

*GETTING
THROUGH
THE
STORMS
OF LIFE*



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Dedication

For all who have faced hardship and have
turned to Jesus as their hope.

INTRODUCTION

I never know where people are at in life—how despondent they are. But I do know that God's Word can reach them wherever they are. I would like to share with you a letter that I received:

“Pastor Greg, the Lord has used you to be a lifesaver in a storm I have been dredging through. Last summer I didn't even want to live. I laid on my bathroom floor and Googled a scripture and you popped up too. I have listened to you since the early 1990s but that day I really listened to your message. It helped me get myself up and pull myself together. The storm is still going but I have been growing closer to God.”

I wonder if this describes you right now. Maybe you are in the middle of a storm. Maybe you're not despondent enough to take your own life, but you are looking at this big giant storm and you are wondering if you are ever going to get through it.

It is my hope that you can use this book to learn how Jesus can guide you through whatever storm you may be going through. To get a better sense of who He is and what He has planned for you. And as we think about the storms in life, as we think about hardships that we all go through, I invite you to ask the Lord to speak to you and help you find calm in the midst of your storm.

LIFE IS FILLED WITH STORMS

Now, I don't know about you, but I have just about given up on weathermen. They never seem to get it right. They say a storm is coming and no storm comes. They say it is going to be hot and sunny but it rains. Quite frankly, I think I am as good at predicting storms as they are. I just look out my window. If it is sunny, it will be a good day. If there are some clouds, I will take an umbrella. By the way, do you want to know a surefire way to get it to rain? Wash your car. It always works for me. Also, I know when it is going to rain before anybody else for one simple reason: I am bald. Bald men are always the first to know when it is raining. I just feel it on my head. I'll say, “It's raining,” and my wife will say, “No it isn't.” Then about a minute later she says, “It is raining!”

Storms sometimes come unexpectedly. Some are big storms. Even scary ones. Have you ever been out and about doing whatever it is you do and an unexpected storm comes? You are just out and the birds are singing and the sun is shining, and a drop of rain falls. Then, all of a sudden, ominous clouds build and it is a downpour. And you think, “When it rains it pours.”

Sometimes, in life, storms come and we are expecting them. But sometimes they just come into our lives seemingly out of nowhere. When I say storm, I am talking about a metaphor for difficulty in our own lives. Hardship. Trials. Or even a tragedy. A storm could be a broken relationship. Maybe you are going through a financial crisis. Maybe you were laid off at work. You are facing legal problems. Or unpleasant and painful health issues. It might be the inevitable effects of age, a stroke, or heart attack. It might be a storm in the form of rebellious children, or even crazy parents. Maybe you are struggling with an inner conflict right now.

There are so many life-storms that come. It can be a game-changing storm, like the death of a loved one. Maybe you were expecting it. You knew it was coming but, now that it has happened, the finality is sinking in and it’s so hard to adjust to life without that person around. It may be the *unexpected* death of a loved one—you didn’t know it was coming. My point is this: storms can wreak havoc in your life.

Here is something I want to tell you. There are two kinds of people in life: those who are going into a storm, and those who are in a storm. You are either in one or you are headed into another one. Right now, you are probably thinking, “That is the most depressing thing I have ever heard.” Listen, I am just telling you the truth.

The good news is this: God is always with you in every storm you are going to face in life. You don’t have to be afraid.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wrapped it up with these words:

“Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a 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)

In that statement of Christ, I want you to notice that it doesn’t talk about *if* the rain will fall, but *when* the rain falls. Because it will fall. The storms will come. The Bible says that it rains on both the righteous and the unrighteous (see Matthew 5:45).

You might remember that movie from a number of years ago called *The Perfect Storm*, starring George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg. That was actually based on a true event of a mega-storm that happened in 1991, off the coast of Massachusetts. In fact, it was the strongest storm of any in US history. This perfect storm was called that because three storms combined into one in the Atlantic Ocean, and created an almost apocalyptic kind of situation. Here is how it happened: two existing storms were hit by a hurricane—ironically dubbed Hurricane Grace. It all converged into this mega-storm. This perfect storm had a hundred-foot wave face. Can you imagine that? Life was lost in that horrible storm.

There is a story in Matthew 14 of the disciples facing a storm. You could also call theirs a perfect storm, in a way, because what came out of it was very, very good. It is a story of how the Lord worked through a stormy circumstance and it has a lot to say to us today.

There are many occasions in the Gospels where we read about the disciples and storms. This story happened on the Sea of Galilee. It’s actually a freshwater lake that is so big it almost seems like an ocean. And the way it is designed—with a nearby mountain range—winds will come funneling through the range and hit the water, resulting in big storms. That happened on multiple occasions. But this time we might as well name it Hurricane Grace because of the ultimate outcome.

“Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed

by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.' And Peter answered Him and said, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.' So He said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'" (Matthew 14:22-33)

So what can we learn from this text about the storms of life?

THE STORMS WILL COME

Many Christians are mistaken by the idea that once they start following Jesus Christ and seek to walk in the center of His will, life becomes smooth sailing. This simply isn't true. Storms (hardships, difficulties, or whatever it is) are going to come. Jesus said, in John 16:33, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The bad news is, no matter what, storms are inevitable. The good news is, as a Christian, you will learn through storms and you will have great victories. Where there are no trials in life, there are no triumphs. It has been said, "The hammer that shatters glass also forges steel."

Here is another very important thing to know: Storms don't last forever. Hardships don't last forever. The Bible says, "Our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! . . . For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NLT). Again, the troubles you see now will soon be over. But the joys to come will last forever.

