women & more

Keeping Faith Through the Storms
13 October 2011

The storms will come! There is no avoiding them. If we live, we will incur storms in our lives: (1) seasonal storms, (2) transitional storms, and (3) unexpected storms (squalls). Webster defines a squall as a sudden, violent gust of wind often with rain or snow. Today we’re talking about the squalls!

“CHIPPIE the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up and blown over.

“The problems began when Chippie’s owner decided to clean his cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She’d barely said ‘hello’ when ‘ssopp’! Chippie got sucked in.

“The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum and opened the bag. There was Chippie—still alive, but stunned.

“Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do…she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air.

“Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

“A few days after the trauma, the reporter who’d initially written about the event contacted Chippie’s owner to see how the bird was recovering. ‘Well,’ she replied, ‘Chippie doesn’t sing much anymore—he just sits and stares.’

“It’s hard not to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over…that’s enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart” (From Max Lucado’s book In The Eye Of The Storm).

Can we relate to this little guy? We’re going along life’s road fairly smoothly, we’re praising the Lord, and we’ve even got a thankful heart when out of the blue the doctor calls. The certified letter arrives. The friend or spouse we trusted betrays or abandons. The check bounces—the big one: house payment or rent check. The police are at our door…ssopp! Waves of doubt and fear roll over us. During spiritual warfare, we’re overwhelmed, confused, fearful and depressed! What happened? Our calm life has been sucked into a storm surge, and in Max’s words, “The enemy is too big; the task too great; the future too bleak, and the answers are too few.”

What are the storms or impending storms we’re going through right now?
What are we doing to cope? Who are we turning to for help? Jesus knows how we feel: His body has been shocked, his pulse has raced, his eyes have been salt-stung with tears, he’s been sleep-deprived, deserted, heartbroken, and, yes, Jesus has pleaded with the Father asking why? We are precious to him, so when our “calm goes to chaos” and our “peace to perplexity”, he will be with us and see us through. “When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever” Proverbs 10:25.

- People, even Christians—sometimes especially Christians—want to know “why” some storm has come, and God is not offended at our asking. Though he usually doesn’t tell us, there are two great truths we can claim when enduring the consequences of life’s storms.

   **The Nothing and the Everything Truths…**

1. **Nothing** touches us that has not passed through the hands of our heavenly Father. Nothing! Be sure that God has sovereignly surveyed and approved the trial—the warfare—and is allowing this in our lives.

   Job in the Old Testament says of God after his ordeal, “I had heard about you before, but now I have seen you” In the New Testament the Lord said to Paul in his storm, “My grace is sufficient for you.” Hold on…I’m with you!

2. **Everything** we endure is being used to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ and to prepare us for serving others more effectively. Everything! The Holy Spirit is committed to shaping us into the image of Jesus. We need to be quietly aware that the life of Christ is being modeled in us and that the storm is being used to empty our hands of our own resources, our own sufficiency, and turn us back to the faithful One. And God knows what will get through to us!

In the Old Testament the Lord wanted Jonah to serve the people of Nineveh by telling them about God. Jonah had to be convinced through a storm. And in the New Testament we see Peter being conformed into the image of his Savior and Master, Jesus, through the many storms in his life. While storms at sea are rare for us, some of the storms on Grand Lake can hold the elements of terror, shock, and violence that our squalls sometimes comprise. We know that we do not want to be out in deep water when a squall hits!

Since **we will have storms**, and ask why, we need the Lord’s presence to navigate and survive. When people endure something catastrophic they often ask, “Where was God?” But if they don’t know him, how will they recognize his presence?
Let’s examine Matthew 14:23-33 where Jesus, though not bodily in the boat with his disciples, was powerfully present with them in the storm. They needed 1) to know him so that 2) they’d know he was present.

23 “After he (Jesus) had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

“During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.

27 “But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’”

Don’t storms often come in the night? Verses 28 through 31 recount Peter asking to come to Jesus on the water, his faithless sinking, and then the Lord’s rescuing hand extended—a storm within a storm for this disciple!

“And when they (Jesus and Peter) climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”

I. The disciples worshiped Jesus for the very first time corporately, because they recognized him as the Son of God. God allows storms in our lives so we will come to know him and recognize him in the storms and be confident of his presence with us!

Then Mark 4:35-41 (and Luke 8:2-25) recount how the disciples reacted in a storm with Jesus present in the boat. Would they be less fearful? Why?

