the Name of Christ. That’s what it means to be a *servant-leader*.

But it is still a tension that every leader lives with to a greater or lesser degree all of his life. Believe me, I know!

Jesus, then, responded to the news that His family was outside seeking Him in the context of their unbelief and the growing belief of others. So when He was told, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see You” – His response was totally appropriate to the situation. With a sweep of His hands toward His disciples and other believers seated around Him, Jesus said: “Here are My mother and my brothers. For whoever *does* the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:49-50). Or to quote Luke’s rendering: “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and *put it into practice*” (Luke 8:21). A heavy saying indeed! But it represented the reality at that time of the disbelief of His physical family as opposed to the faith and obedience of His wider spiritual family.

I am sure that this response by Jesus was encouraging to His disciples – as well as disheartening and disappointing to His brothers and sisters. And it would have been most painful of all for Mary, His mother, who had supernaturally brought Him into the world as a young virgin! Perhaps this was one of the first motherly pains that she would face that she had been told about when Jesus was an infant: “...a sword will *pierce your soul*...” (Luke 2:35). However, it reflected the hard reality of His ministry at that particular time. His “family circle” had now widened to include everyone who “...did the will of His Father in heaven.” That larger spiritual family now represented the relational priority of His life and ministry.

Secondly, the disciples saw the struggles of *friendship*. On the one hand, Jesus widened His family circle that included far more people than just blood relatives. But at the same time, He also narrowed and tightened His circle of *friendships*. While He would have *relationships* and *friendships* with many people, He would only have intimate *partnerships* with those who were ready for *radical discipleship*! That's why He turned back the two would-be followers who had not really stopped to count the cost of discipleship.

So, leading up to this storm, we see Jesus leaving the multitudes behind. He was not only leaving behind the curious and casual followers who were primarily motivated by self-interest, He was leaving behind His own family members – His own flesh and blood.

Thirdly, the disciples saw the struggles of the *flesh*. All day long they had seen the spirit of Jesus manifest through His body in love, kindness, compassion, touching, healing. Now they were seeing the needs of His weary body increasingly taking precedent over His spirit. In other words, they were seeing the *full humanity* of Jesus.

Simply put, Jesus was extremely tired from an exhausting day of ministry. There is nothing more tiring and depleting than ministering to the needs of others. Everywhere Jesus turned that day, there was the constant presence, pressure and pull of people. All wanted His attention. Expectations were high. Every one needed or wanted something from Him. As we often times say, "He hardly had time to breathe!" And most probably He did not have time to eat either. So when He finally crawled into the boat



as the sun was setting on Galilee, He was so totally exhausted that He laid His head on one of the cushion fishermen sat on as they rowed their boats – and He immediately fell into a deep sleep.

Like the disciples, when we too ponder Jesus sleeping in the boat, we are confronted with one of the great *mysteries* of the Incarnation. How can Omnipotence Incarnate be weary? How can the eternal Son of God experience fatigue? How can the God who “...never sleeps or slumber” (Psalm 121:4) fall into a deep sleep?

Certainly there is a great mystery here – and it is the mystery of the *Trinity*, or *Tri-unity of the Godhead*. The Incarnation is the revelation about the Second Member of the Triune Godhead taking up habitation in human flesh. It is the incredible story of God the Son humbling Himself to “become flesh” in the womb of a young virgin. It is the omnipotent and omniscient God growing up in a carpenter’s shop and submitting Himself to a fallible human father. It is the true and living God taking upon Himself our *full humanity* in every way – except for our sin nature. Christ’s spiritual DNA was absolutely holy and without sin.

What the Disciples were seeing was not God in Christ “play-acting” as a man. This was not deity pretending to be human. The Incarnation was not a divine charade or masquerade. It was not a case of divine make-believe. No, Jesus Christ was both *fully God* and *fully man* in every way. For 33 years, the eternal God “tabernacled among us,” as John would later write (John 1:14). During those three brief decades, He lived under the full limitations of our humanity.

That means Jesus got *hungry*...He grew *tired*...He required *rest*...He needed *sleep*.

So, let this story remind you that Jesus needed *everything* that you and I need as human beings. I want you to see Jesus as the disciples saw Him that evening. Take a good long look at Him in all of His humanity. See Him just like yourself in every way – except *without sin*. That's why we can relate to Him during all of those times when we intently feel the weight of our own humanity; when we are "tired to the bone"...when we have been depleted by people...when we are absolutely exhausted...when the one thing we need and desire more than anything in the world is a good night's sleep!

It's because of Jesus' full humanity that the writer of Hebrews reminded us of His uniqueness as our sensitive and sympathetic High Priest. Jesus is not like the inwardly turned Buddha whose eyes are shut in mystical contemplation, oblivious to the world around him. He is not like the Allah of Islam who is so totally transcendent that he can never have personal contact with mankind and only reveals his impersonal will from the hiddenness of a veil (Koran, Surah 42:51). Jesus is not like any of the 350 million gods and goddesses of Hinduism who are characterized and victimized by all of the same sins, lusts and passions of the rest of fallen humanity. No, a thousand times NO!

Only because Jesus was fully the *Son of God* and *God the Son* could He become our empathetic and sympathetic High Priest. Read afresh these timely and timeless words from Hebrews:

“Therefore, since we have a great High Priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to *sympathize* with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been *tempted in every way*, just as we are – yet was without sin. *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

It is helpful to prayerfully ponder for a moment the Greek word used in this passage for “sympathize.” In the original it is *sumpatheo*. Just as it sounds, we get the English word “sympathetic” from it. It is a derivative of two words: *sun* meaning “with”; and *pascho*, meaning “to suffer with another” (The writer of Hebrews uses the same word in 10:34). So the reason that Jesus can “fully sympathize” with us in the struggles of our humanity is that He also fully experienced all of those human frailties and weaknesses. The only exception – and it is a BIG one, is that there was *no sin* in His spiritual DNA. All of the rest of us were “born sinners” and “born losers.” Or as David rightly expressed it: “Surely I was *sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me*” (Psalm 51:5). That means that we were ALL born with a *sinful nature* that we received from our original parents, Adam and Eve. That’s why theologians refer to this as the “Adamic Nature.” As a result of this universal *fallenness*, we have in our flesh a *natural inclination toward sin* – while Jesus had a *supernatural inclination away from sin*.

On that stormy night, the disciples discovered the full humanity of Jesus. They saw close up His wearied flesh, totally exhausted from a long day of ministry. But they also discovered Him as their High Priest to whom they could cry out in their time of distress.

Fourthly, the disciples discovered afresh their own *fears* and *faithlessness*. An unexpected fierce storm can do that to you. It can suddenly cause repressed fears to rise to the surface that we did not know we had. It can awaken insecure emotions that we thought we had grown out of. The right storm can cause deep-seated anxieties to mount up that we thought we had conquered – but had only suppressed below the surface of our consciousness. An unexpected stormy situation can trigger a “panic attack” that cripples and paralyzes us! The right storm can make the strongest among us tremble with sheer terror! That’s what happened to the disciples, many of whom were lifelong veterans of the sea.

As we have already seen, this storm occurred at the end of an extensive and exhaustive time of ministry for Christ. Sermons had been preached...teachings had been given...people had been healed...demons had been cast out. Since the disciples had been at His side through it all, they too were very tired.

Finally evening came. The sun had set over the western hills surrounding the Sea of Galilee. When that happened, it became dark very quickly. As darkness fell, Jesus was also ready to fall on his face from physical exhaustion. He had given spiritually, emotionally and physically all day long. He had faced the multitudes who constantly pressed in upon Him from every side for help. He confronted sickness and

disease all around Him. He was blessed by the faith and belief of many – and disappointed by the unbelief of others.

So here we see both the *full deity* and *full humanity* of Jesus. We see Him as the *Son of God* and the *Son of Man*. Through His *divine nature*, we hear heavenly wisdom in His teachings and see heavenly authority in His miracles, healings and exorcisms. But through His fatigue we see His *human nature* on display. At the end of a long hard day of constant giving, we see Jesus both tired in spirit and body. Both are crying out for a break. Both His inner man and outer man need a time of rest and restoration. So He tiredly climbed into one of the boats, laid down on a cushion – and fell fast asleep.

All that day, through His ministry, the Kingdom of God had been advancing – and the kingdom of darkness had been receding. The powers of the evil one were being broken. So with Jesus exhausted in both spirit and body, and sound asleep in the boat, the evil prince of darkness attacked through the form of a storm. He was literally trying to kill Christ – who was the real target of this storm. The disciples would just be enjoyable “collateral damage” for Satan to take out at the same time! If he was able to “swamp their ship” and take all of them to the bottom of the sea together – all the better! Either way, Jesus would never live to face the cross and bring Satan’s ultimate defeat.

Before this storm arose, they no doubt thought that their faith in the Lord Jesus was strong. They had a young but growing relationship with Him. They were what we might call new believers, baby Christians or spiritual neophytes.

Probably if this would have just been a small gale, they would have ridden it out with no problem. They would never have awakened the Lord from His sound sleep. But the Bible says that this was a “furious squall. The authorized KJV calls it a “great wind-storm”. Other translations translate it a “tempest” or a “fierce gale”. The Greek word is *lailaps* and literally means “a hurricane, a furious storm, a whirlwind.” It is clear from both the Greek and English words used to describe it that this was a violent life-threatening storm! It was so fierce and violent that the pounding waves were about to swamp their boat and send them all to the bottom of the sea!

Let me pause at this point to remind you again that these men were not “landlubbers” who spent most of their lives on terra firma. No. These men were what we call “ol’ salties” – although the Sea of Galilee was fresh water and not salty! They had spent most of their lives on or around this Sea. They knew well her fickle nature. They had often seen blue skies and clear water turn dark and stormy in just a matter of moments. That’s because of the unique geography of the area around the Sea of Galilee. I have seen it many times as I have visited this part of the Holy Land. The combination of high hills and low narrow valleys act like a wind tunnel that focuses intense energy out onto the Sea. In a matter of minutes those gale force winds can turn a calm balmy sea into boisterous churning waters! Since fishermen, to this day, generally fish all night on the Sea of Galilee, that’s when the storms are the most dangerous.

But these men had faced and ridden out many storms in their fishing career. They were not novices on their first boat ride. They were veterans of the sea. Long

dark nights and rough waters were something that came with their calling. Stormy seas were just part of a fisherman's life.

But this storm was different. As the mounting waves smashed upon their boat from every side, they began to sense a furiousness and fierceness in this storm like they had not experienced before. It was almost as if there was a supernatural energy of some kind pulsating in the winds and waves! There seemed to be a malevolent, evil presence animating this storm. There was something sinister about this storm that chilled the disciples to the bone!

As the winds grew fiercer, they began to take in more and more water to the degree that their boat "...was nearly swamped." While some rowed with all their might, others bailed water as fast as they could! But still the storm was proving to be stronger than their efforts to ride it out.

As the storm continued to intensify, fears began to mount up in each of them like the buffeting waves all around. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, they began to face the very real and imminent possibility of being "lost at sea." Death by drowning is indeed a fearful thought! To contemplate suffocating in water is terrifying to anyone!

In their fear-now-turned-to-panic, they cried out to Jesus: "Teacher, *don't you care* if we drown?"

Don't we often say the same thing to God in a thousand different ways during our stormy days or tempestuous nights?

- *God, don't You care about my situation?*
- *Are You not concerned that life is crushing in on me and I can't bear it any longer?*
- *God, are You not concerned that I am drowning in boredom in my job?*
- *Do You not care that I am sinking deeper and deeper into debt?*
- *God don't you care that I am dying of cancer?*
- *Don't You know that the waves of loneliness are overwhelming my soul without a mate?*
- *Do You not care that I am drowning in sorrow after the death of my husband?*
- *God, are You not concerned that my mother is wasting away with Alzheimer's?*
- *Lord, do You not care that my son is in rebellion and hooked on drugs?*
- *Do You not care that I am sinking deeper and deeper into a sea of depression?*
- *Do You not see that I cannot take any more? Don't You know God – that I am at my limit? My wits end? That I have had it?!*
- *God! Don't You care about what is happening to me?!*

We've all been there, haven't we? We have all been in stormy situations where it just seems like God has indeed died – as the “God is dead” theologians proclaimed a few decades ago. Or, if He is not dead, He certainly seems to be slumbering and sleeping through my storm! The sum effect is this: *God doesn't really care about ME!*

During these storms, heaven seems to become brass. The more we cry out to God, the more heaven seems to be silent. Our prayers seem to echo out into an



uncaring, unlistening and unresponsive universe. The silence becomes deafening! The longer heaven is silent, the more intense our fears become.