Did Jesus know a storm was waiting? Yes, He did. And He would use it for their own personal benefit. Here is something to consider: sometimes the things we dread most can actually be the best things for us. You can

be sure as they looked out on the Sea of Galilee, being seasoned sailors, the disciples could see a storm was brewing. But to their credit they got in the boat and began rowing in the direction of the other side, which meant they had to go right through the eye of the storm. Jesus told them to cross over and that is what they were going to do. This reminds us that security is not in the place of easy circumstances but in the place of obedience to the will of God.

Have you ever seen the bumper sticker that says, “God is my copilot”? Do you have that sticker? If you do, take it off. Because do you really want God as your copilot? That sort of implies you are at the wheel—at the controls. If you are going to use that analogy, shouldn’t it be “God is my pilot”?

The fact is, a lot of us like to be in control of our own lives, or at least think we are in control. My wife knows this about me. I do not like her to drive me anywhere. I am a horrible backseat driver, offering running commentary on everything. “Cathe, speed up. Get in that lane. Go, go, go. Cathe, back up. Stop! Change lanes.” I am like that the whole time, and then she says, “Why don’t you just drive?” “Good idea! Pull the car over right here.” Yes, I like to be in control. And we can be that way in life, saying, “Lord, stop. Lord, turn right. No, Lord, this way.” We are trying to be at the controls.

But you don’t want God as your copilot. You want Him as your pilot, because He even knows when the turbulence is coming and how to get through it. When you fly, occasionally you will hear the voice of the captain come over the intercom saying, “Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to experience some turbulence, so please buckle your seatbelt.” This always happens to me right when I get my full cup of hot coffee. *Gee, thanks*. Listen, God knows the route to a better destination than you ever had in mind. In fact, when God is the pilot, He doesn’t need a copilot.

Now imagine for a moment that you heard the voice of the captain saying, “Ladies and gentlemen, we have lost power in both of our engines and we are going to have to make a water landing.” Right at that moment, you are preparing to die. You are thinking about your last words. But you ask, “Who is the captain of this aircraft?” and you find out it’s Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger. A glimmer of hope appears because, of course, you’ve seen the movie about him. Sully landed US Airways Flight 1549 on the Hudson River in 2009. It was a successful water landing and

he became a national hero. “Well,” you think, “if he is in the cockpit, there is a chance I am in reasonably good shape.”

Listen, someone better than Sully can be in the cockpit of your life. It is the Lord Himself, and you won’t have to be afraid when turbulence comes. God wants to be your pilot, not your copilot. Turn the controls over to Him and don’t be a backseat driver. Let Him do what He does best.

One man that beautifully weathered his storm was Joseph. I mean, you want to talk about setback after setback. Yet we see, despite the fact that he was sold by his brothers for twenty pieces of silver as a slave and thought to be dead, God’s providence brought about his elevation in the kingdom of Egypt. He became the second most powerful man on the face of the earth. And one day his brothers were brought before him. He could have issued payback like you have never seen. He could have executed them. But instead we read that Joseph said to them, “But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Genesis 45:5). That is an amazing statement. *You did not do this to me, but God did it.* Wait. Um, hello Joseph. Let’s go back for a moment: you were sold into slavery, you were falsely accused of rape, you were put into prison—and you are saying God did it. Don’t you mean to say God *allowed* it? No. Joseph said God did it. Amazing. It is just a reminder that God is in control of our lives.

Know this: He who stirred up the storm is also the hiding place in it. What did Jesus say? He said, “Get into the boat and go to the other side.” If Jesus said, “Get into the boat and drown in the middle of the lake,” I would not have gotten in that boat. God is going to get you to the other side. What is the other side? Ultimately, it is Heaven. He will get us safely to Heaven. God promises a safe arrival. But He did not necessarily promise smooth sailing. In this life, storms will come.

STORMS SERVE THE PURPOSES OF GOD

Notice the word *immediately* in verse 22 of Matthew 14, “Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat.” There is an urgency here. This strongly suggests they did not want to get into the boat and leave. Why? Because of what had just happened: the most popular miracle that Jesus ever performed. Can you guess what it was? The raising of Lazarus from the dead? No. A man being cleansed of leprosy? No. A person receiving sight? No, it wasn’t that either.

His most popular miracle at the time was the feeding of the 5,000. In fact, this is the only miracle in all four Gospels. It is interesting that this was His most popular miracle because receiving sight is great, and dead people living again is amazing, but free lunch . . . now we are talking! The people were hungry. A little boy brought his loaves and fishes. Jesus blessed the food, then He multiplied it, and everyone was fed. There were even leftovers. I love that detail. He always gives us more than enough. Then they were saying, “We love Jesus! We want Him as king right now.” One Gospel says they wanted to make Him king by force. Imagine that. “You are going to be our King if You want to or not. By the way, when is dinner?”

The disciples were getting caught up in all of this excitement and Jesus made them get into the boat, immediately. Effectively He was saying, “Boys, come over here right now. Get in the boat. Let’s go.” Why? Because He was protecting them from themselves. On more than one occasion they argued about who was going to be the top dog in Heaven. And He didn’t want them to go from being unknown to being in positions of power on the terms of the people. You have heard the expression “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” That is what could happen to them. He knew they wouldn’t be ready for something like this. It was the worst thing that could happen to His disciples. He had to get them out as quickly as possible.

