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## An Introduction to the JOURNEY Series

### How This Series Was Birthed

A book doesn't just "happen." It takes a long time. The first time I studied and preached a series about how Jesus uses the storms we encounter was in 1985. That's over thirty years ago. I had been studying the story of Jesus stilling the waters in the Sea of Galilee as found in Mark 4:35-41<sup>1</sup> when I noticed a six-fold pattern of how Jesus used that storm to train His disciples to learn to walk by faith instead of by sight. He was maturing their love for Him to the point where they were secure in God's love, not because of their feelings or circumstances, but because they had come to know His love intimately.

Shortly after that, I studied a second storm that the disciples experienced, in Matthew 14:22-36,<sup>2</sup> and saw a similar six-fold pattern.

Finally, I was led to study the storm Paul encountered in Acts 27:14 – 28:10 and saw the same six-fold pattern. However, in each of these three storms, there was something different. There was *progression, maturity, and development* in the lives of Christ's followers. In the first two storms, the disciples were fearful.<sup>3</sup> They had not demonstrated the mature love that Paul exhibited in the third storm, where his love for Jesus was so secure that he had unwavering faith in the midst of the storm.<sup>4</sup>

- In the first storm, the disciples were comforted by Jesus' **presence** with them.
- In the second storm, they were comforted by His **promise** to them.
- In the third storm, Paul was able to take comfort in Christ's **person**, even though Jesus was in heaven.

### Walking with Jesus in our Personal Journey

Ultimately I had three series ... I casually referred to them as "Storm 1," "Storm 2," and "Storm 3." As I've had the chance to teach them through the years, God keeps using this material – in my life, in the lives of those in my church, and now throughout various countries of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Matthew 8:23-27 and Luke 8:22-25.

<sup>2</sup> See also Mark 6:45-65 and John 6:16-21.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 8:26; 14:27.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 27:24

You'll notice that the focus has changed slightly in this newest version of how Jesus leads us through the storms of life. Instead of focusing on the storms, I've chosen to take a step back and look at the Christian's journey *through* the storms of life. It's a journey toward maturity. You see this reflected in a passage in John's first letter to the churches in Asia Minor:

*I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:12-14).*

When you first read that passage, you think John is suffering from spiritual ADD. He keeps saying the same thing over and over. However, upon closer reflection, you will notice that there is a progressing maturity that he describes. There are *little children*, *young men* and *spiritual fathers*. Each are mentioned twice in this passage – and each has a statement or two that describes their spiritual growth.

I believe John is describing three unique stages of spiritual development:

- **Little children.** These new believers are described as having their sins forgiven and that they are at the beginning of their relationship with their heavenly Father. The focus here is on the *establishment* of a relationship with God.
- **Young men.** These believers are said to have overcome the wicked one, to have the word of God abiding in them, and that they are strong. The focus is on the *power of action and ministry*.
- **Spiritual fathers.** These mature men and women are described as “*knowing Him who is from the beginning*.” Here the emphasis seems to be on an intimate, deep *knowledge* of the eternal God and His unchangeable character as the foundation for their lives.

These three “stages” of Christian growth correlate perfectly with what Jesus was teaching His followers through the storms they encountered.

- They were to take comfort in His presence (a relationship with Him was established). These new-born believers were to *grow*.
- They were to find comfort in His promise (He would use their strength to minister to others). These young believers were to *mature*.
- They would find comfort in His Person (a deep and intimate knowledge of Jesus). These mature believers were to *serve*.

In each of these chapters, I will seek to point out a “life-lesson” that we need to remember in order to trust God and grow through the storms of life. Here’s the first one:

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*God is never finished with you. He is always growing you  
and maturing you into the person He wants you to be.*

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We will find many more of these life-principles in our journey. You might want to write them down in a journal so you will be able to look back and reflect on them as you face your own storms.

### **The Message in These Books**

Now that this preaching series has evolved into three books, each with an accompanying study guide, I thank you for joining me as we follow the journey that Jesus has for each one of us. As you work through each of these studies, you will see God growing you, maturing you, and then using you to build His kingdom and teach others His ways.

The storms of life are coming. It’s not a matter of “if,” but “when.” This study is designed not only to help you get ready, but to help you to grow through the storms of life.

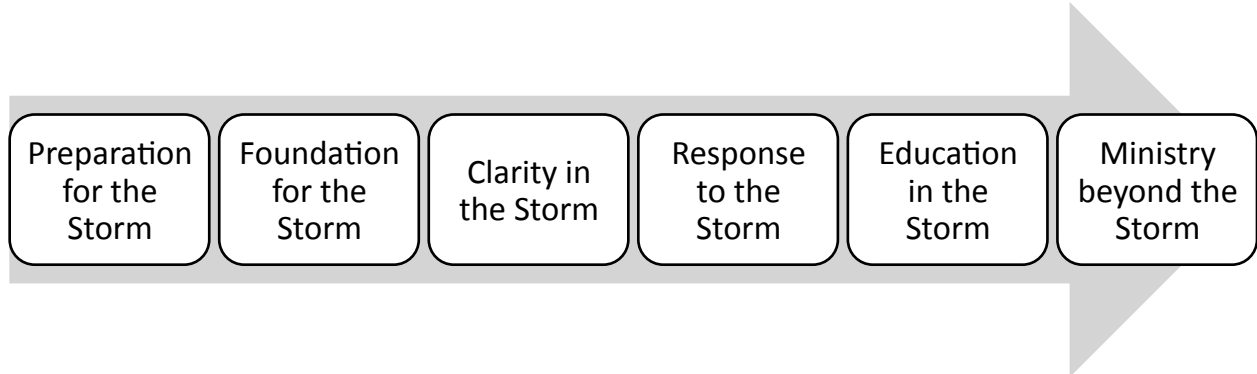
Have you ever wondered why Jesus would send His disciples into a storm-tossed sea? In each of these studies we will walk with Jesus as He prepared His disciples for abundant life and ministry. He used six principles to insure that every storm would make them stronger and more fruitful:

1. **Preparation for the storm:** God is always getting us ready today for tomorrow. We will learn together how today’s trials are tomorrow’s triumphs.
2. **Foundation for the storm:** God never sends us into the storms without first giving us a strong foundation to support us. We will learn the five basic foundations for every storm: the promises, the presence, the person, the purpose, and the principles of Jesus. We will also learn how to stand on a firm foundation in the day that will keep us from wavering in the night of doubt.
3. **Clarity in the storm:** Storms always reveal. In the storms we see Jesus more clearly, we see our fears more clearly, we see our need for faith more clearly, and we see the enemy’s intents toward us more clearly. We will learn how to let Jesus shine through our lives by faith in times of trouble.

4. **Response to the storm:** Jesus expected four things from His disciples in the storm – and they are the same things He expects from us. Jesus expects us to love and trust Him and to exercise faith and not doubt him in the difficult night of trials. We will learn how to exercise faith that will manifest the life of Jesus to others in our difficult days.
5. **Education through the storm:** We should not first ask God to get us out of our trouble, but rather to ask God what He is teaching us through our trial of faith. The disciples learned never to question God’s love or power in the storms. Our greatest desire must be to get to know Jesus better in the storms. The critical lesson here is to learn how storms deepen our faith.
6. **Ministry beyond the storms:** When the storm ends, Jesus has us ready to minister to people. We will discover four principles of what it means to minister the way Jesus intended. We will discover how to get beyond ourselves and focus on the needs of others. Our ministry to them will flow out of the lessons that God has taught us. Here you will learn how Jesus will prepare you to faithfully serve Him.