These were some of the individual and collective fears the disciples were having in their “Storm of Discovery.” But right in the darkest moments of their storm, they were about to discover and discern things about Jesus that they had never known up to that point. They were about to discover His power and sufficiency for every stormy situation in life – regardless of how fierce and ferocious! They were about to discover new truths about Jesus that they had not known while they had followed Him during days of sunshine and blue skies.

It is interesting to me that when they cried out to Jesus, they called Him, “Teacher.” That’s what *rabbi* meant. Up to that point in their relationship with Him, Jesus had been most manifested as their teacher. They had listened privately and publicly to His teaching and preaching. They had heard His incredibly practical parables and His pithy wisdom. They had watched and listened to His debates with the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and religious lawyers. Certainly His teaching was unparalleled. He was indeed the Master Teacher!

But what does a teacher know about storms? His background was in a carpentry shop in Nazareth – not in fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee! So what could He do for them now? Another teaching was not what they needed in their hour of crisis! This was not a didactic moment. It was not a time for some pedantic platitude! This was not the right situation to have someone give a homily on the supremacy or

sovereignty of God! No! They needed someone to rescue them from drowning – not someone to recite spiritual principles to them!

Even though they did not know what Jesus could do for them at this moment of crisis, they did know that they wanted Him to be fully awake! They wanted His full and undivided attention – and quickly! They wanted to make sure that He was completely aware of what they were going through. They did not want Him to “sleep through their storm!”

After they had awakened Him from an apparent deep sleep, He did the totally unexpected – as God so often does. He did not lead them in a time of prayer or hymn-sing. He did not take over the oars and begin to row along side them with all of His might. Nor did He frantically pick up a bucket and begin to feverishly “bail water” as some of them were doing! No. *He was absolutely calm in the midst of their storm.* Jesus did not deal with the surface issues of what was going on. He dealt directly and decisively with the *source*.

With all of the authority of deity, Jesus “...got up, *rebuked the wind* and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still.’” And almost immediately what He spoke and commanded came to pass. “*The wind died down* and it was *completely calm*.”

At this point we must pause and ask, “Why did Jesus ‘rebuke’ the storm?” Even though we often give names to storms, they are an impersonal force. They do not have a personality. Storms do not have a ‘mind of their own.’ They do not have a will we can reason with. Storms are controlled by laws of nature

– not by any ranting or raving we might do as they assail us. Why then did Jesus ‘rebuke’ the storm?

Apparently Jesus discerned that the evil one and his demonic forces were in some way behind this storm. That’s what the Greek words seem to indicate. The word Jesus used here for ‘rebuke’ was the perfect tense of the verb *epitimao*. It means “to judge or “to rebuke.” It is a technical term for dispossessing a demon of his power.

Jesus had used this same word of command earlier when He disposed an evil spirit in a man whom He encountered in the synagogue in Capernaum. On that occasion Jesus said: “Be quiet! Come out of him!” (Mark 1:21-25). The demon did, and there was spiritual calm where there had been stormy chaos.

You can clearly see the parallel here between Jesus’ calming the *spiritual storm* in a man by casting out an evil spirit, and His calming this *physical storm* by taking authority over the demonic realm that was stirring it up. Jesus literally took authority over the *physical storm* and the *spiritual storm* animating it. He commanded...ordered...rebuked both the natural and supernatural forces with these more literal words from the original language: “Be silent! Be muzzled and remain so!” And it was so!

I like the contemporary way that Eugene Peterson expresses this in *The Message*: “He told the wind to pipe down and said to the sea, ‘Quiet! Settle down!’ The wind ran out of breath, the sea became smooth as glass.”

Don't you just love it?! His rendering is so fresh and contemporary. You can see it all take place in your mind's eye.

In exercising this kind of supernatural authority, Jesus manifested the very same sovereignty over the natural realm that God had often demonstrated in the Old Testament. As good God-fearing Jews who had been raised in the local synagogue school in Capernaum, they would have known that this was a fulfillment of a number of Messianic prophecies found in their Bible – especially the Psalms. Read the following verses through the lenses of their experience on the stormy seas of Galilee – and let them bolster your faith also.

- “O Lord God Almighty, who is like You? You are mighty, O Lord, and Your faithfulness surrounds You. *You rule over the raging sea; when its waves mount up, You still them*” (Psalm 89:8-9).
- “He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved. You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. But at Your *rebuke* the waters fled...” (Psalm 104:4-7)
- “He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted the waves...*You stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed*” (Psalm 107:25, 29).
- “They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He sent forth His word and healed them; He rescued them

from the grave. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love...Others *went out on the sea* in ships; they were merchants of the mighty waters (Sounds like fishermen to me!). They saw the works of the Lord, His wonderful deeds in the deep. For He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away...They were at their wit's end. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distress. *He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.* They were glad when it grew calm and He guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men" (Psalm 107:20-31).

And the ultimate Old Testament example of God's power over the sea is when He "...rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up" (Psalm 106:8). As Torah tutored Jews, those disciples would have known these Scriptures. But like us, the unexpected dangers of their immediate circumstances caused them to forget what they knew! How like them we are.

They should have also remembered the words of Isaiah, who had prophesied this about the Messiah:

"He will be a shelter and a shade from the heat of the day, and *a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain*" (Isaiah 4:2-6).

But so often we do not remember the promises of God that we should call to mind and hold onto in

times of danger and fear. We become so consumed with the immediate circumstances around us that we forget many of the things about Jesus that we should remember and rest in. But they – just like us – *forgot to remember!*

Let me encourage you not to forget who is in your boat with you, if you are a Believer. If you will only have faith, He too can "rebuke the winds" and "calm the waves" that rage within and without your life!

Before we leave this "stormy lesson," let me remind you of one final principle: *Great storms usually come after great successes.* That's why so many great defeats come after great victories...why tragic failures can follow great successes...why great falls often follow the summing of great heights. That's why all of us are at one of our most dangerous points almost immediately after some great success, victory, or break-through. That was the case with Jesus and His disciples.

Never forget that the evil one will be our ever present enemy until we cross the threshold of heaven. He may retreat into the elusive darkness for a season to await a more opportune time to assault you, as he did with Christ after His temptation (Luke 4:13). But just when we expect him the least, he comes against us like a flood to swamp our boat. Or like a "...roaring lion" who is "looking for someone to devour" (I Peter 5:8).

With both perfect discernment of this stormy situation and absolute authority over it, Jesus "rebuked the wind." He also rebuffed the evil one animating it. My friend, He can and will do the same for you. If you will

but “have faith” in Him, He can do for you in your storm what He did for the disciples in their storm. They discovered Christ’s absolute sufficiency in an area of their lives where they had not trusted Him before. If you will ask Him by *faith*, He will bring to you the same spiritual calm and emotional tranquility in the midst of your storm.

Like the disciples, let the current high seas and rough waters you are going through become your “*Storm of Discovery*.” May you discover the all-sufficiency of Christ in the storm that is “rocking your boat.” Sing the following old Gospel song again in your heart and you will experience His calming peace in the midst of your storm. As you sing in your spirit, note that the verses express the fears of the disciples and those of us going through storms. But the refrain echoes the calming words of Christ to His panic-stricken disciples – and to us.

“Master, the tempest is raging!  
The billows are tossing high!  
The shy is o’er-shadowed with blackness,  
No shelter or help is nigh;  
Carest Thou not that we perish?  
How canst Thou lie asleep,  
When each moment so madly is threatening,  
a grave in the angry deep?  
Refrain:  
“The winds and the waves shall obey My will,  
Peace, be still! Peace be still!”  
Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea,  
Or demons, or men, or whatever it be,  
No water can swallow the ship where lies,  
The Master of ocean and earth and  
skies;

They all shall sweetly obey My will;  
Peace, be still! Peace, be still.  
They all shall sweetly obey My will;  
Peace, peace, be still!"

Master, with anguish of spirit,  
I bow in my grief today;  
The depths of my sad heart are troubled;  
O waken and save, I pray!  
Torrents of sin and of anguish,  
Sweep o'er my sinking soul!  
And I perish! I perish, dear Master;  
O hasten, and take control!  
Refrain

Master, the terror is over,  
the elements sweetly rest;  
Earth's sun in the calm lake is mirrored,  
and heaven's within my breast.  
Linger, O blessed Redeemer,  
leave me alone no more;  
And with joy I shall make the blest harbor,  
And rest on the blissful shore.  
Refrain

Are you there yet? Have you heard His voice? Are  
you experiencing His perfect peace? The disciples  
did – and you can too!





## THE STORM OF *DESTINY*

The disciples of Jesus faced more than one fierce storm in their brief years of fellowship and co-ministry with Him. In the same way, few of us Christians today get through life with just one “stormy experience.” Because we live in a fallen universe where the whole natural realm is out of balance and where the whole human realm is in spiritual rebellion, we will all likely face a number of stormy seas during our brief sojourn here on planet earth. The storms you face may be physical, relational, emotional, financial or spiritual. They may assault your marriage, family, ministry, business or health. The storms that assault you may be of short duration or of prolonged intensity. But be assured that they surely will come – and do so with devastating fury.

Just because you are a follower of the Lord Jesus does not mean that you will be immune to the “storms of life.” Quite the contrary. Being a proactive follower of Jesus Christ will guarantee you a life of *stormy opposition*. The first disciples of Christ were not protected from storms. Neither will you nor I be either. Let’s look at the storm that the disciples faced as they followed Christ. It is found in three of the Gospel accounts – Matthew 14, Mark 6 and John 6. Although you are probably very familiar with the story of Jesus “walking on the water” in the midst of a storm, you may not recall the immediate circumstances leading up to this spectacular manifestation. Let me refresh your memory of the

wider context of this unique event where Christ again demonstrated His sovereign and supernatural power over the natural elements.

Storms in the natural world never blow up instantaneously. There is always a build-up period that may take a few hours or a few days. Wind speeds increase. Clouds blow in. Skies become dark. There is a change in the barometric pressure. Lightning flashes across the skies, often accompanied by the crescendo of rolling thunder. If you are around a lake or sea, they cease to be what the Bible calls “still waters” (Psalm 23:2). They become agitated and angry. Waves build higher and higher. Soon foamy white caps are blown about by the capricious winds. It goes without saying that it is not a good time to be in a boat in the middle of a large body of water! But that was exactly the disciples’ situation – for a second time.

But before we get in the boat with them, let’s pause to look at some of the immediate events that preceded their second “storm of life.”

Just as was the case with the “*Storm of Discovery*” that we looked at in the last chapter, the second storm was also precluded by another intense time of ministry by Jesus and the disciples. Let me refresh your memory about some of the major events that the Bible records. As we carefully unwrap them, I think it will help us better understand why the disciples soon hit stormy weather.

Shortly before this time, Jesus had sent His disciples out “two by two” on their first solo mission excursion without Him. But even though He did not personally

go with them, He did so in Spirit by giving them His "...*power* and *authority* to drive out all demons and to cure diseases...to preach the kingdom of God...to heal the sick." In obedience to this first commissioning by Jesus, "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them" (Mark 6:7-13). So, through the power and authority of the Lord Jesus, the disciples had been storming the gates of hell – and setting the captives free from sin, sickness and Satan!

Obviously this kind of spiritual offensive by Jesus and His disciples did not go unnoticed by both the religious and political establishment. Neither did it go unnoticed by the prince of darkness – whose domain and dominance were being assaulted by the ministry of the disciples.

This dramatic spiritual manifestation especially caught the attention of King Herod who "...heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known" (Matthew 14:1; Mark 6:14). He rightly discerned that these supernatural displays were in some way connected with this man, Jesus of Nazareth. Since it was Herod who earlier had John the Baptist imprisoned and killed, he lamented in his typical political paranoia: "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" This was his guilt-provoked explanation for this supernatural manifestation being demonstrated through Jesus and His disciples. And he wasn't far from the truth in believing this!