Sometimes, the thing we want most in life ends up being the worst thing ever. We hope for it. We plan for it. We work for that success. Then, one day, you find the success you had hoped for. Maybe you even have more success than you hoped for. And you start forgetting about God. Maybe you start becoming self-confident. Yet, in all of those times you thought were so horrible—living paycheck to paycheck, bad health issues, or other problems—you were the most dependent upon God. Because of that, you realize the hard times are better, spiritually speaking, than the easy times. Sometimes, when we reach our goals we forget about the Lord. Jesus moved His boys into the storm for their own good. He said, “Let’s get out of here. Get in the boat and move away from here.”

There are times when God will not answer your prayer the way you want Him to. In the moment, you might think God is so unfair. Then, years later, you look back and see that God was protecting you through the storm. Maybe you wanted to marry that girl so bad. Or you just knew that guy was Mr. Right. You pleaded with God. You prayed and prayed.

But the Lord said, “No.” Now, ten years have gone by and you saw what happened to the person that ended up married to them. Then you look at the great spouse the Lord may have given you, and say, “Yes. Thank You, Lord, for protecting me from myself.” Sometimes we ask for things that could actually harm us. And, because God loves us, He says, “No, I am not going to let you do that.”

And sometimes we bring storms upon ourselves unnecessarily, as a result of our own disobedience. The perfect example of this is Jonah. Do you remember him? He was called by God to go and preach to the city of Nineveh. But he didn’t want to go, because the Ninevites were enemies of the Israelites. And he thought if he didn’t preach repentance to the Ninevites, God would destroy them, and that would be one less enemy to deal with.

God told him to go, and he boarded a ship that was going in the opposite direction. He chickened out. You might say that Jonah was the original “chicken of the sea.” He disobeyed God. He tried to run away. So what happened? A great storm came. And that storm began to terrify all the sailors on board and they cried out to their gods. Jonah said, “Throw me overboard and the storm will stop.” Sure enough, the moment he went over the side, the storm ceased from its raging.

You could say that storm really came as a direct result of Jonah’s disobedience. There are times when we create our own storms. Because you are not doing what God told you to do, you are reaping the consequences of it. You go out drinking and then drive home. But you get pulled over and you get a DUI. Maybe you have been lying to a bunch of people and you got caught in your lie. Or you’ve been having an affair and you were found out. Don’t blame God. You brought these storms on yourself. The good news is that God can still work in the middle of any storm and even bring good things out of them.

But then there are storms that can come as a result of our obedience to God. Moses went through a lot of hardship because he obeyed the Lord. He could have played it safe and hung out with that flock of sheep he had. But the Lord called him to go deliver the Israelites and that’s what he did. Had he not obeyed that call we would never have known his name or been inspired by his story.

If Daniel had simply refused to pray, he wouldn’t have spent a night in the lion’s den. If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have

bowed before the golden idol, they would not have been cast into the fiery furnace. But because they obeyed God, there were special blessings for them. As he spent the night with some hungry lions, Daniel saw the power of God deliver him in the midst of hardship, not just from it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego saw that Jesus would walk with them through their fiery furnace instead of just delivering them from it. Likewise, there are special things we can learn when we are in the midst of a storm. So, you can play it safe and stay in your little harbor of security but if you want to go sailing on the open sea at God's leading, you will face storms. The bad news: storms are inevitable. The good news: you will learn from them as a Christian.

In Mark 4, we read of another storm. The disciples had done nothing wrong. They did not bring this storm upon themselves. Jesus was not trying to protect them from something. The purpose of this storm was to produce something in their lives they needed. He was looking for a desired result. The Bible says, "Our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NLT). There are lessons you learn in storms that you just don't learn anywhere else.

There are some biblical promises we would rather forget. In 2 Timothy 3:12, we read, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." That is not usually a verse you see people hanging on their wall, is it? Who wants to put that verse up? But it's just as true as Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to those who love God," and Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."

In Acts 14, we see the apostles visiting a church. They told the people, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (verse 22). But we would rather that passage read, "Through many days of perpetual happiness and bliss we enter the kingdom of God." It's a nice thought. But that's not in the Bible, because it is not true of life. No one is exempt from experiencing the storms of life. What you have to understand is that God is at work in the life of a Christian. He will not waste your pain. He will take those things you are going through and use them for His glory, in time. He chose you. He predestined you. The

Bible says, “For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son” (Romans 8:29 NLT).

Many of us have committed Psalm 23 to memory. It paints a beautiful scene. “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul” (verses 1–3). It is a pastoral scene. A pleasant picture. Sheep grazing on grass, drinking from the cool mountain springs. We love that. Now understand of course that this Psalm was written by a shepherd named David. He knew a little bit about sheep because He had to take care of them. He knew they were one of the dumbest animals on the face of the earth. He knew they needed the constant care and protection of the shepherd. And that is why he humbled himself and said, “You know what? The Lord is my shepherd.”

We love the green pastures and we love the still waters. But then David continues on to say, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (verse 4). “Hold on,” you say. “I signed up for green pastures and still waters. Not for dark valleys. I don’t like valleys. I don’t do valleys.” Oh yes, you do. If you are a child of God—one of His sheep—there will be times He takes you to those green pastures and still waters. But He is with you in the valleys as well. And it is through those valleys we learn important lessons. Fruit does not grow on mountaintops; it grows in valleys.

JESUS IS WATCHING

After Jesus sent the disciples on their way, Matthew 14:23 tells us, “He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray.” Mark’s Gospel records this additional detail: “He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them” (Mark 6:48). He saw them. He was watching them. It was Passover, there was probably a full moon out, and He could see His boys out on the sea. And though they could not see Him, He could see them. When the storm hit, they might have asked, “Where is Jesus?” Answer: He is watching.