It’s often helpful to visualize something graphically. Here’s a picture of what Jesus is doing in our lives as we go through the storms.

## Our Journey with Jesus through the Storms of Life



### How to Get the Most Out of This Series

At the end of each chapter, there will be a short series of questions to help you process and apply what you have just learned. These are designed to be reflective, practical and personal.

You will also be able to go deeper into each chapter’s teaching through the study guide. This can be used individually or in a small group. Some churches have taught this material to large groups, and then used small group discussions to apply this material to each person’s life.

### My Deepest Desire for You

I share these thoughts and principles as a fellow-journeyman. I haven't arrived yet. In fact, I've got a long way to go. But the greatest joy of my life has been to walk with Jesus and learn these lessons from Him. My deepest desire for you is that you will be drawn closer to Him, and that through studying His Word, you will know Him better and trust Him more than you ever have.

Welcome to the journey!

### **Time for Reflection**

After each chapter in this book, you will have time for a short Bible study and time of reflection. The accompanying study guide and journal will take you further ... but don't pass over each of these few questions. They can be life-changing!

Read 1 John 2:12-14 again.

- Let's think for a minute about the "*little children.*" What are babies like? What do they need?

John tells us that these spiritually young children "*know the Father.*" What foundational principles did you learn (or are learning) as a new Christian?

- What are "*young men (and women)*" like? What do they need?

John tells us that these young men are "*strong,*" that they have "*overcome the wicked one,*" and that the "*Word of God abides in them.*" Who do you know who is like that? How did they get that way?

- Finally, there are the "*Spiritual Fathers (and Mothers).*" Though they are not perfect, they are mature. In what ways are they mature? How is that evidenced in their lives and ministry?

Who do you know that would fit into this category? Why?

- Let's talk about you. Where do you fit in these three stages? How long have you been in that stage? What is Jesus currently doing in your life to take you to the next stage?

## Chapter 1 – Building Wisely

### Rocks and Sand

It was August 1992 and few were ready. After all, it was initially only a minimal hurricane – a weak Category 1, and the first one of the season, nothing to worry about. People had seen this before. But the storm suddenly and rapidly strengthened to a Category 5 with 175 mile-per-hour sustained winds before making landfall at Homestead, Florida. It came in during the middle of the night – and proved absolutely horrifying for those in its path. When the sun rose the next morning, it revealed a landscape that looked like a nuclear bomb had exploded.

The devastation marked by Hurricane Andrew was, at the time of its occurrence, the costliest hurricane in United States history:

- About 63,000 homes were destroyed and over 101,000 others were damaged.
- 175,000 people were left homeless.
- As many as 1.4 million people were left without electricity.
- In the Everglades, 70,000 acres of trees were knocked down.
- Rainfall in Florida was substantial, peaking at 13.98 inches in western Miami-Dade County.
- \$25 billion in damages were reported.
- 44 people lost their lives.

The devastation was so severe that the name “Andrew” was officially retired from the list of hurricane names in the spring of 1993.

Were people unprepared? Certainly. I live in South Florida and folks here don’t take hurricanes very seriously. At least they didn’t until Andrew.

But preparation for a hurricane goes far beyond buying batteries and bottled water the night before it hits. Serious preparation starts years before ... including the way houses are built. Since Andrew, building codes have become stricter and regulations have sought to ensure that buildings are constructed to withstand the onslaught of a major hurricane. Though it costs more money on the front-end, it’s much smarter and safer in the long run.

### What Jesus Had to Say about “Building a House”

The greatest sermon ever preached takes about twenty minutes to read. Try it some time. Start at Matthew 5:1 and read through chapter 7:27. It’s fascinating – especially to read it out loud. But what always grabs my attention is the imagery Jesus uses at the end of His sermon. In simple language, he talks about two people who each built a house: one on a rock, one on sand ... and with very different results.



*“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Matthew 7:24-27).*

*Habitat for Humanity* is a Christian humanitarian effort committed to building quality housing for those who cannot afford it. *Habitat for Humanity of Greater Miami* began in 1989 as a small but dedicated group of volunteers in the southern part of Miami-Dade County that built 14 homes in the Perrine neighborhood. In 1991, The Jimmy Carter Work Project came to riot-torn Liberty City to help rejuvenate the community by infusing it with pride through home ownership and spreading the “theology of the hammer.” At the end of seven days, 14 homes stood as evidence of that effort. Ultimately 27 houses were built in South Dade before August 1992.

When Hurricane Andrew roared through, none of those houses sustained any structural damage.<sup>5</sup>

As the news reports spread in the coming days, it was interesting to see video of entire neighborhoods leveled to the ground ... except for the *Habitat* houses.

What made the difference between survival and ruin? The way the houses were built. *Habitat* took its mission seriously and went the extra-mile in building a quality house ... and 27 families still had a place to live after the storm.

I wonder how many people saw those images and thought of Jesus’ words: *built on a rock ... built on the sand*. Those that were built “wisely” survived. Those that were built with inferior products or built by cutting corners were thrown to the wind. They did not survive.

What you need to remember is that Jesus’ words have nothing to do with *building-construction* ... and everything to do with *life-construction*.

### **How God “Grows” His Children**

So how does God do *life-construction* in our lives? In other words, how does God *grow* His children?

- The first facet of God’s life-construction we need to realize is that it *doesn’t* start with us. It starts with God. It starts with His grace. *“While we were still sinners, Christ died for*

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<sup>5</sup> [www.miamihabitat.org/miami-habitat-history](http://www.miamihabitat.org/miami-habitat-history)

us.”<sup>6</sup> We bring nothing to our salvation – it was completely and perfectly accomplished by Jesus on the cross. *“Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to the cross I cling.”*<sup>7</sup>

This fact is worth focusing on for a few minutes, for the simple reason that our human nature believes we can save ourselves. We believe that if we do enough good things, God will be obliged to let us into heaven based on our merit. We pridefully long to take credit for that which we can actually never accomplish – because we can never be good enough. We must cast ourselves on the love, grace and mercy of God as revealed through Jesus Christ.

Grace is a hard concept to understand. Maybe this fictional story will help ...

*A man went to heaven. He got to the gate and St. Peter said, “You know, you need a thousand points to get in here.”*

*The man said, “I’ve been going to church all my life and nobody ever told me that!”*

*St. Peter said, “I don’t care, you must have a thousand points to get in here.”*

*The man said, “How do I earn points? By doing good things?”*

*St. Peter said, “What have you done to earn your points?”*

*The man said, “Well, I grew up in a Christian home and I went to Sunday school every Sunday for years. In fact, I have a string of Sunday school medals that go to the floor. When I got older, I went to a Christian school and then to a Christian college. Then I went on to graduate school and became a banker. I have always been supportive of the church. I cared about the church all of my life — supported my pastor when others didn’t.”*

*He said, “I supported missionaries. As a banker, I cared about my community. I wrote low-income mortgages. I gave loans to people who were in desperate need, and I often gave out of my own pocket. At first I gave 10 percent of my income to God, but as I became more affluent I was giving almost 70 percent.”*

*The man went on, making his case before St. Peter: “I had three children — two boys and a girl. One of my boys is a preacher and the other is a missionary. My girl is married to a missionary in a Third World country.*

*I always went to church Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday night. Not only that, I worked with the Salvation Army. I rang the bell at Christmas — when it was really cold. And not only did I support missionaries with my money, I went to the mission field and supported them with my encouragement.”*

*Then he turned to Peter and said, “How am I doing?”*

*St. Peter said, “That’s one point. What else have you done?”*

*The man said, “Good Lord, have mercy!”*

*St. Peter replied, “You’ve got it! 1000 points. Come on in.”*

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>7</sup> *Rock of Ages*, words by Augustus M. Toplady, 1776.