As you will further recall, Herod had carried out this bloody execution of John the Baptist – a man whom he admired and enjoyed listening to – just because

the seductive dancing of a young woman had stirred up a storm of lust and passion in his own drunken heart. This led to a foolish public vow before the men of his court to give this young exotic dancer anything she desired – even up to the half of his kingdom! Certainly the lustful heart of a drunken man knows no bounds of insanity! Being prompted by her mother, who was carrying a grudge against John the Baptist for boldly condemning her adultery, she asked for his head on a “silver platter.” So John’s fidelity in preaching an uncompromising message of repentance and righteousness literally “cost him his head!” Certainly these kinds of seemingly capricious and whimsical – but deadly storms – are very difficult to understand. And yet, God is still sovereign even over such seemingly meaningless and senseless tragic endings to a life well lived in God’s service.

But contrary to Herod’s conclusions about this spiritual activity being the result of John the Baptist being raised from the dead, this was the supernatural power of God being manifest through the simple faith and obedience of the disciples of the Lord Jesus. On their first solo mission excursion, they were finding the Name of the Lord Jesus to be sufficient to meet every need they faced – whether human or demonic.

After this first foray against the powers of darkness by the disciples, Jesus called them back for a time of reporting and reflection. As a wise master teacher, Jesus *held them accountable* for the power and authority He had entrusted to their stewardship. As a result, “The apostles gathered around Jesus and *reported to Him* all they had done and taught.”

The disciples were no doubt exhilarated by all they had experienced. But they also learned that ministry always results in a depletion of spiritual, emotional and physical energy. Jesus knew that His disciples now needed a time of withdrawal and solitude. They needed a time of repose to replenish their expended spiritual and physical resources. But as is so often the case, the pressing needs of others continued to postpone that time of much-needed rest...relaxation...reflection...replenishment. So we read:

“Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, He said to them. ‘*Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.*’”

The older King James Version renders Jesus’ words as: “Come ye yourselves apart...and rest awhile.” The late Dr. Vance Havner – often called the “Prince of Preachers” – paraphrased the admonition of Jesus this way: “If you do not heed the words of Jesus to ‘*Come apart and rest awhile*’ – you will soon just ‘*come apart!*’ Those are wise words indeed – and ones I have often learned the hard way!

So it was in obedience to Christ’s words to “Come with Me *by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest*” – that they unknowingly headed into their second storm. Even with Christ’s eye upon them, they rowed right into the “eye of the storm.”

It is important, then, to see that the people would not allow them the luxury of separation and solitude. Even though the disciples tried to go away “...*by themselves in a boat to a solitary place*” – the needs relentlessly pursued them. Note their dilemma:

“So they *went away by themselves* in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and *ran on foot* from all the towns and *got there ahead of them*...By this time it was late in the day...” (Mark 6:32-35).

When you are in ministry, how often the needs of others “run on ahead” and are awaiting you when you get to your destination! That was what the disciples faced. So when they got to what they thought was going to be a “quiet place” of solitude – the needy multitudes were awaiting them with eager expectation!

In the face of this need, the disciples wanted Jesus to send the crowd away. They had had it. They were completely fatigued in spirit and body. Their emotional tanks were on empty! In fatigued frustration, the disciples wanted Jesus to send this needy crowd away so they could get on with their “R & R”.

But while the disciples had “hit the wall” in spiritual, emotional and physical depletion, Jesus still had “...*compassion* on them (the needy multitude), because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” As a result, Jesus “...began teaching them many things.”

Every Christian leader struggles from “compassion fatigue” from time to time in ministry. But not the Lord Jesus. His compassion knows no limit! When we have *run thin* or *run out*, God’s boundless love and omnipotent compassion have just begun to manifest themselves! While the disciples were totally exhausted and depleted, Jesus’ compassion was still overflowing

with sufficiency. However, because the hour was late...the people were hungry...and the disciples were empty-handed, Jesus performed the miracle known as “The Feeding of the Five Thousand.”

After Jesus had performed this miraculous multiplication of the few loaves and fishes, He sent His disciples across the lake in their boats while He did “crowd control.” Knowing that they would want to continue following Him and the disciples, “He dismissed the crowds.” At this point, Jesus knew that the crowds would only respond to Him. So with quiet loving authority, Jesus sent the crowd of people back to their towns and villages.

Once the multitude of people began to disperse and “head for home,” Jesus headed up onto a mountainside for a time of much-needed solitude and prayer. Even though He was the Incarnation of the omnipotent God of the universe, He was still clothed in the weaknesses of human flesh, as we saw in our last chapter. So He, too, needed a time of physical rest and spiritual replenishment with His Father. Once again we are confronted with the mystery of the Incarnation as we see divine omnipotence limit itself through its habitation in human flesh. In Jesus we see the limitless God limit Himself to the frailties of a body of flesh and blood – just like ours in every way – except without sin. We see omnipotence clothed in weakness...the eternal incarnated in the temporal...the omnipresent God limited by time and space...the Second Member of the Godhead withdrawing for fellowship with the Father and Spirit.

While Jesus went up into the mountain, His disciples headed “out to sea” in direct obedience to His

direction. As a result, they soon found themselves dead center in another fierce storm! Here is the brief account of their unexpected stormy predicament. First from Mark's account:

“When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and He was alone on land. He saw the disciples *straining at the oars, because the wind was against them*” (Mark 6:47-48).

John reported the growing storm with similar words: “It was dark...a strong *wind was blowing* and the *waters grew rough*” (John 6:18).

Matthew's account says:

“When evening came, He was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, *buffeted by the waves* because the *wind was against it*” (Matthew 14:24).

When you put the accounts together you can see several things. It was now fully dark. The disciples had already rowed a long time and were in the middle of the lake. The wind had grown more and more intense against them. The waters and waves had become rougher and rougher. And the disciples were rowing with all their might to try to ride out the storm.

I don't know about you, but I see a spiritual parable in this picture for all of us as proactive Christians. Matthew recounts that the disciples' boat was “...*buffeted by the waves* because the *wind was against it*.” Like the disciples, most Christians constantly find themselves “buffeted in life” by all



kinds of contrary currents and waves. And if we are faithful to the Lord Jesus, usually the prevailing social and political winds are “against us.” That’s because we are often called to “turn around”...“face into the wind”...and “row against the tides” of popularity and political correctness, rather than to be swept along by them. It doesn’t take courage or skill to “go with the flow” of popular opinion. But to “buck the tides” and “swim against the prevailing current” takes spiritual and physical strength!

Once again, the night was dark and dangerous. It was the middle of the night and they were in the middle of the Lake. The seas were unusually rough – and these seasoned ‘old salties’ were again afraid! All over again these veterans of the Sea of Galilee were facing a stormy night more intense than usual. They had weathered many a storm in their fishing careers – but this one was no ordinary storm. It was much fiercer than usual. To try and “ride out the storm,” they trimmed the sails and gave the oars everything they had! As we often say, they really “put their backs to it!” But they were still in grave danger of destruction and death in the threatening waves! Yet, they still they did not turn around. They did not head back to the shore from where they had set out. They stayed the course assigned to them by the Lord Jesus – regardless of the *darkness* and *danger*.

Then something supernatural happened: “Jesus went out to them *walking on the lake*” (Matthew 14:25; Mark 6:28; John 6:19).

The way Mark recounts this story has caused confusion to many readers. Notice what he says:

“About the fourth watch of the night He went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to *pass by them*, but when they saw Him walking on the lake, they thought He was a ghost” (Mark 6:48-49).

What did Mark mean when he said that Jesus was about to “pass by them?” Was He going to casually walk past their boat and leave them straining at their oars? Was He going to walk on by them with aloof indifference? From His vantage point on the surface of the water, was He just going to taunt them in their fearful state – and leave them alone to ride out the storm the best they could?

Isn't that what we often think? Don't we often project our indifference to the pitiful plight of others onto Christ? Don't many of us secretly fear that Jesus is just going to “pass by us” during our grave hour of need? He's going to let us sink deeper and deeper into our sea of oblivion. With divine indifference, God is just going to let us become another anonymous statistic. A nameless, faceless drowning in some sea of unfortunate circumstances.

As a young boy, I remember singing an old Gospel song entitled: “Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior.” The chorus laments:

“Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry. While on others thou art calling, *do not pass me by!*”

As a young boy, this song deepened within me the fear that Jesus would indeed “pass me by” in my time of need! That somehow my cry for help would not be heard or heeded...that Jesus would indeed “pass me

by” in favor of someone more worthy – or someone He loved more than He loved me!

We have all been tormented by this secret fear – whether or not we have ever heard or sung that old Gospel song! We’ve all bought the devil’s lie for so many generations that we secretly fear that God really does not care about us. That He is aloof and indifferent to our plight to the degree that we have to beg and plead for Him not to “pass us by.” That unless we cry out to Him over and over again, then He will just “pass by” on His way to go minister to others whose need is more important to Him than ours!

But no, that is not what Mark records happened here. Contrary to what the English rendering seems to indicate, it does not mean that Jesus was going to “pass by them” and continue walking across the lake – leaving them in their helpless and hopeless stormy situation. The phrase does not mean that Jesus was going to “bypass them” or “pass them up.” It really means to “pass beside” – or “come alongside them.” That’s a whole different connotation than we often read into this passage.

This passage also needs to be understood in light of several similar Old Testament passages. First, this is similar to what God did for Moses when he asked to see God’s glory as a proof that He was really going to be with him as he led the Children of Israel. So God said: “I will cause all my goodness to *pass in front of you*, and I will proclaim My Name, the Lord, in your presence” (Exodus 33:19).

A second similar situation was God's appearance to Elijah when he was running for his life from evil Jezebel – hiding in fear in a cave in Mt. Horeb. God said to him:

“What are you doing here, Elijah?...Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to *pass by*” (I Kings 19:9-11).

For Jesus to “pass by them” was a *theophany*, or manifestation of God's presence and power in the midst of a dangerous situation. Rather than “pass them by,” Jesus was going to “come alongside” to aid and rescue them in their time of danger. Never fear, then, beloved, that the God of grace and glory will ever “pass by” any of His children in their time of need. Because of His love, He “comes alongside” you in your time of need – even if He has to “walk on water” to do so! That's why the Psalmist exclaimed:

“God is our refuge and strength, an *ever-present help* in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though *its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging*...Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:1-3, 10).

So the true and living God is our “ever-present help” in time of trouble because He always “comes alongside” us in our distress. He does not leave us alone to “ride out our storm” by ourselves. While He “passes by” us, He never “bypasses” us. He always comes to our side to comfort and sustain us. He

comes “alongside us” in order to get into our boat so we will never be alone in our “storms of life.”

Please remember that what He did for His disciples then *physically*, He now does for us *spiritually* through His indwelling Spirit. That’s why Jesus specifically called the Holy Spirit the “Comforter” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The word in the original is *paraklesis*, which means “a calling to one’s side.” The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is to continue doing exactly what Jesus did when He was physically here on the earth – to “come to our side” to strengthen and sustain us. But we even have an advantage over the disciples. While Jesus could “pass alongside” them in order to get into their boat, the Holy Spirit goes one step further. He does not just “get into our boat” – He “gets into our lives!” Listen to these astounding words of promise by the Lord Jesus:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be *with you forever* – the Spirit of truth. The world *cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him*. But you know Him, for He lives *with you* and will be *in you*. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...On that day (the day of Pentecost) you will realize that I am *in My Father*, and *you are in Me* and *I am in you*” (John 14:15-20).

What an incredible promise! What a wonderful experience! To have the very Person of Christ living *in us* through His Holy Spirit! No other religious leader in history ever even suggested that he would be able to do that. Not Buddha. Not Mohammed. Not Krishna. Only Jesus Christ. He alone is the true

and living God who comes to “live inside us” – *forever!*

It is also important to realize that when Jesus came to His disciples in the midst of their storm, they had already been rowing and “straining at the oars” for several hours. By the time He caught up with them, it was the “fourth watch of the night” (Matthew 14:25), or somewhere between 3:00 a.m. – 5:00 a.m. John tells us that the disciples had “...rowed three or three and a half miles” – or about halfway across the Sea of Galilee (John 6:19). Think about it. That means that Jesus walked over three miles on the surface of the water – just as effortlessly as if it was one of the well-trodden paths along the Sea of Galilee! Through His supernatural power, the water had become *terra firma* under His feet!

This was no fleeting, momentary experience whereby Jesus, for a few brief seconds, stood on the waters as if they were solid ground. No, He casually walked over the top of the churning waters and angry sea as effortlessly as you and I walk on land! He unhurriedly walked out to them in the middle of the lake as the One who had created all the waters of the world. And while the elements of H<sub>2</sub>O defy our ability to walk upon them, He did so with divine ease.