Now, I don’t know how that hits you. For some, the thought of Jesus watching is a pleasant thought. For others, it is like, “Oh, no. Jesus is watching!” Those people remind me of a story that I like to tell about a thief who broke into a house. He was looking around, but it was pitch

dark. Suddenly he heard a voice in the darkness say, “Jesus is watching you.” The thief starts freaking out, and he is fumbling for his flashlight. Again he heard it: “Jesus is watching you!” By this time, the thief was absolutely terrified. He followed the sound of the voice with his flashlight and saw a parrot on a perch, who once again said, “Jesus is watching you!” The thief was so relieved, he started laughing. “It’s just a parrot,” he thinks. But then he takes his flashlight and follows the perch down to its base and there a large Doberman Pinscher is baring its teeth. Then the parrot looks down and says, “Sic ’em, Jesus.”

That is how some people feel about Jesus. They hear, “Jesus is watching you,” and they think, “Oh man, I’m in trouble now.” No, listen, Jesus watching you is a good thing. God looks at you with love at all times, regardless of where you are at or what you are doing.

By the way, Jesus was not watching passively, but with great interest. He was watching their every move. I am sure He was not only watching them; I believe He was also praying for them. And here is the good news: Jesus is praying for you. We read in Romans 8:34, “Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us” (NLT). He is praying for us. Pleading for us. Interceding for us. No, Jesus had not forgotten about them. Jesus never lost sight of them. But they lost sight of Him.

Does it ever seem as though you are going through your storm all alone and God can’t see you? Know this: nothing escapes His attention. He knows about your suffering. Revelation 2:9 says, “I know your afflictions and your poverty” (NIV). He says, “I know.” And He doesn’t say that passively. The force of the words “I know” means He doesn’t know just by watching, but He knows by having passed through the same experience.

I think one of the reasons people who suffer want to talk to other people who have suffered is because they know what it is like. When someone comes up to me and says, “Our child died,” I look at them and I say, “I know.” They know I understand exactly what they are experiencing because it has happened to us. There is a connection before we even speak a word. Or if someone has found out they have cancer, they are encouraged by talking to a cancer survivor who says, “I know.” There is just some comfort there—having someone understand what you are going through.

Listen, whatever you are facing right now, Jesus says, “I know. I have been through it.” You say, “Come on, Greg—Jesus was God. He didn’t know what it was like to be betrayed.” Really? Ever heard of Judas Iscariot? Some say, “Jesus didn’t know what it was like to suffer pain like I am suffering.” Is that so? Ever heard of the whipping and the Crucifixion? Still others might argue, “Jesus doesn’t know what it is like to be abandoned by friends as I have been abandoned.” Doesn’t He? Didn’t most of His disciples abandon Him the night He was taken to the cross? Yeah, He knows. And He sees.

Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” Remember that old song, “His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches over me.” He is watching over you. Caring for you. Aware of what you are going through. Jesus was watching the disciples, and He was interceding for them. Likewise, He sees us and prays for us.

JESUS HELPS US IN OUR STORMS

After watching them, Jesus came. But when did He come? Answer: at the last moment possible. Look at verse 25 of Matthew 14: “In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.” There are four watches of the night for the Hebrew calendar. The fourth watch is the last part of the evening. Around 4:30 or maybe 5:00 in the morning. I get up very early on Sunday mornings so I can get ready. And if my alarm doesn’t go off I just wake up. I am so programmed to wake up at the same time, even though it’s still dark out. I will look out of the window at times and it looks like it is 2:00 in the morning, but it’s much later.

So the fourth watch of the night is the final part of the evening, just before the sun begins to rise. This meant that His disciples would have been at sea for at least nine hours, most of them spent in the fierce storm. Why did Jesus wait so long? Maybe He wanted them to exhaust all of their resources. Sometimes a lifeguard will actually wait for a person to come to the point of exhaustion before giving them the flotation device, so that the lifeguard won’t get pulled down by the drowning person. More than one lifeguard has been drowned trying to save a person who pulled them under the water. Sometimes the Lord will let us come to the end of ourselves so we will get to the beginning of God.

Maybe you are in the fourth watch of the night. Maybe you have been praying about a certain thing but nothing has happened. You have been praying about a prodigal daughter or son, asking the Lord to get hold of them and turn them around. Maybe you are praying for that husband to come to the Lord. You are praying for healing in your life for some physical affliction you have. A week goes by, and you are still praying. A month goes by, and you are still praying. A year goes by, and still you are praying. Ten years go by, and there you are, still praying. Time goes by, and nothing happens. So you conclude God must be saying no. Well, maybe He is saying no today but that doesn't necessarily mean He will say no tomorrow. His delays are not necessarily His denials. You are saying, "I can't do this any longer. I am too tired. I just need help." Listen, Jesus is coming. Don't despair. Here is the point I want to make: God will come when the time is right and not a moment before and not a moment after. He came to them in the fourth watch of the night, and He is coming for you.

And how did Jesus come for them? Verse 25 says, "Jesus went to them, walking on the sea." Walking on the sea. I love this. Understand, it wasn't like a glassy surface. He isn't just cruising in. No, there are these big waves all around. And He comes over all of these waves walking toward them.

If I were Jesus, I would have flown in. In fact, if I were Jesus I would have flown everywhere. Have you ever had a dream where you fly? It is actually a pretty cool dream. I don't know how your flying works but in my dreams it's not quite like Superman. I just go up and I am kind of cruising around. Then I land and I am talking to people. Then I go up again. I love it. I believe one day I will be able to do that. You ask, "Greg, are you insane?" No, I believe what the Bible says. And the Bible says that we will receive a new body. It will be like the resurrection body of Jesus. And Jesus flew. You say, "I missed that Greg. What Gospel is that in?" It is the moment when Christ ascended to heaven (see Acts 1:9). He actually went up; He just didn't come back down. That He will do later. Jesus could have flown in at the Sea of Galilee if He had chosen to do it. But He didn't fly in. He walked in.

