

Billows of Change

*Sometimes the storms of our lives
prove the strength of our anchor.*

When hurricane Audrey wiped the low-lying Cameron, Louisiana, from the face of the earth, my husband's best friend in college lost part of his family. No warning was ever sounded for John's fishing/industrial community. The following is from John's memory bank:

Mama had left her wash on the line to "let God moisten it" with the usual heavy dew for ironing. In the early morning, the winds shook us from our beds. For some reason we will never understand, Mama impulsively began to gather laundry from the clothesline. Daddy got the rest of the family together. He put them on the roof and began to tie them to the brick chimney. The water rushed into the yard, but Daddy felt they were still a safe distance from the deluge. He called to Mama while securing the second child—but she was gone.

They stopped counting bodies after 550 were retrieved, but numerous lives vanished in the hundred-foot waves, forever unaccounted. I witnessed the aftermath oddities—caskets in trees and massive 200-year-old live trees buried upside down. The roots testified of the monstrous hurricane Audrey's power.

Hurricane Audrey struck a hundred years after the previous hurricane. What power is in the wind that God controls! What energy is in the water! I believe God placed His reminders more frequently in subsequent years. About fifty years



following Audrey, Rita ravaged our coast. Soon after that, Katrina struck with devastating power.

We're Not in Heaven Yet

How can we acquire calmness and dignity when our lives are falling apart? Are we steeped in personal sin or suffering because of the sin of others? Is our world in chaos? Governments are not what we want them to be; war is always present; children become worldly; husbands leave; houses burn; grandchildren die; greedy corporations squander our lifetime investments; neighbors introduce beautiful daughters to drugs; sickness invades families, many with limited insurance or none at all; beloved husbands are killed in foreign war zones; incomes won't meet costs of living; health fails; jobs are lost; cars/houses are repossessed; sons go to prison for stealing from companies. Somewhere in this list you might identify one or more of the things that caused you to lose your comfortable foothold and sink into the depths of personal conflict. How does God see it? Sometimes it is "drowning in sin."

We sometimes believe storms cannot turn the lives of real Christians upside down, because real Christians are righteous, always able to handle tempests! But this is not heaven and conditions are not always perfect. Storms cannot be avoided. The New Testament is filled with examples of Christians engulfed with storms that could have devastated their ministries, but they overcame. The Old Testament has accounts of atmospheric changes being brought about by the hand of God. God often reacted to the sins of His people by allowing physical suffering. He got their attention and told them plainly what He expected of them. Many of these examples will be cited in the following chapters.

Margaret's Broken Heart

The television news media dwell on the sensational, presenting violence in homes, schools, businesses, and nations. Viewers have a ringside seat to all the horror and details. This, in turn, promotes fear and insecurity. Surely they are stormy conditions.

My friend Margaret recently learned that her precious sixteen-year-old grandson Tim was caught doing drugs with his friends. She was in shock. Seeking distraction from her grief, she turned on the television. Immediately a disaster scene filled the screen as a reporter shouted the details of a fatal tragedy. How did Margaret feel then? Mixed feelings of unbelief and sorrow inundated her already broken heart. Billows of change rolled into Margaret's world. She cried out, "Oh, Lord, what am I to do about all of this?"

Turn It Off

Somewhere among the fifty thousand thoughts we have daily, one specific thought will prevail: "What would I give to solve these miseries I am enduring?" The inquirer is generally referring to solving the problems dumped on her doorstep—those that affect her family and friends, not national or international crises. However, anything that affects society or culture inadvertently affects individuals, and turning the television off will considerably lessen our misery during the storms of life.

Times Are Changing

Margaret will look for answers to her grandson's dilemma. She will possibly blame factors outside the family. She may reflect on the past, asking, "What has happened to our society that makes our youth get into such messes? Life was not like this in my day!"

But what has changed? Youth has always been in a hurry to grow up and experience life for which they are unprepared to handle. Jesus' account of the prodigal son is not an exception (Luke 15:11ff). Even though bad things occurred yesteryear in our country, the population was smaller in number and the news media were not so gutter-hungry. When moral tragedies were reported, they were usually reported in a factual tone rather than a sensational one. And sin was not glorified. Lawbreaking and immorality were considered wrong, and wrong was called sin.