In my younger days, I was an experienced water skier. In addition to regular skiing, I did ski-jumping and trick skiing. While I tried “barefoot skiing” many times, I never mastered it due to my size and weight. I could kick my skis off for a brief few seconds and speed across the surface of the water a short distance on the bottoms of my feet. But very quickly the laws of gravity would take over and I would begin

to sink into the water – tumbling head-over-heels because of the high speed the boat was traveling that had been pulling me! Believe you me, the watery landing was always very rough!

When Jesus walked on the water, this was not some millisecond suspension of the laws of gravity so He could stand on top of the water for a brief fleeting moment. No. Jesus was not frantically “treading water” with His feet to stay on top of the surface long enough to feign Deity. Instead, He walked over 3 miles on the surface of rough and stormy waters as effortlessly as He walked on land! Certainly another clear proof of His Deity. And yet, He did not do this in the middle of the day or in the presence of the multitudes He had earlier dismissed. This was not a supernatural manifestation for the curious. It was a sign only for His disciples to bolster their faith. So in this miracle, we once again see how Jesus never performed public signs and wonders just to prove His Deity or draw attention to Himself. Often His greatest signs were only for those who had already put their faith in Him.

By walking on the water, Jesus was demonstrating to His disciples that the “buffeting waves” that were threatening to sink their ship were already under His feet! As noted Bible Teacher, Major Ian Thomas often says: “Everything that threatens to be over your head is already under His feet!”

But the disciples still had the same reaction you or I would have had: “When they saw Him walking on the lake, *they were terrified!* ‘It is a ghost!’...they cried out in fear!”

But then Jesus said: "*It is I*, don't be afraid" (Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50; John 6:20). Literally Jesus said: "I AM." In the original Greek, the phrase is *ego eimi*. It is the identical phrase He used when He proclaimed: "Before Abraham was born, *I am*" (John 8:58) – after which the Jews took up stones to kill Him for blasphemy, or proclaiming to be God. Those Jews clearly knew from their Scriptures that God had said this of Himself on a number of occasions – and that it was a clear proclamation of Deity. So they fully understood that Jesus was saying nothing short of: "*I am* the God that Abraham put his faith in. *I am* the God that said to Moses '*I am that I am*.' Do you want to know who *I am*? *I am He*" (see Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 51:12; 52:6).

This is the phrase that John records Jesus as using on a number of other occasions when He made clear proclamations of Deity through word and deed: "*I am* the bread of life...*I am* the light of the world...*I am* the gate for the sheep...*I am* the Good Shepherd...*I am* the resurrection and the life...*I am* the way the truth and the life...*I am* the true vine" (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; c.f. Jn. 8:24; 13:19; 18:5-6).

These "I am's" of Christ are either the words of Deity or insanity! They are either the clear words of God in human flesh, or they are the words of a deranged individual who was suffering from chronic megalomania and delusions of grandeur! As has often been pointed out, these bold proclamations leave us with only three logical choices about the person of Christ. He was either a *liar*, a *lunatic*, or the *Lord* of the universe! Reason will not allow any other alternative. Our salvation and destiny, like that of the



disciples on the Sea of Galilee, totally depend upon which choice we make!

The many “I am’s” recorded by John are one of the great proofs He sets forth for the clear Deity of Jesus. There is no other logical explanation or Scriptural interpretation other than the inescapable truth that Jesus was clearly saying: “I am God!” And I trust that you have discovered Him to be that in your own life. That like the disciples during their stormy night, you too have had Jesus come to you and say: “*It is I*, do not be afraid.”

In the darkest and most dangerous time of their storm, Jesus walked out to His disciples on the water and said to them: “I AM!” In essence He was saying to them: “I am all you need!” You don’t need to look elsewhere. I am the all-sufficient Savior. *It is I*, don’t be afraid. All that you need right now, *I am*.” And just as He proved Himself to be totally sufficient for them, He will do the same for you. He has not changed. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

It is interesting that only after Jesus said this to them to assure them that He was not a ghost...a watery phantom...a figment of their terrified imaginations that “...they were willing to take Him into the boat” (John 6:21). That fact provokes the questions: “Have you also invited Jesus into the boat of your life...marriage boat...your business boat during your time of storm? Or are you trying to ‘ride it out’ by yourself?” I trust that you have invited the Lord Jesus into the boat of your life to help you through your latest “storm of life.”

But there was one other very important incident that took place before Jesus got into the boat. As usual, impetuous Peter made a bold request. He was still not certain that this person who had approached their storm-tossed boat was the Jesus that they knew. This “walking on the water” was totally new to all of them! While they had seen Jesus perform some amazing miracles, this was something completely new! This was really a “new direction” in ministry for Him! Not only had Jesus never done anything like this before in their presence, no one in human history had ever walked on water before! So in his mind there was only one way to know for sure if it was really Jesus and he “bet his life on it.” He wanted Jesus to prove who He was by giving him the same power to “walk on water.” With impetuous faith, Peter said:

“Lord, *if it is You*...tell me to come to You on the water” (Matthew 14:28-29).

In response to that challenge by Peter, Jesus simply said: “Come.” And we all know the rest of the story. But let’s still read the account again as a refresher:

“Then Peter got down out of the boat, *walked on the water* and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’

Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ He said, ‘why did you doubt?’”

Even though Peter’s faith did not last very long on the waves, this storm for him became a “Storm of

Destiny." From that night on, his destiny would be forever tied with the fact that he is the only other man in human history to "walk on water!" Even if Peter had only walked a few steps on the water, it was still more steps than the other disciples had made! His bold impetuous faith separated him from the other disciples who preferred the false security of their storm-tossed boat to "stepping out on the waters."

When it comes to Peter's brief experience of "walking on the water," we've all heard many sermons about how he began to sink into the stormy waters when he took his eyes off the Lord. Certainly a point well taken. Regardless of whether we are walking on water or walking on land, we begin to sink when we take our eyes off the Lord Jesus. When we cease to focus on Him, we soon begin to sink down into the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Few if any of us will ever find ourselves sinking down in water after briefly walking on it like Peter. But we may find ourselves sinking down into the many destructive storms of *self: self-absorption ...self-will ...self-assertion ...self-centeredness ...self-seeking ...self-indulgence ...self-reliance ...self-defense ...self-pity ...self-loathing ...self-condemnation*. Regardless of which "self-sin" you find yourself sinking into, it will ultimately lead to *self-destruction!*

But everything changed when Jesus got into their boat. Listen to this wonderful account...

"And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat *worshiped Him*, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God'" (Matthew 14:28-33).

It was truly a “Storm of Destiny” for Peter and the other disciples. That dark and stormy night, they discovered in a deeper way than ever before who Jesus really was:

“They *worshipped Him* saying, ‘Truly You are the *Son of God!*’” (Matthew 14:33)

We, too, can hear Him in the midst of our storm saying: “*It is I*, don’t be afraid!”

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, only Mark summarizes this account with these intriguing words:

“They were completely amazed (literally “out of their minds”) for they had not understood about the loaves; *their hearts were hardened*” (Mark 6:52).

Mark alone gives us crucial insight into this incredible event. He interprets for us *why* the disciples were “completely amazed,” *why* this experience on the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night literally “blew their minds!” He said that the disciples “...did not understand” all of this because “...their hearts were *hardened*.”

But we must be careful how we interpret this phrase because of how it is used at other places in the Bible – at least in the English translations. The word Mark used here for “hardened” in the original is from the noun, *porosis*. It literally means “a hardening.” But Mark uses it metaphorically to mean “dull in understanding.” In other words, he tells us that the disciples just “didn’t get it!” That they were “slow in their understanding.”

So, in this context, it does not mean that they were *willfully hardened* – like Pharaoh (Exodus 7:13; Romans 9:17) – because they *did not want to understand*; but that they were just *slow in their understanding*. Their minds and spirits were just slow to “catch on.” They were dull in their comprehension of *who* Jesus really was...that He was more than just another ordinary man...that He was not just a great teacher or miracle worker but that He was “God in human flesh.” And let’s face it, that truth would be hard for anyone in any century to understand!

We often say the same thing about a child in school that is “slow to understand” a certain new concept. It is not that they are dull, ignorant or stupid. It is just that they are “slow to catch on.” Things have not “clicked” in their brain. The mental synapses have not yet taken place. At that point of truth, they have not yet been “enlightened.” As we often say, “the light has not yet turned on.” It is not that they have not *heard* the truth, it is just that they have not yet *comprehended* it. That was the situation here, says Mark, with the disciples.

So just like us, they did not quickly “connect the dots” between this event and what had occurred just a few hours earlier. In their dark and stormy hour, they forgot that Jesus had multiplied the loaves and fishes. They’d forgotten on the Sea what they had experienced on land! If they would have understood who Jesus was through the miraculous multiplication to feed the multitude, then they would have clearly understood who He was when He walked to them on the water.

Those fishermen should have clearly understood that if Jesus could multiply a few loaves and fish and feed a multitude of over five thousand people, then He could also supernaturally “walk on water” to meet them at their moment of need. For Jesus it would be no harder to transcend the natural laws He had created as God and supernaturally multiply food, than to supernaturally transcend the laws of gravity and “walk on water.” If He is the Lord of one realm, He is also the Lord of the other. His Lordship is not limited by any situation. Either He is Lord *of all* – or not Lord *at all*!

But the disciples had forgotten in the night what they had learned in the day. During their storm they had forgotten what they had experienced in the sunlight. Once again, they “forgot to remember.” Their minds and emotions were so focused on the fierce, contrary winds and waves all around them that they lost sight of Christ’s sufficiency. In the darkness of the storm they forgot what they had learned when the skies were blue. In the danger of the moment, they forgot their security in Christ. In their hours of being alone in the boat “straining at the oars,” they forgot the omnipresence of the true and living God – who was not going to “pass them by” in their hour of crisis.

With the newest crisis in which we find ourselves, we are just like the disciples. We also forget to “connect the spiritual dots” between who Jesus is and how He has manifested His supernatural sufficiency in past situations. How quickly our latest “storm of life” causes us to forget existentially what Jesus has done for us in the recent past. Like the disciples, no sooner do we “drop anchor” in some new situation than we fail to apply the lessons learned earlier.

And what is the primary lesson here? *No situation is too difficult for God to manifest His all-sufficiency through Christ.* No new storm is a challenge to His omnipotence. No circumstance cuts us off from His all-seeing eye that is lovingly fixed upon us – like that of a parent who never takes his or her eye off a dearly beloved child.

And just like Jesus “...saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them,” He also *sees you* in your time of need. He sees you right now “straining at the oars” of the storm in which you find yourself. He sees those contrary winds of adversity that are blowing against your life...your marriage...your business...your body. He wants to come to you – just as certainly as He came to the disciples in their storm – and manifest His Lordship over your circumstances.

Whether we need Him to supernaturally multiply resources to meet some urgent need or supernaturally transcend the natural laws in order to meet us at our point of darkness and danger, He is the GREAT “I AM!” He wants so show you that *everything that threatens to be over your head is already under His feet!*

**Principle:**  
**“Everything that threatens to be over your head  
is already under His feet!”**  
**(Major Ian Thomas)**

## EPILOG

This story ended like it began – with the *press of a needy crowd of people*. It was the ever-present throng of hurting humanity that caused Jesus to send His disciples across the lake for a time of solitude and rest in the first place. As we saw earlier, it was “...because so many people were coming and going,” that the disciples “did not even have a chance to eat” – that Jesus sent them across the lake. That’s why Jesus had said to them: “Come with Me *by yourselves* to a quiet place and get some rest.” And in obedience to Him, they tried to do just that. “They went away *by themselves* in a boat to a *solitary place*.”

However, as is so often the case – the needy people “...ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.” The “solitary place” suddenly turned into a teeming “marketplace” of seething human need! No rest there! It seems that as long as we are on planet earth, we will be constantly confronted with the press of needy people. And at the end of the day, meeting “people problems” is what ministry is all about.

After another time of ministry and miraculous manifestation by the Lord Jesus where He fed the multitude with five small loaves and two fish, Jesus again sent the disciples away to try and find that place of solitude and rest. But just when they were “tired to the bone” and fatigued beyond words, they encountered one of the fiercest storms of their lives. At the very time when they were physically and emotionally exhausted, they had to “...strain at the oars, because the wind was against them.” Finally in



the darkest hours just before dawn, Jesus came to them “walking on the water” – and rescued them from their distress and fears.