So why did He walk in? To show His disciples that the very thing they feared—the wind, the sea, and the storm—was only a staircase for Him to come to them. In effect, He was saying, "Here is your problem. Here is what you fear. And here I am in the middle of it. It is not a problem, guys. Don't worry." So what did they do? They freaked out. We read,

“They were troubled, saying ‘It is a ghost!’” A ghost. Was this an episode of *Scooby Doo* or something? Why did they think it was a ghost? Why didn’t they know it was Jesus? Because they weren’t looking for Him.

Had the disciples been waiting by faith they would have recognized Jesus immediately. Instead, they jumped to a false conclusion thinking He was a ghost. How often is the Lord speaking to us, seeking to lead us, and we don’t see Him? We don’t hear Him, because we are not looking for Him. One of the reasons we don’t see the Lord in our circumstances, one of the reasons why we don’t hear the Lord speaking to us, is because we are not paying attention. Jesus showed up in the place where they least expected Him. But there He was.

There are things that you learn as a young Christian, and maybe as a young person. You believe these things to be true because they are in the Bible. And so you should. You might even repeat those things to other people, saying, “You know what? All things work together for good to those that love God and are called according to His purpose.” And then one day you are in a stormy situation. Your faith is being tested, and you find out for yourself how those things you’ve been telling everybody else are really true. Isn’t that wonderful? Now, you know it in a deeper way.

That is what Job said in Job 42:5 after he went through all of his calamity. He said to God, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.” In other words, “I have heard of all of these great things You do. But now I know it by experience.” Listen to this: you may know Jesus, but you will never know Him deeply until He comes to you in the midst of the storms of life.

Now, in Matthew 14:27, a reassuring voice pierces the darkness, “Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.’” Notice that He did not say, “Don’t be afraid; it is I” but the other way around. Because once they knew it was Him, the fear was gone. “It is I.” “Oh, it is Jesus. We are good. We’re fine. Everything is all right. No matter what. Even if the storm continues, we have Jesus and everything is going to be OK.” And the same is true for you. He will never leave you or forsake you. So they went from fear to faith—from terror to belief.

JESUS IS WITH US IN OUR STORMS

You are not alone. God is with you in your sorrow. He understands. He will give you the strength to get through your storm. And sometimes God takes the storms away. Sometimes, He will stop the storm altogether.

There was that other stormy occasion that again came on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was on board the boat. He was sleeping. And the disciples woke Him up. He walked up on deck and said, “Peace, be still” (Mark 4:39). Actually, a literal translation is “Peace, be muzzled”—like He was talking to a dog. “Stop!” And the storm stopped. But then He went on to say, “Oh you of little faith. Why did you doubt?” There are lessons we can learn through storms. Let me say this: it is OK to say, “Lord, deliver me,” “Lord, heal me,” “Lord, provide for me,” or “Lord, step into this situation.” And there are times when He will answer your prayer as soon as you pray it. But then there are times when He doesn’t stop the storm. There are times when you don’t get what you were hoping for and it just goes on.

Let me ask you a question: has it ever seemed as though God were asleep during the times of your need? You were going through some difficulty and you called out to the Lord and you didn’t really hear an answer from Heaven. You thought that maybe God was preoccupied, maybe He was asleep. That is not true. Psalm 121 says, “He who watches over Israel never slumbers or sleeps” (verse 4 NLT). God never falls asleep on you. God is with you in your storms. Psalm 46:1–3 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.” Sometimes God will calm a storm. Sometimes He will just walk with us through it.

You can take heart in the face of danger or uncertainty because of your awareness of God’s presence with you. Isaiah 43:2 says, “When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you” (NLT).

When the telephone rings, and someone says, “There’s been an accident.” When the doctor says to you, “I have some bad news.” When your heart sinks and it seems like your life is going to fall apart. When there is no hope, you must remember the Lord is there with you. You’re not alone.

He's standing there by your side. No, there are not always easy answers. No, we can't logically explain why certain things happen. Sometimes, as life passes us by, we can look back and, like Joseph, say, "Now I know why the Lord allowed it to happen. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Then there will be times when things happen and we will never, in this life, understand why—why that particular difficulty lasted so long. A lot of these things are, quite honestly, inexplicable. We might only understand when we see Him face to face. But we can be sure of this: He is always going to be with us through the storms.

Remember, you are going to get to the other side. And when you get there all of these things that were so hard to grasp will make sense to you. God is doing a work. Sometimes you can see the work. Sometimes you can't. Sometimes that work is to simply conform you into the image of Jesus Christ. And when you get to Heaven you will understand why God allowed that storm. Listen, you are safer with Jesus in a storm than anywhere else without Him. I don't care how good life is. I would rather be with Jesus in the perfect storm than in the plushest, most luxurious place without Him.

God's ultimate goal is not to give you an easy life. God's ultimate goal is to make you like Jesus Christ. He wants to prepare you for Heaven. We are interested in the here and now. But God is far more interested in the by and by. We are interested in what is temporarily good. God is more interested in what is eternally good. And the good thing is something you may not even see right now. Maybe what you don't understand right now is that the crisis you just came through deepened your faith. What you don't understand is how the hardship you just endured made you a more compassionate and concerned person. It has transformed you. What you don't see is that you have become a little bit more like Jesus.