37 “A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

38 “Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?’

39 “He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 “He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’

41 “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’”

• The disciples were overcome with desperation in this violent storm:
  • They cried out to Jesus for help—“Don’t you care if we drown?”
  • They were terrified—even with Jesus in the boat!
  • They asked each other, “Who is this?”, after Jesus calmed the storm.

II. The disciples experienced doubts—“Who is this?”—we thought we knew him, but do we really? When Jesus causes us to question “Who is this” after knowing him, it’s not so we’ll stumble into doubt, but so we’ll be stunned into seeking the answer—Him—“followship”!
We need to worship God and follow Christ, but first we must know him as Savior and Lord (Master). We need to have our faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and be exercising that faith, because we will tend to react in a storm the way we are accustomed to reacting in everyday life. If our faith and hope and anchor are in Jesus Christ and we’re turning to him daily for provision and strength and wisdom, and following him, then we will turn to him during the storms of crisis, trial, and persecution—during warfare.

- Where is our confidence for safety and deliverance through a storm? Have we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Have we accepted Jesus’ payment on the cross of Calvary for our sin, and committed our heart and life to his care? When the surge of the storm comes, do we have Christ as our rock and our anchor? If no, then we need to commit our heart and life to him today. “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” Hebrews 7:25.

If we are believers, what is our relationship with the Father right now? Have we moved away from him? Be sure that if anyone has moved, it is us, because God never moves. Is there sin in our life that God may be dealing with? Ask the Holy Spirit to expose any sin, and then do the following:

- **Repent** “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” 1 John 1:9. Repentance will…
  - **Repair** the relationship “Come near to God and he will come near to you” James 4:8.
  - **Rest** with your confidence firmly in Him. “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” Hebrews 10:23.

If we have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and He is the Lord of our life and our relationship is free from sin, then we just need to wait the storm out, trusting God to see us through it for his purposes—worship and wait! “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” Isaiah 40:31 KJV. Why wait? Because…

  1. God is Sovereign,
  2. God rewards patience, and
  3. God is working things out!

And let others help us. Receive the help God sends through others joyfully and thankfully, understanding that someday we will be used to help another in their storm. God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters!
Fifteen years ago I had two open-heart surgeries, and coded on March 10, 1996. It was almost the death of me! Eight years ago two more health situations threatened to take me out—my throat was healed by God’s touch, but I had to go through surgery to be restored from the other. My husband and I were snatched from divorce court thirty-five years ago, and then we added our son Ryan to our family in a difficult breach delivery. Our first son Renwick had been born ten years earlier, two months premature, and had nearly died.

In the 80s we lost our business when the lender discontinued flooring car dealerships and called our note ‘due’. When a developer wanted our home-site for office buildings, we endured a tremendous storm before City Council overwhelmingly approved rezoning, and God miraculously delivered us to a beautiful home on five acres. Our daughter-in-law had brain surgery and a miscarriage, and our daughter Stephanie has endured several miscarriages—one at mid-term. She and her three children were sideswiped by an eighteen-wheeler while merging onto I-25—the car severely damaged, but without injury to them! Her husband, Bret, has endured two back surgeries.

One of my younger sisters, Karen, died in 1983 of a heart condition she’d suffered for 34 years, and my 24-year-old nephew, Justin, was killed on his motorcycle in 2006, after 17 days in ICU at Cleveland Metro. This year I learned that I have breast cancer, and before it was all said and done, I had reached an incurable ‘life’ sentence—breast cancer cells in my bone marrow. My husband and I were orphaned before we were 60, and those are just a few of the storms in my life! We can see clearly that it is only by God’s great grace and providence that I stand and teach this lesson today…

Storms attack our faith, mess with our minds and bodies, erupt like bombs, and mangle our will to go on. They bring on the long dark night. God allows spiritual warfare in our lives. When daylight turns to pitch black be sure that God knows what he is about; he knows what he is doing! He’s never out of control; he is Sovereign! In describing God’s careful attention to the care of his creation—massive and miniscule—Max Lucado tells us that our God carves out the deep canyons in the sea with the same zeal as he attaches hairs on the legs of the fly to keep it warm. What an awesome God!

In Safe in the Shepherd’s Arms Max says, “If you have the Shepherd…you have an anchor for every storm. You have everything you need!” Hebrews 6:19 “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” We can keep faith: God is with us in our storm!