Now at last we would expect a “happy ending.” We would hope to find the disciples in that solitary place enjoying a time of much-needed rest. We would like to find them lounging around in some beautiful grassy place of solitude enjoying the rest and relaxation they had long anticipated – and well deserved. But it was not to be so. As is so often the case in ministry, just when you think you have nothing left to give, *needy people press in on ever side!* Note Mark’s account of what was awaiting them when they finally did get to their destination after an exhausting day of ministry – followed by a stormy night of struggle:

“When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. And *wherever He went* – into villages, towns or country side – they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged Him to let them touch even the edge of His cloak, and all who touched Him were healed” (Mark 6:53-56).

And so it continues to be so in a life of ministry to this very day and hour! It seems that almost anywhere you “drop anchor”, a multitude of need will be awaiting you if you have a heart of love and compassion for people. You can’t escape it – and shouldn’t try. For Jesus it was the same “...wherever He went.” And it will be the same for any minister worth his salt or light!

It is our *destiny* as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But when the Lord Jesus does tell you to “take some time off” and “get away by yourself” – as He did the disciples in this story – *do it!* It may not turn out to be exactly what you had wanted or expected. It may not meet all of your fantasies or expectations. But when God does sovereignly and graciously give you those fleeting moments or days of solitude, enjoy them to the hilt without any sense of guilt! They are from His providential hand – just as the needy multitudes also are. Find His sufficiency in both situations. He is both the *Lord of the multitude* as well as *Lord of the solitude*.

For the disciples, this second storm became their “Storm of Destiny.” Through it, they not only discovered afresh the *deity* of the Lord Jesus, they discovered their own *destiny* as His followers. They learned that *wherever* they would go in life, they would constantly face the ever-present press of needy humanity. It is part and parcel of the call of ministry. It was their *destiny* as His disciples! And it is our *destiny* also.

Therefore, the *destiny of discipleship* is meeting needs in the Name of Christ wherever you find them. Regardless of which side of the Sea of Galilee you are on or whether you are across the Atlantic, Pacific or Indian Ocean, you will confront needy multitudes who need the loving and compassionate touch of Jesus – through *you!* Whether you are across the

street...across the nation...or across the world, you will find hoards of hurting humanity! It matters not

whether it is sunshine or stormy weather, they will be waiting for you. Don't turn them away – or run away. Reach out to them and touch them in the Name of Christ. And through it all He has promised to be your great "I AM!" He says to you what He said to them: "It is I, don't be afraid."



## THE STORM OF *DESTRUCTION*

The Bible clearly reveals that God at times brings a “*Storm of Destruction*” against the ungodly and disobedient. These various storms in the *natural realm* are His instruments of punishment and judgment from the *supernatural realm*. God is obviously the Creator and Lord of both realms.

In the opening chapter of this book we looked at the fundamental principle that teaches: “*Everything in the natural realm was created by God to teach us about the supernatural realm.*” In other words, everything that we can see with our physical eyes was created by God to teach us about the reality of a greater and higher universe that we can only see through our spiritual eyes. Since we know things empirically through our five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling, we have the delusion that only the things in the natural realm are really *real*. We have been led to believe that only these physical things have *objective reality* – and can therefore be “proven” by science.

By contrast, we have often been taught that everything else outside this physical realm is purely *subjective* and cannot be proven by the empirical methodology. Therefore, the realities of the spiritual realm are seen as completely subjective, imaginary, fantasy, ephemeral, evanescent, ephemeral, illusory. This is the realm of wish-fulfillment...fanciful thinking...vain imagination...fairy tale...science fiction – but not true science. While the natural realm is seen

as the exclusive domain of science, the supernatural realm is seen as the realm of metaphysics, mysticism, magic, pseudoscience and faith.

Nothing could be further from the truth! That belief is the illusion of *scientism*, or the 'religion of science,' rather than the findings of authentic *science*. It is the religion of modernity ushered in by the 'Age of Enlightenment' that replaced *divine revelation* with *human reason*.

But the Bible clearly teaches that Christ is the Creator of both realms. As Paul wrote:

“For by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...*all things were created by Him and for Him*. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17).

Both the *natural realm* and the *supernatural realm* were created by Christ – and He uses both realms to accomplish His foreordained purposes. So, a part of the “all things” that Christ created are storms. And since He “holds all things together,” storms in the natural realm are an expression of Him “loosening His grip” on the natural elements to the degree that they express themselves with a restrained fury. Even so, all natural storms are held in check by God’s sovereign control. They are what we might rightly call “sovereign storms.” God only lets them go so far. He only allows them to unleash part of their potential and power. Like soldiers from His heavenly army, He does not release them all simultaneously into ‘active duty’ on planet earth. If He did, nothing would survive their fury! He permits only limited amounts of rain...

lightning...snow...hail...wind...fires...tornados...typhoons...title waves...tsunamis...hurricanes to express themselves. Just like the devil is on a leash that God firmly controls, storms are also constrained by His omnipotent hand.

But the Bible teaches that one day, in final judgment, God will unleash all of His 'natural agents' in wave after wave of assault on this cosmos. The ultimate result will be that everything ungodly will be destroyed and consumed. And until that time, all of the 'storms of life' are but the first fruit of the full harvest of judgment yet to come against planet earth. Between now and then, all of God's children will face periodic storms of greater or lesser intensity – as we have been seeing in this study. And not all storms are the same in origin and intent. In fact, many storms are created by our disobedience and resistance to God's loving chastening. Listen to what He said through Solomon:

"If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have not poured out My heart to you and made my thoughts known to you and made My thoughts known to you. But since you rejected Me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out My hand, since you ignored all My advice and would not accept My rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock you – when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when distress and trouble overwhelm you" then they will call to Me but I will not answer; they will look for Me but will not find Me" (Proverbs 1:23-28). Sobering words of warning indeed!

But whereas God allows His faithful followers to go through the “*Storms of Disappointment . . . Discipleship . . . Discipline . . . Discover . . . Destiny*”, He will ultimately only permit the ungodly and disobedient to face His final “*Storms of Destruction*.” This ultimate storm of human history will be the final unleashing of God’s unmitigated *wrath* against all ungodliness in the world.

The Psalmist rightly reminds us that the natural elements are God’s servants to accomplish His purposes. He speaks of the “...lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that *do His bidding*” (Psalm 148:8).

The prophet Habakkuk wrote about how God at times manifests His judgment through mighty storms:

“Torrents of water swept by; the *deep roared* and *lifted its waves* on high...You *trampled the sea* with your horses, *churning the great waters*” (Habakkuk 3:10, 15)

Job spoke of this same truth about God’s sovereign use of storms to execute His judgment:

“How often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out? How often does *calamity come upon them*, the fate God allots in His anger? How often are they like straw before the wind, like chaff *swept away by a storm?*” (Job 21:17-18; c.f. 27:11ff).

With similar words, David speaks of the “Storm of Destruction” that the wicked face:

“Make them like tumbleweed, O My God, like chaff before the wind. As fire consumes the forest or a flame sets the mountains ablaze, (Sounds like the many annual California forest fires!) so pursue them with Your tempest and *terrify them with Your storm*. Cover their faces with shame SO THAT men will seek Your Name O Lord (Note here the purpose of this storm)...Let them know that You, whose Name is the Lord – that You alone are the Most High over all the earth” (Psalm 83:13-18).

The prophet Nahum also pictured God's coming wrath as an inescapable “Storm of Destruction” upon the ungodly:

“The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on His foes and maintains His wrath against His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. *His way is in the whirlwind and the storm...*Who can withstand His indignation? Who can endure His fierce anger? *His wrath is poured out like fire...*” (Nahum 1:2-6).

Likewise, Isaiah spoke of God's pending judgment against the pride, prosperity, and drunkenness of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was going to bring their Assyria enemies against them like a raging storm:

“Like a *hailstorm* and a *destructive wind*, like a *driving rain* and a *flooding downpour*, He will throw it forcefully to the ground...woe to



you...the city where David settled! Suddenly, in an instant, the Lord Almighty will come with *thunder* and *earthquake* and *great noise*, with *windstorm* and *tempest* and *flames* of a *devouring fire*" (Isaiah 28:2; 29:1, 6).

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God said His judgment was going to be poured out like a "storm of destruction" upon the false prophets of Israel. This ancient judgment against spiritual heresy is similar to that which has come against the many immoralities and financial extravagances of some of the false prophets, media prima donnas and prosperity preachers in our day. God has been judging many of the extremes and excesses of the "Health and Wealth Gospel" that *guarantee* peace and prosperity in this life – as well as in the life to come. But that's an unbalanced and unbiblical message. God's standards of righteousness and holiness have not changed – especially for Christian leaders. Note these searing words from centuries ago that have such contemporary relevance.

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: 'Hear the word of the Lord!...Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!...Their visions are false and their divinations a lie.' They say, "*The Lord declares*," when the Lord has not sent them; yet they expect their words to be fulfilled. Have you not seen false visions and uttered lying divinations when you say, "*The Lord declares*," though I have not spoken?

Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says:  
“Because of your false words and lying visions,  
I am against you...My hand will be against the  
prophets who see false visions and utter lying  
divinations...”

Because they lead my people astray, saying,  
“Peace,” when there is no peace, and because,  
when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with  
whitewash, therefore tell those who cover it  
with whitewash that it is going to fall. *Rain will  
come in torrents, and I will send hailstones  
hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth.*  
When the wall collapses, will people not ask  
you, “Where is the whitewash you covered it  
with?”

Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says:  
*“In my wrath I will unleash a violent wind, and  
in my anger hailstones and torrents of rain will  
fall with destructive fury. I will tear down the  
wall you have covered with whitewash and will  
level it to the ground so that its foundation will  
be laid bare. When it falls, you will be  
destroyed in it; and you will know that I am the  
Lord. So I will spend My wrath against the wall  
and against those who covered it with  
whitewash...those prophets of Israel who  
prophesied to Jerusalem and saw visions of  
peace for her when there was no peace,”*  
declares the Sovereign Lord. (Ezekiel 13:1-16)

But as tragic as the past “Storms of Destruction” were  
against ancient Israel and her false prophets, the  
Bible says there is yet coming the greatest and most

powerful storm of all against Israel. This political “storm against Israel” will not be led by the ancient Assyrians or Babylonians. This future storm will be a worldwide confederacy of nations led by Gog and Magog:

“You and all your troops and the many nations with you will go up, *advancing like a storm*; you will be like a cloud covering the land . . .

“You will come from your place in the far north, you and many nations with you...a great horde, a mighty army. You will advance against My people Israel like a cloud that covers the land...I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I show Myself holy through you before their eyes.

“...When Gog attacks the land of Israel, My hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign Lord. In My zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a *great earthquake* in the land of Israel...and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at My presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog ...I will execute judgment upon him...I will pour down *torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur* on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. (Note: There will be a growing crescendo of natural disasters orchestrated by God that will manifest His holy wrath and bring about His final judgment). And so I will show My greatness and My holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of

many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.” (Ezekiel 38:9-23)

## EPILOG

The past and future coming “Storms of Destruction” that we read about in the Bible are meant as a warning to us today – just as they were to the ancient world.

As the prophet Hosea warned, if we foolishly and disobediently “sow the wind,” then we will surely “reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7; 10:13; Proverbs 22:8; Isaiah 66:15; Nahum 1:3) – which is a devastating “Storm of Destruction” in any generation! I remind you that a “whirlwind” is a swirling funnel-shaped wind of great velocity that sucks everything up into its violent vortex – and then scatters the mangled debris in its wake. This is very similar to the destruction wrought by a hurricane.

While we may temporarily enjoy “sowing our wild oats” as we “cast all caution to the wind”, God says we will surely “reap the whirlwind” as a result. The Apostle Paul expressed it this way:

“Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked. *A man reaps what he sows.* The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7-8; c.f. Proverbs 5:22; 11:18; 14:14; 22:8; 26:27).