When I was a little kid, I was sent to military school, and I didn't like it one bit. We had to wear uniforms. I lived on campus—on the base. They used all of the military terminology. When kids would leave, they went AWOL. And the principal was not called the principal; he was called the general. We saluted him. We marched in our little formation with our little guns and all of that. I lived in barracks on this little bunk bed. And I had a house mother. On weekends, you would have your parents pick you up and get you out of that place. Sometimes, my mom wouldn't come, so I would be one of the only kids left on base wondering why I was in this place and what was going on. I was like a little kid going through a storm.

I still remember this from my childhood. They had mandatory chapel services. And there was a song we used to sing in chapel. The lyrics were, “When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high. And don’t be afraid of the dark. At the end of a storm is a golden sky and the sweet silver song of a lark. Walk on . . . and you will never walk alone.”¹ But I was alone. I thought, “Who is with me?” There was no mention of God in the song. I heard the part about a bird. Was it the bird who was supposed to be with me? That’s good, but it didn’t bring me any consolation.

Here is what I discovered later: even as that little boy in military school, God was with me. One day I was going to meet Him. I was going to look back on that crazy life and things were going to start making sense for me. Listen, in your storm God is with you. That is why you don’t have to be afraid. Jesus Himself said, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (see Hebrews 13:5). A more literal translation would be, “I will never, no never, no never leave you or forsake you.” He will give you the strength to get through your storm.

Know this: you are not alone in your storm. Jesus is here with you right now, walking with you through it. David said, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” Why? Because “You are with me. Your rod and Your staff they comfort me” (see Psalm 23:4).

KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS

In Matthew 14:27, Jesus tells the disciples, “Take courage. I am here!” (NLT). Christ is here. Have courage. The disciples see Jesus, and Peter gets excited. He has courage, as Christ said to, and he asks for something amazing. “Peter answered Him and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water’” (verse 28). That was a really bold request. “Lord, if it is You, and not a ghost, tell me to come to You.” Jesus said, “All right. Come.” I wonder if He smiled at Peter and thought, “Only you would do this.” But it was an awesome thing that Peter did. You might criticize him and say, “Didn’t he sink?” Yeah, he sank. Yeah, Peter failed. But oh what a spectacular failure. I mean, if you are going to fail, this is the way to do it.

1. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. “You’ll Never Walk Alone.” Song by Christine Johnson, 1945.

Let me ask you a question: have you ever tried to do something for God that was a complete failure? Maybe it was your attempt to share the gospel with someone, and it didn't go so well. They asked you a question that you didn't know the answer to. Maybe you started a little Bible study or wanted to do an outreach, and no one came. Maybe you prayed for someone to get better but they didn't. Have you ever prayed for someone to get better and they got worse? A friend of mine once was sick. He said, "Greg, pray for me." And then he threw up after I prayed for him. Then he said, "You made me worse. Don't ever pray for me again!" Whatever you tried to do it was a failure. And you say, "Why did I ever do it?" Let me say thank you for your failures. I would rather try and fail than never try at all.

Failure isn't always a bad thing. It is OK to try and fail, because you are going to make mistakes in life. It is often failure that precedes success. Erwin W. Lutzer said, "Often the doorway to success is entered through the hallway of failure." And then there's the saying, "If at first you don't succeed, relax; you are just like the rest of us." But listen, nobody else had the guts or the courage to try something like Peter did.

I think that Peter had his heart in the right place. Of course it didn't turn out as wonderfully as one would hope. But remember this: despite the fact that he sank, he did walk on the water for a bit of time. "When Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus" (verse 29). This was an epic moment. Whatever follows cannot undo it and none of the other disciples tried it. We can say the request was presumptuous of Peter, but Jesus said to come. By the way, if Christ says, "Come," we need to come. If He tells us to go, we need to go.

Why did Peter start to sink? Because he took his eyes off of Jesus and put them on other things. Matthew 14:30 says, "When he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid." Or, as the Amplified version puts it, "When he perceived and felt the strong wind, He was frightened." He was doing so well. But then he took his eyes off of the Lord. He saw the wind. He saw the sea. He saw the conditions. Maybe you are sinking right now. Maybe you are going under. I don't know what it is you are looking at instead of Jesus, but you need to get your eyes back on Him. When you have your eyes on Jesus, you can do some amazing things.

It is like focusing a camera. When you find the object you want to take a picture of, everything else becomes blurry as you are keyed in. But

once you focus on something else, what was formerly in clear sight then blurs. When you are focused on Christ, everything else is sort of blurred. You see Him clearly. It is like that old song says: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”²

Also, Peter sank because he was afraid. Circumstances can be very frightening, can’t they? When the doctor says, “There is nothing more we can do.” When a threat is made against your life. When a lawsuit is filed against you. Listen, faith and fear cannot coexist. They are not good roommates. Faith gives way to fear. Trust gives way to worry. Where faith reigns, fear has no place. Where fear reigns, faith is driven away. There is no doubt about it. Fear is a powerful and very real emotion that can overtake you suddenly. Everything might be cool. You are good. Then something is said to you, or something happens, and you are filled with fear. Absolutely overcome. That is when you need to go back to the Word of God and stand on the promises of God.

