

Storms In Your Life

How is your life going? Do you have any storms in your life? Maybe you feel like, "I do not have storms, I have tsunamis, I have earthquakes, I have whirlwinds, I have tornados, it is not just a storm." I will tell you, there are storms always coming in your life. I would like to tell you, "No, get Jesus in your heart. Make Him your Lord and Savior and life is good and you just kick back and wait until it is time for you to go up there." That is not real life, is it? Sometimes when you take a stand for the Lord, the storm is harder, the fight is harder because there is an opposition. There is an opposition to the mission anytime you try to do anything for God. We have a real enemy. You know his name. It is Satan. He hates you because he hates God and you belong to God. If you are going to get back at somebody, you can go after their children and get you because it is your weakness, it is your love. I am not saying God is weak. I do not mean that, but I just mean it is His tender spot. Also, when you are serving God you have to be a very strong person. When I talk to you about putting God first in your life, find your purpose in life, it is going to be great, you are going to love it, I mean it. I have also told you that the Bible says, "Count the cost before you go it." Does that keep you from doing it if you count the cost? No, it does not, not if you are sold out to God. At the same time, you need to be forewarned and forearmed. Do you know the old saying, forewarned is forearmed?

Today we are going to talk about the storms in your life. We are going to talk about embracing the storms in your life. Think about what a storm is. Have you ever, ever been in a tornado? Where we live in Texas we have tornados? What do you have in your part of the world? We have tornados.

What are they like? They can come out of nowhere but you usually have a little bit of warning. In fact we have tornado warnings in our town and once a month, at the end of the month on Friday, they sound the tornado alarm to make sure it is working. When you hear it, you can hear it all over town. It means to take cover, prepare, get ready, and watch out for danger. It is a real loud noise.

When a tornado comes, what is it like? I have never been in one but I have been in a place where a tornado went over the building. It was a miracle. We were in a Wednesday night church service and there were tornado warnings. In a tornado you have to be in the right kind of building. You do not want to be near glass or windows. You need to be in a very sturdy part of the building. If you cannot and you cannot do anything else you get in a hallway and cover yourself up with a mattress.

I have done that with my children before. Ran and grabbed a mattress off the bed and covered ourselves up until we knew it was safe. However, this one time, we were at church. The tornado siren went off and there were about 1,000 of us in there. We could not all jump in our cars and run home and run for safety because one of the things they tell you with a tornado is, do not get caught in your car. If you are in your car, get out and find a low place by the side of the road to protect yourself. We were in this church. Our pastor said, "We need to pray. We have just received word that a tornado is headed right here and it should hit at any minute. We need to pray." You talk about praying; there was some praying done in that building right then. There was not any, "I do not know how to pray." It was like, "Oh Jesus, help us." You can hear a tornado coming. It sounds like a freight train. It is really loud, but it sounds like a freight train going by. You can kind of hear that with a tornado and it was coming, coming, coming. We were praying so hard. About the time it should have hit, nothing happened, and then we heard the freight train going on. Later we found out that some people who could see what was going on said, "It came, it went up over the building, went down and kept going." It caused no destruction whatsoever. What a storm to be a part of, but what a storm to find out God can tell you what to do in a storm. God can encourage you in a storm.

God can protect you in a storm and God can even keep a storm from not being as bad as it could be.

I do not know what you have in your part of the world but storms of life are just as bad as whatever kind of natural storm we have. I really hate it that they call those things acts of God. That is not an act of God. God does not send a tornado to kill a bunch of people and hurt people and destroy them. How do I know that? I can tell you this way. When God sent Jonah to Ninevah, God said, I care about these people. Where was Ninevah? Iraq. Ninevah is still a present day town in Iraq. It has not gone anywhere for thousands of years. Even in Jonah's day it was there and it is still there today. Are they believers? No, not really. Some are, praise God, most are not. Yet God said I want you to go and warn Ninevah, a great thing is coming to punish them. They have got to turn from their wicked ways and serve me. Jonah did not want to go. He said, "They will not believe me for one thing and they are vicious enemies. Why do I want to help them?" He ran the other way. He did not embrace the storm. He did not embrace going into the hard thing, trusting that God would