Ominous clouds produced by change pose a direct threat against Christians. Large-scale gambling enterprises, legal in many of our communities, are now considered upstanding business ventures. Personal pleasure has

become a god. The digital era enables the global processing of information, good and bad. We see the benefit for the general welfare of the population, and we see the detriment of men and women brought to their knees in filth. Even our youth has unlimited access to the good, the bad, and the ugly. Immoral and unethical leadership is so prevalent that society sometimes only laughs at the disgrace. National, state, and local governments have trouble making and carrying out laws to control illegal acts and corruption; and borders are easily transgressed by international enemies. Traditional family life is being bashed.

Speak Up!

Too often we remain quiet when we should speak out. Did you know that a U.S. postage stamp commemorating a Muslim holiday was developed as a Christmas season postage stamp? The typical use for Christmas stamps is to send Christian greeting cards. What a travesty! I protested to our postmaster and he informed me: "America is a free country and we have to do this in accordance with freedom." I wrote in protest, "When did celebrating another country's non-Christian belief become something we must do to honor a false god?"

Those men who wrote our Constitution, Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence were Bible-reading men. They believed God's message empowered a nation toward greatness. However, Christians are specifically instructed to live peaceably under those who rule and govern our nation. The New Testament commands us to be "subject to rulers and authorities" (Titus 3:1). We are also told to pray earnestly to God for our country's welfare, to love it, and to labor by all means in our power to promote its best interest (Psalm 122:6-9). Even if we are poor, we are to pray for our nation to perform as God wills.

The documents generated by our founding fathers laid the foundation that allowed this nation to rise to its greatness. However, forces are now at work to make the First Amendment apply to an immoral lifestyle, filled with lewdness and obscenity. The intent of that law was never the legalization of

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anything that violated the greater good for society. When society fails to uphold righteousness, those of us who do uphold good values need to remind others that *our* rights are not to be violated. The prophet Jeremiah spoke to God's people about the trend in behaviors of those who were sacrificing their sons as burnt offerings and told them that God "would break this people and this city" (Jeremiah 19:11).

Billows of Immorality and False Worship

A storm front moves in, bringing with it putrid billows of change, encouraging immorality and false worship. God expects Christians to move against the onslaught. Fervently pray for leaders to make godly decisions. If we abide by God's laws, He promises that He will never leave or forsake us. Pray that right will prevail. We do not have Jeremiah with us now, but we do have the Bible.

My oh my! Margaret, look where your question led. There are no new problems. God has already told us how we must handle those we have. He has applied the same rules to mankind for centuries.

Margaret should reflect on the situation, correct it where possible, and get on her knees and pray fervently for her grandchild and his parents. She should work to influence that child for the Lord's way. God is in charge and He does answer prayer.

Regardless of how mighty the winds of change blow, we must remain steadfast in Christ. The Bible is full of a "great cloud of witnesses" whose lives were countercultural. We long to join that hall of fame! (Hebrews 11).

Change: Live in the Present

Are you living life to its fullest, or are you caught up in tomorrow's world or yesterday's world? As a young mother I looked forward to the time when my children could wipe their own noses and wash behind their ears. As an adult student I looked forward to the time a half-dozen research papers were not taking up my spare time. As an educator I looked forward to retirement. After spending sixteen years as a Sojourner mission worker, then becoming co-caregiver to three teenage grandsons and an aging mother, I am happy I never actually retired. As a grandmother and caregiver I am looking forward

to the time when my grandchildren have children of their own. All the while I know God does not intend that we retire from His service, but I also know He wants us to learn acceptance—to find time to rest and enjoy the beauty of His blessings.

Each phase of your changing life brings great blessings. Learn to accept your time of life and to see beauty in the moment. Daily, God sends such wonderful blessings. Thank Him for His great generosity, and continue to look for opportunities to catch those glimpses of pure delight.

He has made everything beautiful in its time . . . nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God (Ecclesiastes 3:11-13).

Change in Governments

After too many shootings in schools around our nation, another wake-up call occurred on violence in schools in Blacksburg, Virginia. Many went to their computers to voice their opinions on the whys of this terrible, tragic violence. One opinion went through hundreds of emails before it was sent on to me. It is a keeper. I should like to give credit but no name was noted on the piece. The article has been reworded slightly and shortened, but its content is true.