The Bible is a very realistic book. It clearly teaches the inviolate “Law of Sowing and Reaping” in both the

natural realm and spiritual realm. Science proves the same law – even though their empirical verification is limited just to the natural world. The Bible, however, is intensely practical. It assures us that we cannot “break God’s laws” – whether in the natural or supernatural realm. We only “break ourselves *against* God’s laws.” They are permanent and immovable. His laws are the fixed points on the compass. They are immutable and non-negotiable. That’s why Paul says it is sheer fantasy and self-deception to try and “mock God” by breaking His laws. We only “mock ourselves” since this kind of *self-deception* ultimately leads to *self-destruction*. That’s why Proverbs warns that the person who “sows the wind” with rebellious, sinful behavior only “...lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves” (Proverbs 1:16). In other words, *sin sabotages your own life!*

Let’s be honest here. *Sin is fun!* It appeals to all of our fallen natures. That’s the only reason that “sin sells.” It is *universally successful* because it is *universally fun!* Sin appeals to our fallen nature. It is attractive and alluring to our flesh. While the Bible teaches that there is “...*pleasure* in sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25), it also assures us that after that time of “sowing our wild oats” we will surely “reap the whirlwind.” In other words, our actions will come back upon us – in stormy spades!

We cannot avoid all storms in this life, but we can avoid this ultimate “Storm of Destruction” from God’s white-hot wrath that He will one day poured out in a purging judgment against everything that is an affront to His holiness. However, no true child of God need ever fear that storm of wrath. Why? “For *God did not appoint us to suffer wrath*, but to receive salvation

through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:9).  
Hallelujah!

Although *wrath* is only being stored up for the ungodly (I Thessalonians 2:16), believers are to be storing up their treasures in heaven – not on the earth. Why? Because the earth will one day all “go up in smoke” as a result of God’s fiery storm of judgment that will cover the whole earth. It will be a conflagration like nothing planet earth has ever experienced since the flood. The only difference is that it will be by *fire* this time – a worldwide wildfire. Nothing will escape its searing devastation. Note these sobering words of Peter about these “last days” that people of his day – and ours – disbelieve in:

First of all, you must understand that in the *last days* scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ He promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word *the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*” (II Peter 3:3-7)

At this point Peter hit the pause button to answer the scoffers who believed in the “law of continuity” that says that everything will continue to exist as it always has – in perpetuity. This assumption that Peter addressed was based upon the erroneous belief that

God is a prisoner of the very laws He has created. That meant that they believed that if there is a God of creation, He is bound by the laws of non-intervention. Therefore, He either *cannot*, or *will not*, become involved in His creation – either in redemption or judgment. Listen to Peter's response...

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: *With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.* The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. *He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*" (II Peter 3:8-9)

After reminding his readers and us about the love, mercy and grace of God that causes Him to exercise incredible patience, Peter assured them that this "age of grace" will not last forever. God's patience will one day run out. All who will repent will have done so. At that point the door of grace will be closed – and the door of wrath will be opened! God will then drop the curtain on human history in fiery judgment. He referred to this time, the time that will bring a close to the "last days", as the "day of the Lord." Note carefully how Peter described it:

"But the *day of the Lord* will come like a thief. *The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*" (II Peter 3:10)

Or to quote the NASV:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and *the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.*” (II Peter 3:10 NASV)

The English Standard Version renders it this way:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and *the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*” (II Peter 3:10 ESV)

While there are some slight variations in these translations, they all give the same sobering message about this coming fiery judgment on planet earth. They each say that the heavens and earth will be “destroyed by *fire*...destroyed with *intense heat*...will be *burned up* and dissolved.” A kind of fiery intensity like the world has never experienced is the common denominator here. It almost sounds like a description of nuclear fission on a worldwide scale!

While the people in Noah’s days had 120 years to repent and prepare for the watery judgment that was coming (Genesis 6:3; I Peter 3:20), this final “day of the Lord” will come suddenly – totally unexpected like a “thief in the night.” And just like the watery deluge that purged the earth during the days of Noah, this fiery conflagration will completely purge “...the earth and everything in it.”

But, remember that the flood did not “destroy the world” so that it ceased to exist. It only “washed



away” everything and everyone that was hostile to the purposes of God. In like manner, this future “purging by fire” will do the same.

Therefore, if everything is going to “go up in smoke,” how should that coming “Storm of Destruction” affect your lifestyle? Your priorities? How you accumulate material things? How you cling to possessions? How you stockpile money and hoard resources?

Good questions! And Peter gives a great answer – and one that is intensely practical:

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, *what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.* That day will bring about *the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.* But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, *make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him.* Bear in mind that *our Lord’s patience means salvation...*

Therefore dear friends, since you already know this, *be on your guard* so that *you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.* But *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior*

*Jesus Christ.* To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (II Pet.3:3-18).

There’s no way I can improve upon that – so I won’t try. All I will do is to lovingly exhort you to live with this mindset. Know in every fiber of your being that a fiery “Storm of Destruction” is coming upon our entire cosmos. Everything you have worked for and accumulated will “go up in smoke” if it is tied to this world.

How is your fire insurance? I can tell you that no earthly policy will cover your losses – regardless of how expensive the premiums or extensive the coverage! If that is the case, wisdom says to do as Jesus said: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...but *store up for yourselves treasures in heaven*” (Matthew 6:19-20). That’s the *only* Storm Insurance that covers ALL losses – whether through fire, water, hurricane or Tsunami! That’s an Eternal Insurance Policy worth having! It guarantees *100% protection against any loss*. It is the only Insurance Policy that offers *eternal security* – both for you and for your possessions – but only if the insurance premium was paid by Christ through His life, death and resurrection. Your possessions are only *eternally secure* if they have been stored in heaven!

I’m covered. How about you? Remember the wisdom of Proverbs 10:25:

“When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever.”



## THE STORM OF *DISCERNMENT*

It is safe to say that when a person's life is taken over by Christ, the heavenly invasion is so radical and life changing that it can be likened to a *spiritual storm*!

That is why on the Day of Pentecost, there was a sudden "...sound like the *blowing of a mighty rushing wind*," that "came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2). But the Holy Spirit of God does not come to "fill houses" – He comes to "fill people!" That's what He did at Pentecost – and that's what He has continued to do ever since for Christians who want to be filled with His presence, power and purpose.

Because of those 'heavenly winds,' the disciples rushed out and "stormed Jerusalem" for the Lord Jesus! That "mighty rushing wind" and those "tongues of fire" emboldened them with the power of the Holy Spirit so that nothing could stop them – neither ridicule, opposition, persecution, imprisonment nor death! That's the kind of thing that heavenly storms are sent by God to do. But we have to have *spiritual discernment* to see His sovereign and providential hand in the midst of these heavenly storms. Without that they just seem like natural phenomena, rather than supernatural manifestations and visitations.

We are not closing our study with the negative "*Storm of Destruction*" – but rather with the positive "*Storm of Discernment*."

This is the kind of ‘spiritual storm’ that blows into our lives and sweeps out the bad...the sinful...the unholy...the carnal...the immature...the fleshly...the trite...the trivial...the mundane...the mediocre! These sovereignly directed “divine winds” simultaneously blow us *toward God* as they blow us *away from the world*. That’s because before these heavenly storms come, we are blown by the popular and “prevailing winds” of our culture. Or in our spiritual immaturity we are “...tossed back and forth by the waves, and *blown here and there by every wind of teaching* and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14).

These ‘heavenly winds’ are purposeful. They are not in any way capricious or erratic – even though we might not immediately know their significance when they blow upon our lives. One thing is for sure however: they are orchestrated by a loving Father to blow us into His arms in full surrender! These heavenly prevailing winds are gentle – but decisive! These ‘spiritual storms’ manifest to us and to others that we are indeed born of God and are walking by His Spirit.

Let’s look at three ‘winds of the Spirit’ that blow across our lives as Christians and take us heavenward.



## THE WINDS OF SALVATION:

It is very interesting to note again that Jesus likened the work of the Holy Spirit to that of *wind*. Remember what He told Nicodemus.

“The *wind* blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

Jesus reminded Nicodemus – and us – that there is a *divine sovereignty* in both the natural wind and the spiritual wind. On a calm day, it is impossible to predict with certainty from which direction the winds will start to blow – whether from the north, south, east or west. But once the physical winds begin to blow, you can immediately detect the direction from which it is blowing by which way it drives and directs everything in its path. The leaves rustle and are blown in a particular direction. The heads of grain in the fields sway and tilt in response to the blowing of the wind. The waves and whitecaps on the water are blown and tossed about in response to the wind’s power. And if you are around a small airport, you will see the ‘windsock’ indicating the direction of the winds to show incoming planes how to make their approach. If the wind is strong enough and ‘at your back’, it will push and carry you along by its force.

It is the same with the “winds of the Spirit.” You cannot always anticipate where the Spirit of God will start to blow in the world – sovereignly sweeping people in the direction of the Kingdom. All you can do is either *ignore it . . . fight it . . . or flow with it*.

When you look at the ‘action verbs’ associated with the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, you can see this sovereign principle at work. The Bible teaches that the Spirit of God is like a “*fire that glows*” (Acts 2:3)...a “*wind that blows*” (John 3:8)...and a “*river that flows*” (John 7:38)! It is easy to see that each of these Biblical metaphors for the Holy Spirit reveal a *sovereign dynamic* that is totally outside of man’s control or manipulation. In each case we either “get into the Spirit” of what God is doing – or miss out on the joy of being “caught up in the Spirit” of what He is doing in the world at that particular time and place.

For almost 40 years of ministry, we have seen this principle at work in NDI. As a result, we have had the incredible privilege of being “in the flow” of what God’s Spirit is doing in many countries around the world – especially among the *unreached, under-reached, hard-to-reach* and *out-of-reach people groups*. It has been my personal privilege to experience many fresh Pentecosts as the Holy Spirit descended in power upon individuals and groups. We have had the incredible joy and awesome privilege of being “on the cutting edge” of where God’s Spirit is being sovereignly poured out to birth and grow His Church! And saints, it doesn’t get any better than that!

So the BIG QUESTION is this: “Are you in the Spirit’s *flow, blow* and *glow* – each of which will cause you to GO?!” You can’t “*walk* in the Spirit . . . *pray* in the Spirit . . . *sing* in the Spirit . . . *live* in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25; I Corinthians 14:15; Colossians 3:15; Ephesians 5:18; Jude 20, etc) – without *mobility* and *flexibility*! Things like tradition, rigidity and inflexibility often cause you to miss out on what God is doing. Those spiritual conditions cause you to

become satisfied and ossified! You become a 'sedentary saint' who sings "*Standing on the Promises*" while doing nothing more exciting than "*sitting on the premises!*" As the old expression says: "We become sot in our ways." Then the Spirit passes us by – leaving us to wonder about the emptiness of our Christian life and the barrenness of our witness. Or, in His sovereign love He dispatches a storm to *wake us up...shake us up... break us up...and stir us up!*

The Apostle Peter reminds us that we have the Bible because "...men spoke from God as they were *carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (II Peter 1:21). In similar fashion, it was because the Apostle John was "...in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" that he received his revelation from heaven on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:10).

If you are *aglow* because of the Spirit's *blow* and *flow* – He will keep you "on the go" for His honor and glory! In the process, the Lord's Spirit will constantly take you in exciting "new directions" in life!

#### THE WINDS OF SANCTIFICATION

But if these sovereign spiritual winds give evidence of our *salvation*, they also testify to the level of our *sanctification*.

These heavenly winds reveal whether we are just *hearers* of the word or *doers* of the word, whether we are just *talkers* or *walkers*. To quote James:

“Do not merely *listen* to the word, and so deceive yourselves. *Do what it says*” (James 1:22).

Jesus said that those who hear His words and put them into practice are “...like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” When the “...*rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house*; it did not fall.”

But He went on to warn about those who “...hear these words of Mine and do not put them into practice.” He said these hearers-but-not-doers were “...like a foolish man who built his house on sand” so that when the “...*rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house*, it fell with a *great crash!*” (Matthew 7:24-27).

It is important to note that strong storms came against both houses – that of the *hearer* and of the *doer*. No life is immune from adversity. But only one house was ‘storm proof’ because the occupant took proper preventive action. He moved from *information* to *application*. While he heard the sound of the wind, rain and rushing water, there was not a “great crash” that followed. Tragically, the loud “crashing sound” that Jesus warned of houses being destroyed during storms is heard as much in the spiritual realm as in the physical world! God permits these winds to show us the *quality* of our spiritual foundation, which brings me to my next point...

### THE WINDS OF GLORIFICATION

One day the winds of God will sweep us from this earthly life into heaven. This is known as the



“Rapture” when all living Christians will be “...*caught up*”<sup>\*\*</sup>...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (I Thessalonians 4:17; I Corinthians 15:52). It will obviously take some kind of powerful ‘supernatural storm’ to translate every living believer into the air to meet the Lord Jesus! Will we be translated in a “whirlwind” like the one that took Elijah up to heaven (II Kings 2:1)? I don’t know. It will be no harder for God to take all Christians in a whirlwind as it was for Him to take just Elijah. Numbers are insignificant to an omnipotent God! Regardless, this spectacular event will initiate the final stage of salvation, or the *glorification* of the believer.