Do you understand? The Christian life *starts* with God's grace. There's no other way. And that brings us to our life-lesson from this chapter:

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*Life is understood, not by looking at ourselves or our circumstances, but by looking at God Himself. It's all about Him.*

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- The second facet of God's work in our lives that we need to understand is that this salvation is obtained by believing. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."*<sup>8</sup> Faith is the open-hand that receives God's gift of salvation. When we do that, we are born again through God's deep and lasting work in our lives.

Paul tells us, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* As new-born Christians, we are members of His forever family – we are forgiven completely and guaranteed of an eternal home in heaven. But that's just the beginning. We have a lot to learn.

- The final facet of God's life-construction that we need to understand is that God's plan for our lives doesn't stop with salvation. He has a plan to grow us to maturity in Christ.

In Romans 8, Paul lays out God's plan for how to grow into Christ-likeness. Spoiler-alert: it has a lot to do with suffering. That's why Paul tells us, *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*<sup>9</sup> Those words have comforted many people in the midst of their personal storms. However, it's the next verse that tells us *why* God brings sufferings and trials into our lives: *"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son"* (Romans 8:29). That's God's plan. He wants to make us more like Jesus in our character.

### **Storms Are a Part of Life**

Storms are a part of life. They are not the norm, but they are a necessary part of life. Through God's wisdom, storms provide the needed balance for the weather of our planet; fierce tropical storms are necessary to provide a balance between the heat of the tropics and the frost of the Polar Regions. It seems that hurricanes and typhoons are necessary to keep a balance to prevent worse consequences. Storms are a part of the ecological balance of our world's weather pattern.

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<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:29

In a similar way, our Father has designed storms for our lives to provide a balance in our journey and growth in grace. A Christian should acknowledge that God is the sovereign Lord of the mountain and the valley. He is the Lord of fair weather and foul. He is the Lord of the storm. And God has designed storms to play a much higher role in our lives than we often perceive.

For the child of God who is convinced that God loves him or her and is sovereign, every storm is seen simply as another day of walking with Jesus and discovering more of His tender love.

Storms are not stones; they are gifts. Nor are they evil-sent; they are bread from the Father to be received with thanksgiving for our good. Even when Satan stirs up the wind, as in the case of Job, God will still *"have His way in the whirlwind and the storm."*<sup>10</sup>

### **How God Uses the "Storms of Life"**

There's a lot to be learned through a storm. Jesus took His disciples through specific storms to teach them specific lessons. In this book we will look at a specific storm that the disciples encountered – and discover how Jesus led His disciples into and through it.<sup>11</sup> I will present the three storms as progressive and as a part of God's plan to build a solid foundation in our lives – and to mature us and move us from faith to faith and from glory to glory.

Storms reveal our foundation. Is your life built on the shifting sands of self-effort and a perspective that looks at "this-world-only" – or is it built on the solid rock of Jesus Himself?

Storms also show us the Savior. In the midst of the wind and the waves, we see Jesus more clearly. Our faith is strengthened – and we learn to trust Him more. Someone has well said, *"When Jesus is all you have, you'll realize He is all you need."* Storms have a way of accomplishing that in our lives.

Storms are inevitable. In Jesus' story of the two house-builders, they both experienced a severe storm: *"the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house."* It's true – we're all going to experience storms in our lives. But it's not inevitable that we be victim to their effects. We don't have to be defeated by them. We can grow through them to become the people that God wants us to be.

It starts with building a strong foundation. Build wisely, my friend!

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<sup>10</sup> See Job 38:1-30

<sup>11</sup> In the two sequels to this book, *"Growing Deeper – Following Jesus in the Storms of Life"* and *"Becoming the Person God Meant You to Be – Responding with Wisdom in the Storms of Life,"* we will look at two other storms and see God's continuing work in the lives of His children.



## Time for Reflection

Read Matthew 7:24-27 again.

- What did these two builders have in common?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What differences were there between the two builders?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What does God want you to do to ensure your life is built on a solid foundation?

## Chapter 2 – Following Closely

### Expecting the Unexpected

On March 4, 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered his first inaugural address as the new President of the United States. The most famous line from that speech is, *“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself!”* That sounds really good, especially if you are trying to stir up a bunch of patriots in a nation to stand tall during difficult times. But it simply isn’t true. It wasn’t true then, and it isn’t true now.

There’s a lot out there to be afraid of!

Judith Viorst wrote a great children’s book entitled *“Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No-Good, Very Bad Day”* that many of us have read. I love that title – because we all can relate to it. You’ve probably had a few of those *terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad days* in your life. I have. Whether it is getting the pink slip at work, the diagnosis of cancer from the doctor, the knock on the door late at night by the police, a bankruptcy notice from your financial institution, or divorce papers from your mate – life is full of sour twists and turns.

So how do we prepare? How do we face adversity? And where is God when it all hurts so badly?

### In the Middle of the Storm

Did it ever occur to you that ***Jesus intentionally placed His disciples in the middle of storms?*** In this book, we are going to take a close look at one incident in the training of the twelve disciples. It was so significant in their lives that it is recorded three times in the Gospels. Because of its importance, I ask you to read all three accounts, as recorded by Jesus’ biographers:

#### **Matthew 8:18, 23-27**

*And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side.... Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”*

#### **Mark 4:35-41**

*On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And*

*other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"*

#### **Luke 8:22-25**

*Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. But He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"*

Do you consider it strange that the all-knowing, all-wise, all-loving Jesus Himself told the disciples to get in a boat and go to the other side of the lake, *knowing* that a severe storm would threaten them so badly? Why would Jesus allow them to face such danger and jeopardy?

And while we're asking questions ... where was Jesus during the storm? Answer: He was *asleep*, seemingly unconcerned about what was happening to His men. When they finally wake Him up and tell Him they are perishing, He has a very strange response: *He rebukes them for their lack of faith!*

Wow!

I'm sure the disciples were that perplexed! Each of the three accounts ends with them asking the same question: *"Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"* They understood they were in the presence of Greatness ... but they did not understand His methods or the lessons He was trying to teach them.

Our response to this encounter reveals much about our concept of God and His purpose for our lives. And much like a spiritual-litmus-test, it reveals much about our maturity level and understanding of how God works in our lives. The bottom line? Our response to the storms of life reveals our perspective: are we living God-centered or self-centered lives?

Jesus had just spent the majority of the day teaching the multitudes a series of parables that had to do with faith. <sup>12</sup> And like any good teacher, Jesus gave them an exam to see what they had learned. However, His exam was not of the "pen and paper" variety. He put them right in

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<sup>12</sup> See Mark 4:1-34

the middle of a situation where they had to trust Him ... and they got a big, fat “F” on the test ... and that “F” *did not* stand for *faith*.

The goal in this book is for us to better understand that God works in our lives in much the same manner as Jesus did with the disciples. We think we know all about trusting God. And then a *storm* comes up – and, just like the disciples, we take our eyes off Jesus, and end up running around scared and fearful, not knowing what to do. Yeah, that would be an “F” on that test.