Look at what happened to Peter in our story: “Beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’” (Matthew 14:30). Peter was a smart guy. He didn’t wait until he was already under the water. He started immediately—when he was beginning to sink. When you are beginning to sink, call out to Jesus. Don’t wait until it is worse. Maybe you got yourself into some trouble. You thought, “I shouldn’t have done that.” And now you are trying to cover it up. Maybe now you are lying to cover up the cover up. Stop all of that nonsense and just cry out to God. Say, “God, I have sinned. Help me. Jesus, forgive me.” Deal with it now. Don’t let it get worse. And don’t make it worse by trying to fix it. Call out to God. That is what Peter did. He was starting to sink and he said, “Lord, save me!”

Sometimes people say, “I am so over the church. There are so many hypocrites in the church. I am just over it.” Well, I am so over people saying they are over the church. I say, “You are over the church and hypocrites? Join us! There is always room for one more.”

I know there is hypocrisy in the church. As a pastor, I probably know it better than anyone because of all of the things I hear and the people I know. Christians mess up. Leaders mess up. We might admire certain people and that’s OK. Maybe they inspire us. Fine. But know this: people

2. Helen Howarth Lemmel, “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus,” 1922. http://www.hymnary.org/text/o_soul_are_you_weary_and_troubled.

are going to let you down, because we all fall short of God's glory. I am not getting ready to make a big confession, so relax. But here is my point: when I became a Christian, I chose to follow Jesus Christ. He has never been a hypocrite. He has never been inconsistent. He has done everything for me He promised He would do. And when I keep my eyes on Him I can get through whatever comes my way.

It reminds me of a trip we were on years ago in Hawaii. My son Jonathan wanted to try scuba diving. There was an instructor who would train him and then accompany him on a dive. So Jonathan spent most of a day in a swimming pool learning how to work all the equipment: the mask, the snorkel, the inflatable vest (also called a BC), the tanks, and all the rest of it. He felt reasonably confident. So the next day comes and we got on this little boat and were going out to the place where we are going to dive. I am already certified as a scuba diver so I decided to go along. But the weather conditions had turned bad. The sea was churned up. I looked out there and thought, "This is not a good day for a dive." But we had already committed. The boat was rocking back and forth, and Jonathan is looking kind of nervous. And I am acting like this is fine but inside I am thinking, "This is crazy!"

So we get out there and, once you have your equipment on, the way you even get in the water is a little scary. You have your BC and your tanks on, and then you have your weight belt and your mask, and you put your regulator in and hold on to your mask and fall backwards off the boat. So we go into the water. The surface is churning and we are bobbing up and down, and I am thinking, "This is not good at all." I can see panic in the eyes of my son, Jonathan. And the instructor looked at Jonathan and said, "Jonathan, look at me right now. Look at me." Jonathan looks at him. And he says, "Remember what I taught you." I love that. "Look at me. Remember what I taught you. OK. Breathe. We are going to go down." And the moment we got beneath that surface, everything was calm and it was great and we had a wonderful dive.

So look to Jesus. Keep your eyes on Him. Get your eyes off of circumstances. Get your eyes off of your feelings. And get your eyes back on Christ again. Hebrews 12 says, "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us . . . looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (verse 1). That is the key to living the Christian life: keep your eyes

on Jesus. That is what would have kept Peter walking on the water. But he took his eyes off of the Lord and he began to sink. So Jesus reached down and rescued Him.

WHEN YOU ARE SINKING, CALL OUT TO JESUS

What you are going through right now may look like the worst-case scenario. But it might just turn out in a way that will amaze you. Chuck Swindoll tells the story of a man who was shipwrecked. He was all alone on a little uninhabited island. He scanned the horizon every day for a ship to rescue him but none came. So this man painstakingly built a hut for protection from the elements, where he could keep the few possessions he managed to salvage from the wreck. One day he went out looking for some food. When he came back, he was shocked to see his little hut in flames. He tried to put the fire out, but it was too late. He went to sleep that night feeling completely despondent. Everything he had in the world was now gone. He thought all hope was lost. The next morning, he awoke to find a ship anchored to the shore! Still trying to believe his eyes, he heard footsteps and a captain's voice saying, "Sir, we saw your smoke signal and we came to rescue you." You see, what may seem like a disaster right now may be a smoke signal ultimately leading to your deliverance.

When you call out to Jesus, He will not turn you away. Look at Matthew 14:31, "And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'" I love that it was immediate. Jesus didn't leave Peter there to flounder or to take in some water. He reached down and pulled him up. Did Jesus drag Peter back to the boat while Peter was underwater? No, He lifted Peter up and they walked back to the boat together. Peter walked on the water again. Even when you fail, you can still get up.

Mark's Gospel tells us a detail that is helpful in seeing a very important part of this story. It is the same story; the disciples are freaking out and Jesus comes walking on the water. But Mark 6:48 says Jesus would have walked right past them. I love this. They are out at sea. They are panicking. And here comes Jesus, taking a Sunday stroll in a storm. By the way, when you are God you can do stuff like that. So they say, "It is Jesus." And they cry out to Him, because otherwise, He would have walked right past them. What does that mean? That means He was not

going to force Himself into that boat. Jesus was waiting for them to call out to Him.

You can go through your storm saying, “I don’t want God’s help. I will face it on my own.” Go ahead. See you on the bottom of the lake because you are going to sink. Instead you can say, “Lord, save me.” That is hard for some of us. We don’t want to call out to God. We don’t want to admit our own shortcomings, our own weaknesses.

You want to be a smart man or woman? Call out to God, “Lord, save me!” Whatever you are facing in life, let Him reach down and lift you up. He may take the storm away when you call, like He did on that other occasion with the disciples, rebuking the storm. Then again, He might just help you get through the storm with a greater strength that you did not have before. And most importantly, He will teach you a lesson in that storm that you needed to learn to make you more like Jesus. But it comes back to this: He is waiting for the invitation.