Salvation, then, is a great redemptive continuum from *eternity past* to *eternity future*. It includes *justification*, *sanctification* and *glorification*. In other words, God’s “great salvation” (Hebrews 2:3) has 3 dimensions:

- *Justification*: “*I have been saved.*” (Past Experience)
- *Sanctification*: “*I am being saved.*” (Present Experience)
- *Glorification*: “*I will be saved.*” (Future Experience)<sup>††</sup>

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<sup>\*\*</sup> The word here in Greek is *harpazo*, meaning “to snatch or catch away.” It is used in regard to Philip when the Spirit “snatched him away” after his baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (**Acts 8:39**); of Paul in being “caught up to Paradise” (**II Corinthians 12:2,4**), and here of the “Rapture of the saints.” And the actual word “Rapture” comes from *rapturo* in the Latin Translation of the Bible.

<sup>††</sup> For a further summary of this cardinal subject you can download “God’s Great Salvation” from my Biblical Principles for Living website: [www.biblicalprinciplesforliving.com](http://www.biblicalprinciplesforliving.com).

When you consider how totally comprehensive God's salvation is, you can better understand Paul's words: "...where sin increased, *grace abounded* all the more" (Romans 5:20). And this "abundant grace" is God's work from start to finish. Paul further underscored God's sovereignty in salvation when he wrote:

"For those God *foreknew* He also *predestined* to be conformed to the likeness of His Son...And those He *predestined*, He also called; those He *called*, He also *justified*; those He *justified*, He also *glorified*" (Romans 8:29-30).

Those verses succinctly summarize the sequence of salvation from God's perspective. Note carefully the 'action words' of salvation on your behalf: *foreknew...predestined...called...justified...glorified*. And to what end? So that every believer would be "...conformed to the likeness of His Son." That is a *progressive transformation*. It does not all happen in a moment. A new believer does not become fully conformed to the likeness of the Lord Jesus overnight. It takes years. No, it takes a lifetime! That's why this 'present phase' of salvation that the Bible calls *sanctification* is usually in the *present tense*. That means that it is an on-going *process* rather than a one-time event. *Justification* on the other hand is a *past tense experience* – never to be repeated. One is the *crisis* while the other is the *process*. Justification opens the 'door of salvation.' Sanctification is the lifelong process of 'walking the walk' that justification makes possible – rather than just 'talking the talk.'

These three interrelated phases of salvation remind us of the important principle which says: “*A crisis that is not followed by a process leads to an abscess.*” In other words, when the *crisis of justification* is not followed by the *process of sanctification*, then there is a *spiritual abscess*, or what the Bible calls *spiritual immaturity...retarded Christianity...carnality...fleshly faith*.

It is always easy to spot a Christian who is not “walking by the Spirit” into greater levels of spiritual maturity. They are basically ‘worldly Christians.’ They still think like the world...act like the world...love the world...and passionately pursue the things of the world more than they “...seek *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33). And both their *Date Book* and *Check Book* reveal that neither God nor the advance of His Kingdom is a high priority in their expenditures of *time* and *money*.

**Principle:**

**“A crisis that is not followed by a process leads to an abscess.”**

God did not send His Son to die for us so we could continue to live out our lives “business as usual.” He did so in order that we would live from that moment on as “business as *unusual!*” Because He *died for us* we are to in turn *live for Him* – which is what *sanctification* is all about. And when *sanctification* has done its full work, we are *glorified* more and more into the image of Christ. We increasingly become like Jesus in how we think...talk...live...love...give. Note these powerful words of Paul:

“But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the *glory* of the Lord, are being *transformed* (sanctification) into the same image from *glory to glory* (glorification), which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (II Corinthians 3:18).

I trust that you have already seen the application of this quick overview of salvation to our study on the “Storms of Life.” I hope that you have been able to spiritually ‘connect the dots.’ Just in case you have not, the point is this: *God often has to bring storms into our lives to transform us to the image of the Lord Jesus.* That’s because we are all so prone to being *conformed to this world* (Romans 12:2). That’s why Paul exhorted:

“Do not *conform* any longer to the pattern of this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

Before our conversion, we all were “. . . dead in our transgressions and sin” and we “followed the *ways of this world*” (Ephesians 2:2). Tragically, even after conversion many Christians still live their lives just like the people of the world. As we have already seen, they basically have the same worldly values and priorities as non-Christians. They spend their lives playing the same trite games of ‘trivial pursuit.’ They rush around in their luxury cars, ‘hurrying big for little reasons!’ All of their energies are consumed in the accumulation of ‘things!’ Stuff. Buying toys and chasing pleasures that never bring lasting satisfaction. They prefer the latest ‘designer clothes’ to being clothed in the righteousness of Christ. And all of this

carnal living is in the vain ‘pursuit of *happiness*’—while God is eternally focused on their *holiness*!

Rather than being more and more *transformed* into the image of Christ, they are increasingly *conformed* to the world around them. As a result of these distorted values, God oftentimes has to ‘blow up a storm’ and bring it into their lives to arrest their attention and ‘stop them dead in their tracks!’ Sadly, it is often those ‘stormy encounters’ from God that gets our attention more quickly and decisively than His sunshiny ones!

**Principle**

**God often brings storms into our lives to transform us to the image of Christ, and keep us from being conformed to this world.**

God loves us far too much to every ignore us. He is a *Jealous God* who will not forever share us with other lovers (Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; 6:15; Joshua 24:19, etc). He did not redeem us at the cost of His beloved Son’s death on the cross just to let us live our lives as we choose. In case you missed it the first time, let me say it again: Salvation is not a life of ‘doing our own thing.’ That is what we were *saved from*. In the words of an old hymn, the Christian life is “*Living for Jesus, a life that is true, seeking to please Him in all that I do.*” It is being more and more *transformed* into His likeness “...from glory to glory.” Paul underscored this truth to the carnal, worldly Christians in Corinth this way:

“God is able to make all grace abound to you,  
SO THAT, in all things at all times having all  
that you need, you will *abound in every good*

*work*...Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also *supply* and *increase* your store of seed and will *enlarge* the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made *rich* in every way SO THAT you can be *generous on every occasion*, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God” (II Corinthians 9:8-11).

Unfortunately, those first century Christians were like so many twenty-first century Christians in that they were living rather selfish and self-indulgent lives! They were making themselves the center of their little world rather than the Lord Jesus. However, they still professed faith in Christ and enjoyed all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that were abundantly evident among them. But they were still ‘carnal to the bone!’ They had continued to be ‘babes in Christ.’ Immature. Worldly. As a result they were consuming most of their resources on themselves.

Apparently many of them even began to think that their success and material prosperity were the result of their own doing, that they were somehow the source of their own blessing and prosperity. But Paul reminded them that it was God who gave them the *supply of* seed to start with and then also gave them the *increase* from the sowing of the seed. It was also God who had *enlarged their harvest* and made them *rich in every way*. And all of that prosperity was SO THAT they would “...abound in every good work” and be “...generous on every occasion.”

In his earlier letter to the saints in Corinth, Paul had exhorted them in very vivid terms about the coming ‘fiery judgment’ of God upon all of the works of their

hands. Through the use of a construction metaphor, Paul reminded them that their material possessions were like ‘building materials’ they were using to construct houses with. And those houses would have eternal consequences for their *glorification*. Prayerfully ponder his words for your own life:

“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But *each one should be careful how he builds*. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using *gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw*, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be *revealed with fire*, and the *fire will test the quality of each man’s work*. If what he has built survives, he will receive his *reward*. If it is *burned up*, he will *suffer loss*; *he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames*” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

What could be plainer than that?! Here Paul wrote as an “expert builder” who had laid the spiritual foundation for the church in Corinth. Now he passed the hammer, chisel, trowel and plumb line to them. He told them that for the rest of their lives they would be building on the foundation that he had laid – “which is Jesus Christ.” He then named 6 different kinds of building materials that they could use on the superstructure of their spiritual house:

- gold
- silver
- precious stones

- wood
- hay
- straw

After listing these ‘building materials,’ he in essence said:

“Now as you build, don’t forget that a storm is coming! It will be the ultimate storm of history. It will usher in God’s Day – the “Day of the Lord.” And that storm will be a fiery one – so be careful how you build! Make sure you have good ‘Fire Insurance.’ Be careful to only build with materials that can pass the ‘fire test’ of God’s judgment!”

What happens when you put *gold, silver* and *precious stones* into fire? Nothing. They are only further *refined* and *purified*. That’s because they were basically born in the bowels of the earth under great pressure and intense heat. Fire only refines them. While fire burns out the impurities, it never destroys the basic elements. That’s why God speaks of Himself and His coming Day of Judgment as a “refiner’s fire” (Malachi 3:3). Because of His purifying love, God says that He causes His people to “pass through the fires” so that He can “...*refine them like silver* and *test them like gold*” (Jeremiah 9:7; Zechariah 13:9).

As any worker of fine metal or gemologist knows, the more the metal or precious stone is refined by fire and polished on the grinder, the better you can see your image in it. Get the point? God in essence is saying to each of His children:



“Before I am through with you, I will be able to see My perfect image in you. Make no mistake about it. You will be perfect. I will be able to look into your eyes ‘face-to-face’ and see the perfect reflection of My Son, the Lord Jesus. I love you too much to accept anything less. I cannot allow anything less than eternal perfection to enter into My heaven. So before I am through with you, I will completely restore My image in you that was marred and defaced by sin. And then I will be able to say of you what I said of My perfect Son, the Lord Jesus: ‘This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!’”

Isn't that exciting! Isn't it comforting to know in the midst of life's storms and times of fiery testing that this is what God is doing?! That His goal for you is that you “...become *mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:13). And that level of maturity and Christ-likeness only comes from building your life out of the eternal elements of “...gold, silver, precious stones.” Only these materials will survive the ‘storms of life.’ It is only these kinds of ‘spiritual building materials’ that will make it through the fire of God’s purgation and judgment.

By contrast, what happens when you put “*wood, hay and straw*” into the fire? Since they are ‘combustible materials’, they will burn. They quickly *ignite...catch on fire... consumed...burned up* – reduced to *ashes*!

That’s what Paul said would happen to the lives of carnal, fleshly, worldly Christians. The sum total of their lives would ‘go up in smoke’ and be reduced to a

worthless ‘pile of ashes!’ And the issue here is not *quantity* but *quality*. It is not a question of ‘how much’ – but rather ‘what kind.’ It is the difference between what is *worthy* and what is *worthless*...what has *substance* and what is *superficial*...what is *temporal* and what is *eternal*. And it is *fire* that makes the determination! Remember that the Bible is clear in revealing to us that “God is a *consuming fire*” (Hebrews 12:29). That simply means that one day He will *eternally consume* anything and everything that is contrary to His nature.

You see, the more we build with “wood, hay, straw” – the larger our pile of ashes will be on the day of our glorification at the Judgment Seat of Christ! And a ‘pile of ashes’ will not please or glorify Christ! Those ashes will not be worthy to lay at His nail-scarred feet. But the more we build with “gold, silver precious stones”, the greater our *reward* will be. The coming ultimate ‘Storm of God’s Judgment’ will result in either *reward* or *ruin*...*gain* or *loss*...*ashes* or *awards*. We will either hear Him say “Well done!” or “You fool!”

My concluding question is this: “*What kind of building materials are you using to construct your heavenly mansion? What kind of building materials are you sending ahead through your living and giving? Will they stand the test of time? Will they go through the fire and survive? Will they make it through the final ‘storm of life’ – whether at your death or at the Second Coming of the Lord?*”

In his beatific revelation of the “...Holy City, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,” John saw an eternal dwelling beyond description. And there was no “wood, hay or straw” in it! Listen to

his description as he sought to describe the indescribable:

“It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very *precious jewel*, like a *jasper clear as crystal*...The wall was made of *jasper*, and the City of *pure gold*, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of *precious stone*.”

Then, John goes on to describe the building materials in the foundation of that eternal City:

“...jasper ...sapphire ...chalcedony ...emerald ...sardonyx ...carnelian ...chrysolite ...beryl ...topaz ...chrysoprase ...jacinth ...amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls... The great street of the City was of *pure gold*, like transparent glass” (Revelation 21:9-21).