### **What Is a Storm?**

Let’s define a storm, in a broad sense, as anything that God brings into your life that is outside your control. It requires faith and total dependence on Jesus. It requires *following Him closely*. It demands trusting Him that He will never allow anything into our lives that is not for our good and for His glory.

### **Lord, Where Are We Going?**

If you are like most people, you would like to know where you are going before committing to the journey. We want to walk by sight – while God wants us to learn to walk by faith. Remember, when Jesus called the disciples to follow Him, He did not give them a detailed outline of where they were going, when they would arrive, how it would be accomplished, or what He was doing in their lives.

He simply *“appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.”*<sup>13</sup>

Jesus has called each of us to that same walk of faith. At the moment of our salvation, God began a process of growth and development in us. The theological term is *sanctification*. That’s a big, old-fashioned term for *progressively becoming more and more like Jesus in our character*. And part of the developmental process God uses is putting us in certain situations (read: *storms*) that require us to keep our eyes on Him, learning to walk by faith and not by sight.

God’s design is that we experience maturing love in our walk with Him. The storms of life that Jesus leads us through will help reveal areas of our life that are not under the control of His Holy Spirit. But it is there that we see Jesus and a view of God and His purpose for our life.

The problem is we short-circuit the process. We plead with God to get the boat back to the shore and fail to learn the lessons God has for us.

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<sup>13</sup> Mark 3:14



Here is another life-principle we must learn and master:

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*God will keep taking us through the same process  
until we learn the lessons He has for us.*

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I'm sad to say I've been a slow learner. I've fought the process. But God has been gracious to bring me to where I am today. I haven't arrived, but I'm growing ... and by God's grace, so can you.

### **Misconceptions about Storms**

Early in my ministry I was seeing people come to know Jesus and I was excited about my walk with Him and how He was using me. Though I had a great deal of zeal, I had very little mature knowledge and experience with God.

Connie and I were experiencing good times in our life together, when, all of a sudden, a storm hit our house. Connie was struck with a terrible pain in her back. X-rays revealed a large kidney stone that could only be removed by cutting into her kidney. Many might say that major surgery is not much of a storm – and that many people, believers and non-believers get through it just fine. But to Connie and me, a pair of twenty-four year olds 2,600 miles away from our homes, it was a set of circumstances beyond our control. To add to the difficulty, we did not have insurance and the medical bills were enormous. I prayed for God to heal my wife – and I would have liked to see a miracle.

I began to wonder, *“Lord, if we are serving You, why is this bad thing happening to us?”* It's interesting, isn't it, that because we are believers and serving Jesus, we think we should be exempt from such things. But Church history – and the Bible – tell us a very different story. God's people *do* suffer – but our suffering is marked by God for our good, and to draw us closer to Him. As I walked the halls of the hospital, I began to sense that Jesus was with us in this storm.

God reminded me of a statement Jesus made: *“If a son asks (his father) for bread, will he give him a stone?”*<sup>14</sup> Those of you who have had God use His Word and His Spirit to speak directly to a deep personal need understand what I experienced. With that simple word, my heart was calmed. Jesus had said, as He did that night on the ship, *“Peace, be still.”*<sup>15</sup>

My worry was replaced with peace; my doubt was replaced with faith; and I had a deep assurance that Connie would be fine. God took care of all our needs. Connie came through the surgery fine, and a church in Louisiana took a love offering for us that paid the medical bills.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 7:9

<sup>15</sup> Mark 4:39

That event revealed some areas of my life in which I had to trust God – specifically, finances and my wife’s health. But the greatest lesson I learned was to never call those things He brings into my life mere “stones.” Some things might look like stones, feel like stones, and roll like stones – but we must learn to see our trials from *His* perspective. When we begin to look at these events through the eyes of faith, we discover that these “stones” are a precious gift from a loving Father who gives good things to His children.

This principle learned forty-five years ago has helped us trust God as Connie faced multiple health issues over the years; back surgery, a major stroke, a liver transplant, cancer and chemotherapy, brain surgery, loss of balance, broken hip, and many other health issues.

The bottom line? We must follow Him closely and never take our eyes off Him. We must trust Him that He will never allow anything into our lives that is not for our good and for His glory.

### **Looking Ahead – Some Truths We Will See in the First Storm**

- Storms often reveal our fears and weakness
- Storms are under God’s sovereign control.
- God does send His children into storms.
- Jesus will be with us through the storms.
- Storms help us see Jesus more clearly.
- There is always a purpose and ministry beyond the storm.
- Jesus is doing something within us today to prepare us for the storms of tomorrow.
- Storms test our foundation to insure that we are building on rock and not sand.
- Storms are not the norm, but are temporary in our lives.
- There is always sunshine and new days of growth between each storm.



## Time for Reflection

The life of Joseph is recorded in Genesis 37-50. Early in his life, God came to him in a dream and showed him that he would become a leader and a blessing to his family. Read Genesis 37:1-11.

From that point on, Joseph experienced a series of events brilliantly disguised as catastrophes:

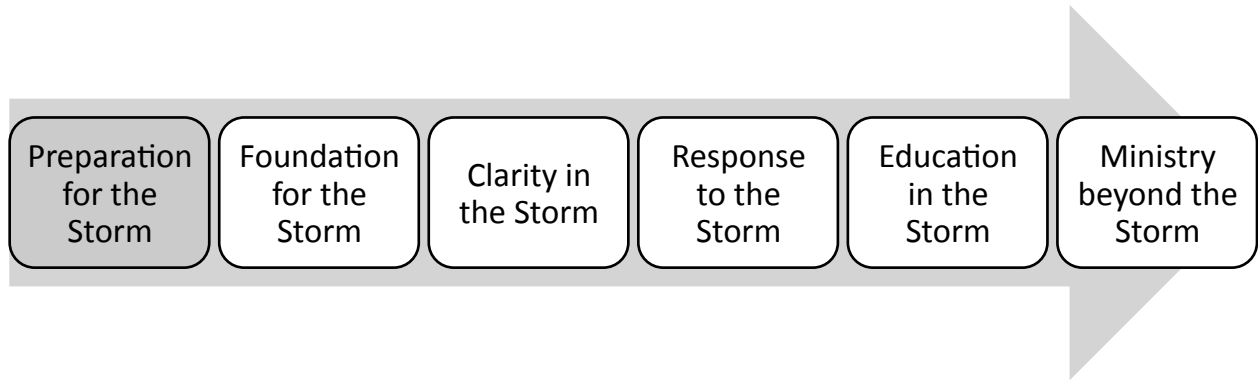
- He was shunned and rejected by his brothers and left to die in a pit (Genesis 37:24).
- He was rescued, only to be sold into slavery (Genesis 37:28).
- He was presumed dead – and sold into slavery again (Genesis 37:34-36).
- God made him prosper, but he was later falsely accused and thrown into prison (Genesis 39:1-20).
- He was the victim of injustice and was forgotten in prison (Genesis 40:15, 23).
- Ultimately, he was blessed by God, exalted, and became a blessing to the whole nation (Genesis 41).

At the end of his life, he exhibited spiritual maturity and God's perspective when he said to his brothers, *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive"* (Genesis 50:20).