did not embrace the storm. He did not embrace going into the hard thing, trusting that God would take him through it. He ran. He ran into a bigger storm. Listen to what I am saying. Sometimes God asks you to do something that is hard, really hard, and you know it is going to be hard. He tells you ahead of time it is going to be, but He says "I am going to be with you through it, now go." If you are not careful, you will run and get in a storm that God did not say He would protect you in. Then you are really in a mess. As humans, we have a tendency to avoid the hard things, do we not? With God, hard can be easy. Without God, hard can be a disaster.

Let us look at the storms in people's lives in the Bible. Today we are going to look at Paul and some of the things he went through as he served the Lord. How did he sail through these storms? This is my own opinion, but I think that Paul liked a good dog fight. He sure did seem to get himself in a lot of them. Some people say, "I am a lover, not a fighter." I think Paul was a fighter and that helped him. God knows who can handle different things. Some people can handle more than others and God can put you in places He cannot put everybody. Paul was one of those. This man was so far from God, he was so spiritually blind and he was a very religious man, the most of the most. He was as blind as a bat as far as Jesus was concerned and the real Messiah. However, when Paul got the truth, when it was made clear to Paul, "Paul, I am Jesus. You are persecuting Me when you are persecuting these precious people. I have something for you to do." When Paul got that, he did a 180-degree turn. He was going this way and he turned and went that way. There are people who can do that. Some people say, "You cannot change that fast. You cannot do it. That is your mindset. That is your belief. That is your conviction, you cannot change that fast." Yes, you can. You certainly can. Some of you are very analytical. You have to think it out. You have to think of all the angles. You have to peruse it. You have to discuss it. There are other people who can turn their whole life on a dime. Paul was a guy like that. Of course, it took getting knocked off his horse, going blind and being blind for several days, and then having a man come and saying, "Paul, God has told me to come find you and pray for you because He has chosen you. You are His chosen vessel." Just the same, it changed all of his thinking and all of his priorities. God did not stop there. When you go through a storm in your life that has to do with serving God, doing what God wants you to do; God will keep reminding you of His promise for you, His purpose for you. He will send people. He may send a dream. In Paul's case, He sent an angel, and that could happen too.

All I know is, God is in control, right now. Whatever you are going through, and when the events of your life become miserable, discouraging and you want to give up, it is that promise from God that you have to hold on to. I had to hold on to one for a long time, waiting and waiting. It felt like everybody else was getting their thing and I was just waiting and waiting. I wondered one time, did I miss it? Did I do the wrong thing? Did I make the wrong decision, I thought I heard God but it has not happened? Did I do the wrong thing? One night I was at church and I looked down on a book table and said, "I missed it, God, did I not? I am so sorry. I think I missed it." I heard in the quiet of my heart, "You will be glad you waited." Oh, am I glad I waited. Oh, am I glad I endured all of those storms. I cried out to God and said give me the strength to do this. Tell me again, Lord. Send somebody to tell me again the call on my life. It is not a lack of faith to do that. It is not a lack of faith at all. You may say, "God has told me. I should not be asking Him again." When there are a lot of storms going on, when life is not happening the way you think it ought to be happening, it is not a lack of faith to say, could You tell me again.