Not a trace of “wood, hay or straw” listed there! All of the building materials used are costly gem stones or precious metal. And that’s God’s Eternal City that every true believer is investing in through his life and labors. It will be the only thing left standing after God’s final storm of history! After the winds have ceased...the rains have stopped...the lightening quits flashing...the floods have subsided...the fires have died out – *only God’s Eternal City will remain*. Therefore, I trust you have your eternal reservation “written in blood” and fully paid for through the life, death, resurrection and glorification of the Lord Jesus. I hope and pray that you are building your life out of storm-proof and fire-proof materials!

The writer of that old beloved hymn, "My Hope is Built," rightly understood these truths and poignantly reflected them with these familiar verses:

"My hope is built on nothing less,  
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
but wholly trust in Jesus' Name.

Refrain:

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand,  
all other ground is sinking sand;  
all other ground is sinking sand.*

When *darkness* seems to hide His face,  
I rest on His unchanging grace.  
In every *high and stormy gale*,  
my anchor holds within the veil.

Refrain:

His oath, His covenant, His blood,  
support me in the *whelming flood*.  
When all around my soul gives way,  
He then is all my Hope and Stay.

Refrain:

When He shall come with trumpet sound,  
Oh may I then in Him be found.  
*Dressed in His righteousness alone,  
faultless to stand before the throne.*

Let me close our study of this last storm with those familiar brief words of summary – anonymously written, but eternally true:

*“Only one life t’will soon be past;  
only what’s done for Christ will last.”*



## SUMMARY OF LIFE'S STORMS

Truly, the Psalmist was right when he proclaimed:

"He makes the *clouds His chariot* and rides on the *wings of the wind*. He makes *winds His messengers, flames of fire His servants*" (Psalm 104:3-4).

Twice Jeremiah says of God:

"When He *thunders*, the waters in the heavens roar; He makes *clouds* rise from the ends of the earth. He sends *lightning with rain* and brings out the *wind* from His storehouses" (Jeremiah 10:13; 51:15-16).

Using similar words, Elihu said this in the Book of Job:

"He loads the *clouds* with moisture; He scatters His *lightening* through them. At His direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever He commands them. *He brings the clouds to punish men, or to water His earth and show His love*" (Job 37:11-13).

Those verses remind us that God sovereignly controls all of the natural elements He created. They are indeed "His servants" to do His bidding. So the Bible clearly teaches that God uses clouds, rain, wind, thunder, lightening and storms to bring both *pleasure* and *pain*. Sometimes God's storms come as gentle reminders of His providential love and grace; at other

times they come with destructive fury to unleash His judgment!

As we have seen throughout this study, God providentially designs some storms for His children to *test* and *try* them. His storms purge from our lives those things that are not eternal. God uses them to separate us from our love affair with the temporal, trite and trivial – so our lives will not one day be reduced to ashes.

The "Storms of Life" can reveal *God's wonder* or *God's wrath!* They can either be used as the *gentle warming* of His love; or a *global warning* of His anger!

He can either whisper to us through the gentle breezes; or He can scream at us through the violent winds! The choice is ours.

As we have watched storm after storm assault America and other parts of the world in the last few years, we are amazed at both the ability and limitations of science. Through our sophisticated radar and satellite tracking, meteorologists and scientists are able to give us 'advance warning' of a storm's approach. Because of these 'Early Warning Systems,' loss of life is often minimized. But only if the warnings are heeded. In the face of every storm, there are always those who choose to either ignore, or disobey, the warnings. And they often pay with their lives as a result.

In like manner, we have the absolutely accurate and trustworthy radar of God's revelation – the Bible. It has given all of us an accurate weather forecast of what we can expect in the months and years ahead

until Christ returns. His eternal 'Advance Warning System' clearly predicts a series of devastating "Storms of Destruction" coming upon the whole earth! No one living will escape their wrath. There will be worldwide devastation on a scale never before experienced on planet earth!

And Jesus clearly said that these natural disasters would be one of the major signs announcing His imminent return:

"There will be droughts, famines, earthquakes . . ." (Please note His following words) ". . . perplexity at the *roaring of the sea and waves*" (Luke 21:25).

As we saw in an earlier chapter, Jesus said these natural storms would come with increasing frequency and intensity. However, they would not be the *end* – but rather the ". . . *beginning* of the birth pangs" (Matthew 24:7). These "storms of life" will be heaven-sent with a clear purpose – to get our attention! They are to turn our love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus and to the purposes of His Kingdom. That's why Jesus said when we see these storms brewing in the natural universe: "Lift up your head, your redemption draws nigh!" (Luke 21:28).

Question: "*Are you ready for the Lord Jesus to come?*"

Whatever storms you have been through in the past; whatever storms you are in right now; whatever storms you will face in the future – only Jesus can be your *sure anchor* and *secure harbor*! Only "in Christ" can you find a ". . . shelter from the storm" (Isaiah



25:4). That's why the writer of Hebrews speaks of our hope in Jesus Christ as the one and only "...*anchor for the soul*, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:10).

The true child of God need never fear this final "Storm of Judgment" that will come upon the whole earth. The prophet Nahum wrote:

"The Lord is good, a *refuge in times of trouble*. He cares for those who trust in Him, but with an *overwhelming flood*...He will pursue His foes into darkness" (Nahum 1:7-8).

My friend, I trust that the Lord Jesus is your "...refuge in times of trouble." Make no mistake about it, the Christian life does not exempt you from experiencing "times of trouble." There will be periods of darkness. Sometimes they will be brief. At other times they will seem unending. That's why the saints of old called them the "Dark Night of the Soul." These stormy times of darkness and danger are part and parcel of the Christian life because we live in a fallen and rebellious world where everything is spiritually upside down and the natural realm is out-of-balance. So storms will come. Get braced for them. But while *storms will come*, they can be *overcome* – which will lead to a glorious *outcome*!

**Principle:**  
**"In this life storms will come.**  
**But storms that are overcome will lead to a**  
**glorious outcome!"**

Many of our contemporary praise songs and choruses are rather trite and mundane when it comes to the eternal verities of God. They are what I call "Spiritual

Champagne Music” – bubbly and bright with little content! They are designed to give you a quick ‘spiritual high’ and make you ‘feel good.’ Many are what some of us call ‘7/11 Music’: brief songs composed of about 7 words that are sung 11 times – if you are lucky! Sometimes they are repeated seventy-times-seven times! Even after endless repetition, there is little lasting impact.

But some of the hymn writers of old had a much more realistic and robust faith and they reflected that in their music. They knew that every believer would experience the “storms of life” and go through periods of turmoil and darkness. A good example is the great old hymn, *O Worship the King*. The second stanza says:

“O tell of His might, O sing of His grace,  
Whose robe is the light, Whose canopy space;  
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds  
form,  
And *dark is His path on the wings of the storm.*”

With a similar theme, Edward Mote penned the words of the beloved hymn, *On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand*.

“When darkness seems to hide His face,  
I rest on His unchanging grace.  
*In every high and stormy gale,*  
my anchor holds within the veil.”

It is interesting that these are the second stanzas of both of these great old songs of the faith. The first stanzas of both hymns are very positive, God-

centered, and extol the power, love and grace of Christ. But they do not stop there. They are far more realistic in their portrayal of the Christian life. So their second stanzas, in essence, say:

“The storm is coming! It will be ominous and threatening. It will be a time of darkness and danger. The dark clouds may be so thick and intense that they will seem to enshroud you and cut you off from God. But don’t be afraid. Don’t doubt. Don’t panic. Morning is coming! The light will dawn and it will shine brighter and brighter into that perfect eternal cloudless day!”

It was this reality of God’s steadfast love in the midst of a storm that caused David to sing in one of his Psalms:

“Sing to the Lord, you saints of His; praise His holy name. For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime; *weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.*”

When I felt secure, I said, ‘I will never be shaken.’ O Lord, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.”

Thankfully, David does not end during His ‘Dark Night of the Soul’ when it seemed as if God had “hid His face.” He did not end in darkness and dismay. He called out to God, and the Lord heard him. As a result David exclaimed:

“You turned my wailing into *dancing*; you removed my sackcloth and *clothed me with joy...*” (Psalm 30:5-11).

Beloved, that’s what Jesus came to do. He came to meet you and minister to you in your storm. As one of the Messianic prophecies promised, He came to “... comfort all who mourn.” So as you “mourn in your storm,” Jesus promised to take you through victoriously to the other side. And there He will give to you...

“...a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”

While your storm may leave you with some ashes, your relationship with Him is totally secure. That’s why this Messianic Psalm goes on to say:

“He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:2-3, 10).

That’s what He has promised to do for you through your “storm of life!” Remember that He loves you with an everlasting love. Jesus promised that nothing or no one can snatch you from His Father’s hand (John 10:28). He has you in His ‘eternal grip’ – and no storm can wash you out of His nail-scarred hands!

Let me close by reminding you of the story of the beloved hymn *It Is Well with My Soul*. It was written by a successful businessman, Horatio Spafford. He had sent his wife and daughters on a trip to England

by ship. He was to follow them later. The ship went down at sea in a great storm and many were drowned. His wife was saved however and sent him a brief telegram upon her arrival in London. It simply said: "Saved alone." When he read it, his heart was broken. He knew his beloved daughters were lost at sea.

As soon as possible he left by ship to join his wife. When he was at about the place where the ship was sunk, he looked into the deep dark waters and penned these words:

"When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
*when sorrows like sea billows roll;*  
whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul."

That's my prayer for you my friend. I trust that whatever storm you have gone through and whatever you have lost, it is still "well with your soul!" That's why this song written in the 'Dark Night of the Soul' finally resounded with praise. Sing those words in your heart to the Lord as the closing prayer of this book:

*"Though Satan should buffet,  
tho' trials should come,  
let this blest assurance control,  
that Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
and hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

My sin – O, the bliss of this glorious thought,  
my sin – not in part but the whole,  
is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,  
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And, Lord, haste the day  
when the faith shall be sight,  
*The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,*  
the trump't shall resound  
and the Lord shall descend,  
even so – it is well with my soul!”

Thank you for braving some of the “storms of life” with me in this study! It has been an honor to ‘weather these storms’ with you through the Word of God and Spirit of God. Now with your spiritual anchor securely fastened to Him, I pray that you will reach out to others who are being devastated by life’s storms. And just as Jesus has ministered to you in your storm, I pray that you will minister to others in their storms in the love and compassion of the Lord Jesus!

It’s amazing how many of the old hymns and Gospel songs are about storms! That’s because they are more realistic to life than some of our more modern “feel good” choruses. Now, one final ‘stormy hymn’ entitled: *We Have An Anchor* . . .

“Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,  
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?  
when the strong tides life,  
and the cables strain,  
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

Refrain:

We have an anchor that keeps the soul,  
steadfast and sure while the billows roll,  
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,  
grounded firm and deep in the Savior’s love.

It is safely moored, 'twill the storm withstand,  
for 'tis well secured by the Savior's hand;  
though the tempest rage  
and the wild winds blow,  
not an angry wave shall our bark o'er flow.

Refrain:

When our eyes behold  
through the gathering night,  
the city of gold, our harbor bright;  
we shall anchor fast by the heavenly shore,  
*with the storms all past forevermore."*

## PRAYER

Father, thank you that you have given these natural storms to teach us about the spiritual storms of life. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that in Your relentless love You never ignored us. We praise You that Your grace is manifested through the storms You bring against the ungodly to get their attention . . . to destroy their false foundations . . . to drive them to dependence upon you . . . to cause them to let go of the things of this world that so quickly can be blown away or eternally lost through death. Thank You Father, that You bring those storms because of Your mercy and desire to bring them to faith and salvation. And yet, Lord, thank You also that You continue to bring storms in our lives as Christians – to blow away the carnal . . . to wash away the infantile . . . to purge us of self . . . to loosen our grip on all of those things that we become so enamored with in this fleeting life.

Forgive us for so often being double-minded Christians who are tossed and blown about by every wind of doctrine because we are not firmly anchored in Your Word. Please use the storms of life to blow us along in our journey to become single-minded Christians who will grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Lord Jesus.

Thank You that Jesus is our steadfast Rock that we can anchor our lives to and be eternally secure in Him. Now Father, anchor us, Your people, on this Rock of the Lord Jesus through this study so that whatever storms may come our way, we will have an anchor that is as secure as You are, our eternal, steadfast, immovable God. And to You alone we give all the glory and honor! Amen.