- What experience(s) in your life can you point to and say, *"Someone meant this for evil against me"*?
- Have you been able to come to the point where you are honestly able to say, *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good"*?
- If yes, what brought you to that point where you were able to see those events from God's perspective? If no, what is keeping you from seeing those events from God's perspective?

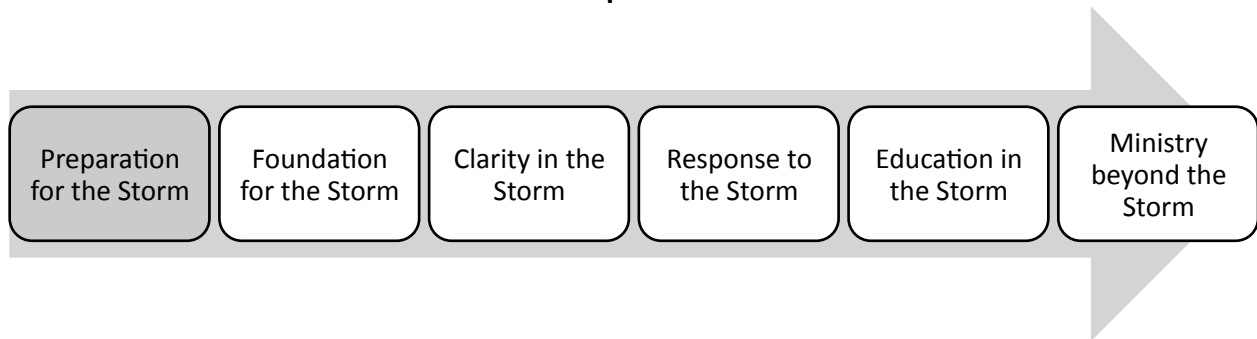
## SECTION 1

### Preparation for the Storm



***God is always  
preparing us today for  
tomorrow's storm***

Chapter 3 – What Jesus Does to Prepare Us for the Storms  
SECTION ONE – Preparation for the Storm



### Preparation Time

If you're going on a long car trip, there are certain things you do. You check Google Maps for directions; you make a list of what you need to pack; you make hotel reservations along the way; and, of course, you make sure you have enough money for gas, food, lodging and entertainment.

It takes a lot to get prepared!

But imagine if you didn't know what to do. You might not think of getting directions, packing, or much of anything else. Your preparation is dependent upon your knowledge and vision of what is going to happen.

And here's the principle we must remember in our lives: ***God is always preparing us today for tomorrow's storm.*** He knows the future; He knows the plans He has for us; He knows what it will take for us to become the men and women He wants us to be. He is omniscient – that means He knows everything. God not only knows all actualities, He knows all possibilities. And because He is also sovereign (meaning He is Lord of all and in control of everything), He works all things together for our good and for His glory.

### The Events before the Storm

Jesus chose twelve men. He chose them to be with Him, to train them, and that He might ultimately send them out on mission for Him.<sup>16</sup> He also taught them specific things they needed to know about God, life, faith, and themselves that would help them mature through the storms of life. In Mark 4:1-34, we see that Jesus taught a series of parables to the gathered crowds. Those included ...

- The parable of the soils (v. 3-20)
- The parable of the lamp (v. 21-25)

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<sup>16</sup> Mark 3:14

- The parable of the growing seed (v. 26-29)
- The parable of the mustard seed (v. 30-34)

Each of these parables had to do with the child of God hearing and receiving the Word of God and learning to live by faith. Though He taught in parables to the crowds, verse 34 says *“He explained all things to His disciples”* in private. The crowds heard the “stories,” but often missed the real meaning and application to their lives. But Jesus made sure the disciples “got it.”

Why? Because ...

- **He is the *perfect Shepherd*.** He guided them perfectly. Everywhere He led them was to bring them to the place He wanted them to be – He was preparing them and developing them into the leaders He wanted them to be.

One of Jesus’ favorite pictures to describe Himself was that of a good shepherd.<sup>17</sup> The shepherd always goes before his sheep. He has seen today what they will face tomorrow. If a roaring lion is nearby, the shepherd will protect and prepare the sheep. If there is a mountainous road ahead, he will strengthen the sheep for the journey.

- **He is like a *perfect Father*.** A loving father always protects His children and provides for them. A good father never sends His children into a situation for which He has not prepared and equipped them. Jesus knew what was ahead for the disciples – and He was preparing them because He cared for them.

Two questions often come up at this point:

First is the question of ***power and ability***: *does God have the power to protect and provide for me?* Over and over, Jesus demonstrated His power: He turned water into wine; He fed five thousand; He healed lepers; He raised the dead. To doubt that Jesus can do anything is ludicrous. It flies in the face of all the evidence for the Bible’s miracles.

The second question is really asking, “Will Jesus do something *for me?*” Its focus is not so much on His ability, but His ***willingness and care***: *does Jesus care enough to protect and provide for me?*

This was exactly the position the leper was in. He knew Jesus ***could*** ... he just didn’t know if Jesus ***cared*** ...

*When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are **willing**, You can make*

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<sup>17</sup> John 10:11

*me clean.” Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed (Matthew 8:1-2, emphasis mine).*

He cared for that guy with leprosy. And He cares for you. Bank on it.

- **He is the *perfect Teacher*.** He created the whole universe. There was so much He could have taught them. But He taught them the exact life-principles they needed – because He was preparing them.

It would have been completely contrary to God’s sovereign, gracious character to know the needs of His children and not prepare them for the storms they would face.

Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch Christian who, along with her father and other family members, helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. Through her father, she learned many life lessons of faith. One time, young Corrie went to her father and confessed that she didn’t think she would be strong enough to be a martyr for Jesus Christ. Her wise father replied, *“Tell me, when you take a train trip, when do I give you the money for the ticket? Three weeks before?”* *“No, daddy,”* she replied. *“You give me the money for the ticket just before we get on the train.”* Her father responded, *“That is right – and so it is with God’s strength. Our Father in heaven knows when you will need His strength. He will supply all you need – just in time.”*

As the perfect Teacher, Jesus not only gives us what we need to know ... He gives it to us when we need to know it. God knows what you need to face tomorrow’s challenges. And He is in the process of preparing you for it ... today.

By the way, it’s always good to ask yourself, *“In light of storms that might be coming up in my life in the future, what lessons is God teaching me right now? What am I learning about His character, His promises, His sufficiency and His power that will help me get through those storms with confidence and victory?”* If you are learning specific truths right now, you can be sure that God will put you to the test to see how well and how deeply you have learned those lessons.

### **Understanding the Storm ... Or Understanding Him?**

Far too often, we want answers about the **storm**: *why is this happening in my life?* All the while, God wants us to take our focus off the storm and put it on Him.

Here’s the life-principle you need to remember:

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*God is always preparing us today for tomorrow’s storms.  
The key to trusting Him in the storm is understanding Him!*

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To put it another way, we will successfully navigate the storms of life to the extent that we know, understand and trust the character of God.

So what was Jesus doing to prepare His disciples for the storm?

He was showing them the Father. An amazing conversation took place in John 14. It was “Question-And-Answer” time with Jesus. And Thomas asked, “*Lord, where are you going, and how can we know the way?*” (verse 5). Jesus responded,

*“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him”* (vv. 6-7).

Next up was Philip, who said,

*“Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves”* (vv. 8-11).

When the disciples saw Jesus, they saw the Father. They saw His heart of compassion; they saw His strength and power; and they saw His sovereignty over all of life demonstrated through wisdom and knowledge.