My call is to go around the world preaching. I probably had thirteen different prophecies saying it is going to happen, not exactly how it is going to happen, but the magnitude of it I know because He has told me and I believe Him. However, in the beginning when it was not happening, it was like "Lord, did I make that up? Am I just going off on a trip or something? Is that really You?" I was on an airplane going to Belarus, one of the former Soviet Union countries. I went there for eight years, went there eleven times taking teams of women and we trained leaders. I knew that God had called me to go all around the world, but year after year after year I just went to Belarus. I love those people. I could go here forever but that is not what God told me. I was on the airplane and I said, "Lord, I do not mean to have lack of faith, but things are hard. There are a lot of storms in my life, a lot of things going on. I need to know you have really told me this. So, Lord I am going to ask You something. Could someone in Belarus give me the same prophetic word and there is no way that person could know anything about me or anything You have said to me? I just need that Lord. I need that confirmation." We went to an unusual church to work in. It met in a large auditorium in Belarus. They were having a hard time with their church. It was a wonderful church, a great church, and it went on to be an even better church. They had a lot of opposition with all these storms. We were there and we began to minister. Those of you that minister, have you ever thought you were going to do this kind of a thing, you were going to speak on this kind of thing and all of a sudden, "BAM", the Holy Spirit fell and it went another way completely. That is what happened. I stood up to start this nice little women's conference. I had a nice little topic I was going to teach on, but God has taught me to listen to the Holy Spirit. When He tells you to say something, say it. He is leading you. I opened up my mouth to start this little topic I had and all of a sudden I started talking

about alcoholism and the problem of alcoholism and how people needed to be delivered from alcohol. I wish I could describe to you what happened, but I am not sure what happened. None of us were. Afterward we were going, what was that? What happened? It literally was like thunder hit that room. The next thing I know, people are yelling, carrying on, falling over and we are trying to figure out what is going on, what to say and what to do. It was very exciting. I loved it. It was exciting and I was still having to listen and figure out what to do but I loved it. Toward the end of it there was a woman and I went over to pray for her. I felt impressed by God to go pray for her, so I prayed for her. After I prayed for her, it was just like the Spirit came on her. She came to me and of course she is speaking in Russian and my interpreter is having to tell me what she said. She points her finger at me and she says, "You will go all over the world. You will be everywhere all over the world. You will speak for God because God has tested you, has tried you and He can trust you." I am thinking. She does not know anything about me. God, You answered my prayer.

When you are going through these storms, God wants you to know your purpose. He wants you to have promises because the storms come. They upset you so much, discourage you so much or defeat you. They put fear in you or make you think, "I will just give up, it is not worth it" and yet you have that promise. You know this is what God created you for and He wants you doing it.

Let me ask you a question. Do you know your purpose? Have you asked God, what is it You want me to do with my life? What is my purpose for being here? Show me in Your Word. Give me a prophetic word from someone, Lord. Do something. A dream, put it in my heart, something Lord, so I know what I am here for. You might say, "Will God do that?" Yes, you are in a war. You have a general. You have a captain of your salvation, Jesus Christ. Do you honestly think God would let this war go on and not tell His people what they needed to do to help out? Of course not. He wants you to know. You may have to seek and search and find, but you can get it if you will not give up.

Let me read what Paul's purpose was, because God gave it to him. He had just been through this big thing with all of the religious leaders in Jerusalem, big fight, big hubbub, all of them yelling, shouting, pulling and tugging. They nearly killed him, nearly pulled him apart. Finally the soldiers took him back to jail because they knew they were going to take him by force if they did not get him out of there. Would you call that a storm? Acts 24:11 says, "That night the Lord stood beside Paul (it did not say an angel) and said do not worry. Just as you have told the people about Me here in Jerusalem, so you must also in Rome." Paul knew, the Lord has told me I am going to Rome. That is where Caesar was. I am going to Rome. He knew that. He did not have to doubt it. The Lord stood beside him and did it. The Lord had to protect him in another storm.

I have never seen anybody in the whole Bible that had one storm after another, after another, after another, but Paul just seemed to sail through them. He always had the answer from God on what to do. God protected him. Paul's nephew got wind of what they were going to try to do with Paul and these religious leaders. He went to the head officer and told him. The man believed him and protected Paul. He said, "We have got to get you out of here. We have to get you on a boat. We have got to get you to Rome." They were going to do it. He went through a lot of things. If you read Acts 24-26, a lot happened. It is not like God said, "Paul, you are going" and the next thing he knew he was there. He had some more experiences. A lot of things happened.