Maybe you are in a storm right now. Things were going reasonably well in your life but then you took your eyes off of Jesus. Maybe you put your eyes back on the old life again and you started going back and doing things you shouldn’t be doing, and now you are sinking. Maybe you took your eyes off of the Lord in your marriage and now you are having problems. Or you took your eyes off of the Lord in another way. It is not that you are in sin, but it is just that you have allowed other things to become more important to you than Jesus—maybe it is your career, a relationship, or something else—and you feel like you are beginning to sink.

So what should you do? Just sink? No. This is the time to cry out to the Lord. There is no shame in that. It does not mean you are somehow a big disappointment to God or you are worthless. It means you have learned a thing or two in life. When you start sinking, you need to pray. Maybe something has happened where you have reaped the consequences of sins you have committed. You are afraid. You say, “I don’t know what to do.” I do: call out to Jesus right now and invite Him onto your little boat—ask Him to save you.

Sometimes God allows hardship or tragedy in our lives to get our attention. The psalmist said, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your Word” (Psalm 119:67). Sometimes hardship is the very thing that wakes us up to our need for God. If so, this is your moment to

call out to Him. He is with us right now as surely as He was with those disciples 2,000 years ago on the Sea of Galilee. If you will call out to Him, He will rescue you. He will forgive you.

Here is why Jesus didn't want to be made king when the people wanted to crown Him. He did not come to feed people. He did not even come primarily to do miracles, as wonderful as they were. He came primarily to this earth for one purpose. That was to die on the cross for the sin of the world. Yes, He would wear a crown, but not a crown of silver or gold encrusted with jewels. He would wear a crown of thorns. He would have a throne, but it would not be a throne of gold. It would be a cross of wood. There He would hang and die for every sin that you have ever committed—every sin that I have ever committed. If we will ask God to forgive us, He will do that and rescue us just like Jesus rescued Peter. But you must call out to Him.

The Lord tells us in Scripture, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you" (Psalm 50:15). I love that. Call on Me when you are in trouble. You say, "I don't know. I am not really into religion. I think Christianity is a crutch." Do you? I think Christianity is the whole hospital, not just a crutch. I need help, and you do too. God will help you if you will call out to Him. He will forgive you. But you must ask for His forgiveness.

JESUS WON'T LET US SINK IF WE CALL OUT TO HIM

He will always rescue us if we call out to Him—Jesus won't let us sink. In Matthew 14:31, we see an interesting phrase: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Those two words—*little faith*—in the original language are actually one word. So it is "littlefaith." Almost like a nickname, with a tenderness. "O Littlefaith," Jesus says to Simon Peter. "Why did you doubt? You were doing so well. You were on a roll. What happened?" Littlefaith got his eyes off of the Lord. But notice also what happened when he called out: "Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him" (NLT).

Now look at verse 32: "And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased." You see, Jesus lifted Peter up and went back into the boat again. Maybe you are sinking right now. You are gripped by fear, worry, or defeat. You might be in the grip of some addiction. Your marriage might be in trouble. You need to follow Littlefaith's example and say, "Lord, save me." He won't rebuke a person who is trying to come to Him by faith.

If you are a Christian, you have the comfort, the assurance, and the knowledge that indeed God will work all things together for good to you who love Him and are called according to His purpose. That is why you need to call out to Him. But if you are not a Christian, you don't have that promise. You are basically on your own. These truths I have shared are not for people that don't know the Lord.

The Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). Jesus says He stands at the door and He knocks and if we will hear His voice and open the door, He will come in (see Revelation 3:20). There our Lord is, the Perfect Gentleman, knocking at the door of the human heart waiting for a response. He is waiting for you to say, "All right, Lord. I am done. I am tired of doing it my own way. I am tired of sinking. I am tired of being alone. Lord, save me." And if you will say that to Him, I am telling you right now that Jesus Christ will save you. He will help you.

First, He will save you from your sin. He will save you from a future judgment, separated from Him, in a place called Hell. But then He will save you in life as well. He will give you the resources and the knowledge to do the right thing. He will walk with you through it and you will never be alone again. I am confident in the promises of God to me. It is not about what I have done for God. It is about what God has done for me in sending His Son to this earth to die on that cross. He bore my sin and He bore yours. He rose again from the dead. And He will come in your life right now and forgive you if you will call on Him.

Have you ever asked Jesus to come into your life to be your Savior and your Lord? Do you have the knowledge and the assurance right now that if you were to die you would go to Heaven? Only you can ask Christ to come into your life. Someone else can't do that for you. Jesus wanted the disciples to invite Him to come on board. And He is waiting for you to do the same.

Peter called on His name. Will you call on Him right now? If you do, you can be forgiven and you can be right with God and your life can be changed forever—for good. If you want Jesus, call out to Him. Say to Him "Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner but I know You are the Savior, who died on the cross for my sin and rose again from the dead. I call out to You right now. Save me. Forgive me. Change my life. I choose to follow You, from this moment forward. Amen."

And maybe you walked with the Lord at one time but you took your eyes off of Him and you have been sinking. Maybe you want to come back to the Lord. You want to get up again. You want His forgiveness. You want a second chance in life. If you want to come back to Christ, let this prayer be yours: “Lord Jesus, I’m sorry for losing focus. Please forgive my lack of faith. I feel as though I’m sinking in life. But there You are, ready to reach out and grab me. Lord, thank You that I am precious to You, that You shed Your blood for me, that You saved me. Help me now to come back to You and receive all that You have for me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

To learn more about what it means to follow Jesus Christ, visit **KnowGod.org**.