- Where He led them – and how He led them – were all to prepare them.
- Everything He demonstrated about His power was to prepare them.
- All that He taught them was to prepare them.

### **What about You?**

Peter could have reasoned, “*Fellows, we will get through this. We have seen Jesus manifest authority over demons, disease, and even death. I will believe that He has authority over storms.*”

John might have joined in, “*You know guys, Peter is right. Not only have we seen His power, but everywhere He has led us He has been moved with compassion on those in need. Can any of you name even one time since we’ve been walking with Jesus that He refused those who called upon Him or believed Him? I’m convinced that He will not lead us where His love and grace will not sustain us.*”

Knowing how Jesus prepares us for the storms, what do you say? What’s your response?





## Time for Reflection

Read Matthew 8:5-10.

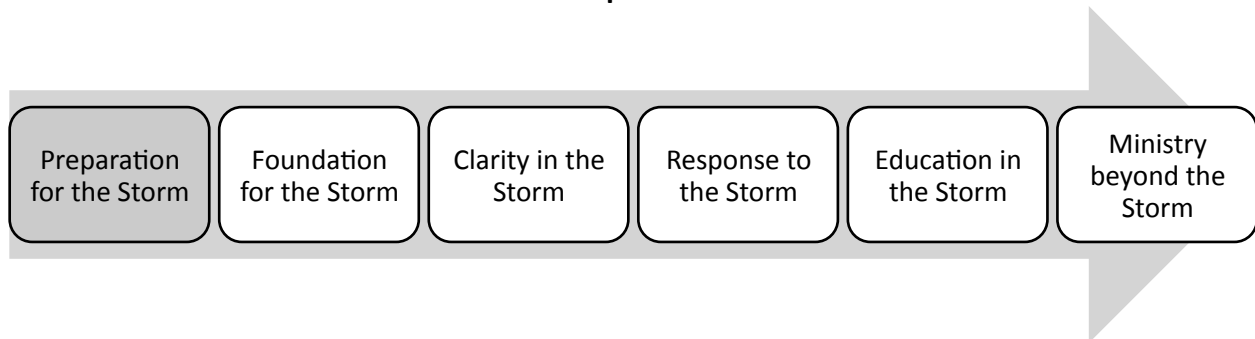
1. How did this Roman centurion demonstrate great faith?
2. What do you learn from Jesus' response to this man's faith? Why is faith so important to Jesus?
3. What could the disciples have learned from this Roman centurion about faith?

In this chapter we learned that Jesus is preparing us today for what we will need as we face tomorrow's storms.

1. What have you learned in the past that prepared you for lessons you've already faced?
2. What are you learning right now that might help you in tomorrow's storms?

You can trust Jesus to prepare you for the events of tomorrow. You can be sure that what He is teaching you today through your study of His Word is building you up for the challenges ahead.

**Chapter 4 – What Must We Do to Prepare Ourselves for the Storms**  
**SECTION ONE – Preparation for the Storm**



**How God Develops a Greater Faith in our Lives**

In 1970 my pastor began praying about a financial need our church was facing. He asked the Lord for confirmation by placing that same burden on someone’s heart who would promise \$1,000 to help meet that need. Naturally, he expected God to use one of the wealthy members of the church to meet this need.

I knew nothing about that prayer until I walked into his office and shared with him that God had burdened my heart to give \$1,000 over and above my tithe. He was shocked – and I was left wondering how I could keep this commitment to God.

A few weeks later, Connie and I arrived at our first mission assignment in the state of Washington. Our finances were tighter than ever, but over the next year we kept an accurate record of our giving. After several months of sacrificially giving an extra \$20 a month, I began to feel defeated. Without God doing something special, I could see no way of keeping my commitment to God.

In my discouragement, I went to God and sought direction reading His Word. Two passages seemed to speak directly to my situation:

*When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—Better not to vow than to vow and not pay (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).*

*“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:8-11).*

God's Word is so practical and direct. It was, as though He was saying, if I brought the offering, He would open the windows of heaven to bless me. Though I can't explain it, I knew that God was going to do what I could not do.

I immediately got up and wrote a check for \$100 and mailed it the next day. When I arrived home from the Post Office, I somehow knew that God had something for us in the mailbox. Though we had not received any money recently, there was a letter containing a check for ... \$100.

I was humbled by God's power. I was convinced God had given the promise and faith to act upon His Word. This was not coincidence, but the hand of God.

I immediately took the \$100 and wrote another check to our church and sent it on its way. Three days later I received a second \$100 check dated the same day I wrote the second check. It was plain to me that God was teaching me something about faith. Over the next few weeks, each time we gave the \$100 that God provided, He matched it.

One day I decided to write a check for an odd amount of \$133. Somehow I knew that God had something waiting for us in our mailbox. To my surprise, there were three letters with three checks ... for \$135 – two dollars more than I had just mailed. With those three checks, I was able to go back to the Post Office and send my last check that completed the \$1,000 promise. God even paid the postage with the extra two dollars. At that point, the checks stopped coming in the mail.

God was teaching me foundational lessons for our ministry. The lessons were not about money, but about building faith and depending on God. I didn't get to keep any of that money God sent. I was only redirecting it like a channel. What I did learn was that when God begins something, we are to exercise faith, and He will finish what He began.

### **His Part, Our Part**

Jesus is continually moving us forward in our growth in grace. He has great plans for us: He has *predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son.*<sup>18</sup> In love, He never leaves us the way we are.

It is imperative that we understand the difference between trying to get Jesus to commit to our Kingdom plans – and us committing to His Kingdom plan. Within each of us is a sinful, selfish nature that continually wants to place *our needs and desires* above *His will for us*. He is the King. We are but servants. He is Lord. We are grateful followers. It is His grace that initiates in our lives – and we respond to that.

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<sup>18</sup> Romans 8:29

## How F-A-T Are You?

There is a role that we play in preparing for the storms of life. I've chosen to use the acrostic F-A-T to communicate our responsibility.

### F = Faithful

We must choose to walk faithfully with Jesus each day. That involves spending focused time in worship, prayer and Bible reading each day. Jesus modeled that for the disciples: *"Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed"* (Mark 1:35).

Early in my Christian life I read a biography of great men of God who rose early each morning and spent several hours in prayer. I was motivated to follow their example – but I met with disastrous results. I could not stay awake during that prayer time, and often barely made it through the day because I was so tired. I quickly realized that God had not made me a morning person. My best hours to spend time with God were in the evening. But I was staying up late and getting up early – and my body rebelled. I was a "night-owl" and I functioned best in the evening.

Carve out time each day to spend with God ... but make sure it is time where you can focus and stay awake! ***Your commitment to follow Jesus should be the outgrowth of your love relationship with Him.*** Study His Word. Study His ways. Pray honestly to Him. Ask Him for the power and grace to obey Him. And learn what it means to walk dependently in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is not difficult to follow Jesus when it is in our hearts to do so. In grace, God creates the desire to do His will within us, and then He calls us to follow. ***Our commitment to Jesus will be a result of His first working in us and then working His will out through our lives.*** *"For it is God who works in you to will and to do for His good pleasure."*<sup>19</sup>

We prepare ourselves for tomorrow's storm by walking faithfully with Jesus today.

God delights in *drawing* us to do His will, not *driving* us to do it. We are called to *"delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of Your heart."*<sup>20</sup> Please note that this verse does not say God will give you what you want ... it says that God will give you the *wants* or *desires* to do His will. That's the heart of a faithful servant.