Turn to Acts 26:32. This is the human point of view, from someone who does not know what God has said to Paul. "And Agrippa said to Festus, he could be set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." They did not have the inside information. God had said I want you to speak for Me in Rome just like you have here. The plan was going on. Arrangements were made to get Paul in this ship. Guess what? It was the wrong time of the year to be on a ship going anywhere because the Bible says it was the time of the year when the bad storms were around. Paul took off with these men right through the path of a hurricane-like storm. Acts 27:20 says, "The terrible storm raged unabated many days until at last all hope was gone." In your storms in your life many times you can feel that way. All hope is gone. There is no hope. There is no hope, but God has said and if God has said, it is going to happen. In fact, nobody had eaten and Paul finally got everybody together and said, "If you just listen to me we would not have had this happen. The ship is going to go down but nobody is going to be lost." How did he know that? Because one more time God sent a word to him to remind him of his purpose. Acts 27:23 says, "For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong" How did he know? I believe I have had a time in my life that the Lord stood beside me, in fact I know I did. Then I have had a time that an angel has stood beside me. How did I know the difference? It is something you know on the inside. I do not know how to tell you. I knew one time it was the Lord. I know it was. It was precious. He was telling me that you were through with Belarus. He was so gentle because I cried my eyes out. I loved those people so much. I could not stand the thought of not ever being with them again. Another time I had an angel. Some time I will tell you about that. It is not strange to have an angel stand beside you either. Do not get to thinking that it

is goofy stuff. It is the Bible. God has not changed. An angel said, "Do not be afraid Paul for you will surely stand trial before Caesar. What is more, God has granted your request and He will save the lives of all of those sailing with you. So take courage, I believe God and it will be just as He said but we will be shipwrecked on an island." There is a prophetic word. It is pretty hard to move in the Holy Spirit when there is a hurricane going on. That is an amazing man. Sure enough, everybody was saved but the boat and everything on it was lost.

Let me ask you a question. Can you remember a time when you were in a hurricane-like situation and in the very middle of it, God sent you a word to remind you that you are going to be okay? I have a plan. You are going to be okay because I have planned for you to do this for me. Think about that.

What happened next? Did the storm quit? No, he had to sail through another one. This time it is basically like he jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire because, remember, they gave up all hope. They got on the island. He starts helping build a fire and he gets bitten by a snake. In Mark 16:17 it says, "In my name, believers will pick up snakes." That does not mean you need to be in the snake handling business and prove that God will not let you die. Jesus was prophesying that is going to happen to some people and here we have it in the Bible where it happened. In Acts 28:3, "They were building a bonfire, the people of the island were to welcome us and to warm us. As Paul gathered an armful of sticks to lay on the fire a poisonous snake driven out by the heat fastens itself onto his hand." They said that he will die. There is no doubt about that. Instead, he just shook it off and kept going. Can you do that about your storm? Can you do that and just shake it off and say that is going to be okay? We are going to go on anyway. It is important to be strong enough to shake off the attacks. I remember one time my dad burned himself so badly on the stove. I did not know what in the world he was going to do. He just shook it off, wrapped his hand up, put some kerosene or coal oil or something on it and kept on going. It was a diversion. This story was a diversion, an attack of the devil and it was designed to divert him.

What is Satan doing in your life right now to divert you by having a storm that is designed to stop you? Ask God for his wisdom. He wants to help you sail through the storms.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to consider the cost when serving the Lord?
2. How does Satan attempt to use "storms" in our life?
3. When you have a storm in your life, how does God reveal Himself?
4. How are the storms in Paul's life from Acts an encouragement to you?

To watch the video on STORMS IN YOUR LIFE, Pillar Five, Relational Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

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