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<sup>19</sup> Philippians 2:13

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 37:4

## **A = Available**

Not everyone who says they follow Jesus is available to do His will. That's true today – and it was true in the first century:

*And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:18-22).*

It seems these two "followers" had their own agendas. But true followers of Jesus are committed to His agenda. They don't come to Jesus for what they can "get," but for what they can "give." Their service is not motivated by a selfish agenda, but by a servant's heart and love of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

The heart of availability is the heart of a servant. He is the chief Shepherd. We are merely under-shepherds, doing what He calls us to do. Let's keep that straight. The Christian life is not about *us and our personal fulfillment*. It is about *Jesus and His glory*.

Our commitment to Jesus will grow as we grow. And each day we will be further prepared for the storms ahead.

## **T = Teachable**

When you set out walking with Jesus in the Christian life, there's a lot to learn. I can tell you, fifty years later, there's *still* a lot to learn! Paul tells us to "*understand what the will of the Lord is.*"<sup>22</sup> It's one of the questions I am most often asked: "*How can I know the will of God?*"

Before I give you seven markers for knowing God's will, let me make three statements that will frame what the will of God is for us.

- The will of God is not so much a "*place*" but a "*Person*." God's will is that you press deeply into knowing Jesus. When you do that, the "*places*" will take care of themselves.
- The will of God is not so much what we "*do*" but who we "*are*." It has to do with character. It has been said that 95% of God's will for you is already written in the Bible – and it has to do with what type of person you are.

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<sup>21</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14

<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 4:17

- The will of God is not a “*destination*” but a “*journey*.” It’s hard for the Christian to ever say, “I’ve arrived at the will of God,” because He is always leading us forward. There’s much more ahead.

Now, what about those seven markers? I think of finding and knowing the will of God much like signposts.

**First**, God always guides based on His Word. His will for us will never contradict His Word. When He says, “*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers,*”<sup>23</sup> you should stop rationalizing about marrying a non-Christian. It just isn’t His will. His Word is clear. And as I said earlier, 95% of God’s will for you is already written in His Word.

**Second**, God guides by His Spirit. Galatians 5:25 tells us “*If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.*” He desires to lead us into God’s will. Keep in step. March to the beat of the Spirit’s drum in your life. That will involve listening and learning. It’s a process. The Spirit has been given as a witness in our hearts to the will of God. Listen ... and obey. He will lead us with “*the peace which passes all understanding.*”<sup>24</sup>

**Third**, God uses the example and counsel of mature believers. Find several mature Christians who can speak wisdom into your life. Don’t rely on just one person ... God’s counsel is best when there are several.<sup>25</sup> Find people who are *wise* – people who know God’s ways. These should be men and women who love you, know you, are willing to listen to you, and above all, speak truthfully to you.

**Fourth**, God gives us His peace in the decision-making process. God’s peace surpasses all comprehension. The great hymn says it well: “*When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, “it is well, with my soul.”*”

But let me give you two serious cautions here. First, we can sometimes rationalize our actions and create a self-made peace (talking ourselves into a decision, without relying on God). Be careful that the peace you experience comes from God. God confirms our choice with His abiding peace that is greater than our emotions.

**Fifth**, God leads by the open and closed doors of circumstances. Paul wanted to go into Asia Minor, but the doors were closed. God re-directed him elsewhere. That’s why Paul often asked believers to pray for him to experience open doors for the proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:14

<sup>24</sup> Philippians 4:7

<sup>25</sup> See Proverbs 24:6; 11:3.

<sup>26</sup> Colossians 4:2-6

**Sixth**, God uses the walk and good examples of mature and fruitful believers as a “pattern”, for us to follow. Paul taught believers, “I am following Christ closely –follow my pattern of life . . .<sup>27</sup> Before making your decisions, ask yourself, “Is this the pattern of mature and faithful Christians.”

**Seventh**, God also uses the principles that He has already built into our lives through previously learned lessons. As our faith grows, so grows our capacity to love God and know His will. When these are lined up in the same direction they point clearly to the will of God.

God guides ... He guides clearly as we begin to simply obey what His Word has commanded us to do. As we walk in obedience to the clear will of God, we will discover the more specific will of God for our lives. If we do these, we will enjoy our journey with God.

### **Where Do I Start?**

The very best place to start is at the beginning – where you are right now. How **faithful** are you? Are you **available**, committed to do His will? And are you **teachable**, listening to learn what God is doing in your life?

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*We prepare ourselves for the storms of life by becoming  
F-A-T ... Faithful, Available and Teachable!*

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If your view of God’s love is that God will only let good things happen to you, then you define “good” from your own vantage point. And you will never grow through the storms. God does work all things for our good and for His glory – but God is the One who defines both good and glory from His wisdom in light of eternity.

If your theology does not accept that a loving Father sends His children into storms, then you will not mature beyond trying to get God to commit to blessing and building the kingdom of God according to your wishes.

Begin with a clear view of God, one that is developed according to His Word.

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<sup>27</sup> Phil 3:17; see also: 1 Thes 1:6, 2 Thes 3:7, 1 Timothy 4:6, 2 Tim 3:10-15, Heb 13:7.



## Time for Reflection

Read Luke 5:1-11.

1. In what ways did Jesus challenge the comfort of the disciples?
2. What was Peter's response (v. 8) to this miracle? Why did he respond that way?
3. At the end of the story, Luke records that when the fishermen brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

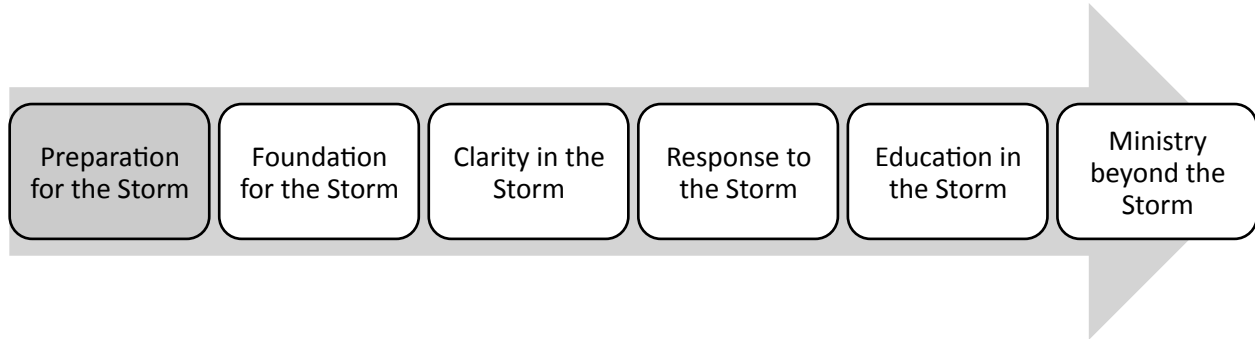
Why did they do that? What compelled them to leave everything and follow Jesus?

What were they beginning to learn about Jesus?

Lord Jesus, give me eyes of faith to see the spiritual realities before me. Help me to learn Your ways and to hear Your voice clearly.



Chapter 5 – How Do I Respond to Jesus’ Preparation?  
SECTION ONE – Preparation for the Storm



### Hurry Up and Wait

Much of life seems to be made up of waiting. When we are young, we can't wait to get our driver's license. When we're working, we can't wait for our vacation to arrive. And when we're engaged, we can't wait to get married. There's a good side of waiting – it involves hope.

But there's a troublesome side of waiting. When you are in the line at the grocery store (and no matter which line you pick, it is always the slowest), you get impatient and angry. When you are late and the traffic has slowed to a crawl, you pound the dashboard. And when your spouse "makes you angry" (or at least that's how you spin it), they feel your irritation and displeasure.

Waiting is hard. We live in a fallen world and that makes life difficult. But what I find interesting is that when Jesus is preparing us for the approaching storms, it often involves waiting ... and we don't like that. We often scoff and rebel at the very thought of delay.

### Three Heart Issues in Waiting

There are three issues that make waiting a struggle for us:<sup>28</sup>

- **Waiting appears meaningless.** All we want is what is at the end of the "wait." We're not concerned about the process of waiting ... we just want the result. There are times we know waiting is good – like waiting for Thanksgiving dinner to be ready. But even then, all we're after is turkey and dressing. We are a results-oriented people. And after all, what good can come out of waiting?

Well, for one thing, waiting is often how Jesus prepares us. We are in the school of discipleship and He is the teacher. ***Don't waste the wait.***

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Tripp has written a series of blogs on the subject of waiting on God. The following points have been adapted from his writing, which can be found at <http://paultripp.com/articles/posts/tired-of-waiting-1>

- **Waiting tells me I am not in control.** If it were up to me, all the traffic lights would turn green as I approach. Slower drivers would immediately turn off the road. And I would be happy. But my unhappiness tells me I am not in control, even though I would like to be.

So waiting can be a reminder that I need to submit to His Lordship in my life. I need to stop running the show, calling the shots, and demonstrating my entitlement. I need to be reminded that, though I am His child, ***I must submit.***

- **Waiting reminds me of how self-absorbed I am.** We want to be comfortable, free from any pain, obstacles and delays. We want our diseases cured, our debts resolved, and our stresses nullified.

When we don't get our way, we often respond with anger, irritation and depression. But Jesus calls us to a life of trust. ***He calls us to an eternal perspective*** where ...

*We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).*

## You Are Not Alone

You're not the only person who has had to wait. In fact, the entire Bible is a story of waiting. It's a major theme running through the Scriptures:

- Abraham and Sarah waited 75 years for Isaac's birth.
- Moses waited 40 years to deliver God's people – and then another 40 while he recovered from a false start.
- Israel waited 40 years to get into the Promised Land.
- After God promised that He knew the good plans He had for Israel, they waited 70 years for those plans to come to fruition.<sup>29</sup>

For some reason, God has ordained waiting as part of His plan for us. Why?

Psalm 37 is a psalm of waiting. David finds himself in the "in-between-times." God is preparing him for the next battle. And so he composes a song. He writes to remind himself and to encourage us:

*Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall*

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<sup>29</sup> Jeremiah 29:11-14

*give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm (Psalm 37:1-8).*

Notice the positive commands and good results he talks about:

- v. 1 *Do not fret ... they will be cut down*
- v. 3 *Trust in the Lord ... He will be faithful*
- v. 4 *Delight yourself in the Lord ... He will give you the desires of your heart*
- v. 5 *Commit your way to the Lord ... He shall bring it to pass*
- v. 7 *Rest in the Lord, wait for Him ... He is faithful*
- v. 8 *Cease from anger ... trust Him*

Which brings us to our next life-lesson:

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*The lessons you learn while waiting in the “preparation” stage will stay with you the rest of your life.*

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### **What Do We Learn While Waiting?**

1. ***We learn that God is sovereign.*** He is in control. Our waiting is not a punishment from God. In fact, it's mercy. Because it is often in our times of waiting that we learn life's lessons and have a chance to grow. Waiting is not what you get at the end of the wait – it's about what you become as you wait. The Bible calls that *sanctification*.

God works deeply in us to make us more like His Son. Yes, there are times I wish I was zapped into Heaven immediately following my conversion. But God has kept me here. And He has kept you here, waiting for His return. That's not a mistake. He has a productive purpose for us while we wait.

2. ***We learn that His Word is true.*** God is good <sup>30</sup> and His plan for us is good. <sup>31</sup> We can wait with hope – sometimes, even in pain – because we know that something good is coming. This is where we must step up in solid trust. It's easy to have faith when everything is going well. But what about the other ninety percent of the time? Faith flourishes in the midst of the fire – and we must look securely into the face of God during times of trial and waiting.
3. ***We learn how dependent we really are.*** Let's face it: trials can easily bring us to our knees. They have the ability to cause us to lose perspective. That's where we must fight.

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<sup>30</sup> Mark 10:18

<sup>31</sup> Jeremiah 29:11

It's the "Gaze-Glance" principle: ***Gaze at God and simply glance at your problems.*** Why? Well, your problems won't simply go away, so focusing on them will simply get us disoriented. But focusing on God will cause us to remain confident and faith-filled.

4. ***Waiting clarifies what's important.*** David wrote,

*"I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!"* (Psalm 27:13-14)

Several years ago I was part of a Partnership Evangelism Team working with Baptist churches in Korea. Each pastor was asked to enlist three laymen to come to Korea to participate in personal evangelism and to conduct revivals in local churches.

Our team was assigned to a small, young Korean congregation. Our first two services had about twenty in attendance. We were disappointed in the number of people responding, so we went to God in prayer. Our team was impressed that God wanted us to share Christ in the local schools. We asked the pastor of the church if that was possible. He came back to inform us that no door was opened to us. We waited. That night in our hotel room, our team got down on our knees and asked God to open the door.

The next morning the pastor came to pick us up and said we were invited to an all-male school of seniors. I asked one of the men on our team, a young Christian businessman from Portland, to give his salvation testimony to each class before I preached. Each class had fifty to eighty students, and we were given the entire hour for our presentation. For five different periods that day we shared Christ. God used this businessman's testimony. The next day we went back and spoke to three more classes of students. As best as we could tell, 20-30% of each class responded to the invitation to invite Christ into their lives.

That night we asked God to open another door for us. The next morning our Korean pastor said that we had been invited to come and address a girl's school of 1,800 students. Again this businessman gave his testimony, and nearly ten percent of the students responded to the invitation.

God used this businessman and built his faith. The next morning, October 1987, I read the headlines telling of the largest one-day percentage decline in the history of the Dow Jones Index. I wondered how he would respond. This was a financial storm for him. In one day he had lost thousands of dollars. Things were outside of his control, and he was unable to reach his broker in time to stop his escalating losses.

It encouraged my heart to see him handle this storm. I don't think I would have gotten through it as well as he did. I sensed from him that he was more excited about Jesus using him to reach people than he was about trying to use Jesus to save his stocks.



## Time for Reflection

Read John 21. This story occurs after Jesus' resurrection.

1. The disciples are out fishing. How do they recognize Jesus? (v. 3-6)
2. Peter's denial of Jesus was fresh in his mind. How does Jesus restore him to the task of ministry?

What is the significance of asking him three times, "*Do you love me?*"

3. How do you think Peter would have responded to this statement: *Once you have seen God at work, there will be a sense of discontentment in your life if you settle for anything less.*

How does that statement impact you?

Lord Jesus, may I see You at work in my life in the days where I have to wait. Open my eyes to see You at work in my life when I fail. And may my answer to your question "*Do you love Me?*" always be "Yes!"