Dear God: *Why didn't you save the children at these schools?*

Dear Concerned Student: *I am not allowed in schools.*

Americans are mute. They act as if they have never had a history course. The mighty Roman Empire, Napoleon's quest for power for France, and Hitler's desires for the Fatherland were all failures. The Bible records the history of many nations that rose to greatness. Then it tells of the erosions of the perceptions of right and wrong among their citizens, followed by total collapses of the governments. We live in another time, but God's principle remains true: as you sow, so also shall you reap. Even without inspired prophets, Christians know what will happen to those who turn their backs on God.

Changing World Takes Back Seat to My Storm

Issues of society do affect us, but when the issues are *my* husband, *my* child, *my* debt, or *my* health, then the economy, the government, and sometimes, even the church, take a back seat. The cry is, “Give me my own space! Hang everyone else and their problems; hang the country!” The person who says this is usually crying for comfort. Previously, she made little effort to adjust her lifestyle and follow God’s directions. Now her own storm takes the front seat. She is drowning in unresolved problems. Will she grab hold of God’s lifeline?

Although the fishermen-disciples were well acquainted with storms at sea, on an occasion when the deep waters became troubled, they became extremely fearful of drowning! They cried out, but the Master slept. Had they forgotten that the One in their boat had created all things from nothing, and that He controlled the elements? They were never in the slightest of danger.

Can we see ourselves acting the same way? Why do we not remember that God is always for us? No matter how bad the storm, the lifeline is there. The Master is not asleep. He knows and cares. His Spirit comforts through the Holy Scriptures. Why don’t we reach for Him?

Change in the Body

In the following pages you may observe sacrifices mortals make in order to handle their storms God’s way. Physical and spiritual storms are often linked; when you have one you have the other! Paul talked about his thorn in the flesh. No one knows what his thorn was, but it might well have been some agonizing physical ailment. Realize now that although you will have to contend with certain physical ailments, you have Paul’s strength to inspire you.

A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).

Experiencing Billows of Change

Have you experienced billows of change? Yes, and I am sure you expect to see many more! Sometimes these winds bring devastating storms and literally wipe out everything—buildings, trees, crops, men, women, and little children—seemingly with little regard. Even though we may have warning of the approaching storm, we often choose to remain in its path. Why?

With full knowledge of hurricane danger, we establish homes beside beautiful rivers and low-lying coast lands. Mansions and cabins line the ocean shores in spite of the consequences of raging, rising tides. We choose the view instead of the dam. We invite floods into our homes in due season. Just as our short-sighted decisions put us in harm's way, we also cause some of the spiritual storms that shred our spirits.

No matter how physically or spiritually challenged we are, God gives every person a spirit to rise above the storms. He is in control. If we look to Him for guidance, the storms will teach us wonderful lessons.

When we face personal storms, we feel loss, anguish, fear, sadness, anger, and despair. Often we do not pray enough; neither do we share our trials with anyone. Do we think our storm is a sign of weakness? Do we blame God or other people for our distress? The saddest consequence of the blame game is that it endangers both our spiritual and physical well-being. God does not intend for us to keep our secret storms to ourselves. Share them when you pray.

Count Your Blessings

Johnson Oatman, Jr., 1897

When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by.

When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings, money cannot buy
Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.

So, amid the conflict, whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

Strength for the Storm

Learning Goal:

This week, I will increase my awareness of “spiritual weather alerts.” Do I tune in, listen, watch, and take action when a storm is headed my way? On the other hand, how do I respond to intense threats upon my spiritual life which can possibly destroy my soul?

Memory Verse:

God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (Eccl. 12:14).

Looking Up:

Holy Father, You created me; You know my every thought. No secret hides from You. Help me to look up to You on difficult and joyful days. Without Your grace and mercy I am helpless. Thank You for Your care and protection. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth . . . put on the breastplate of righteousness . . . shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace . . . taking the shield of faith . . . take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:14–17).

Beside each billow of change that clouds our spiritual and physical health, write a scripture that will uplift:

- _____ Poor health
- _____ Failing finances
- _____ Endless care-giving
- _____ Unsatisfying career

Read Ephesians 6: 14–17 in the side column. Survival does not depend on “blame games,” or living in the past; it calls for present action.

Write in your spiritual armor below:

- _____ Belt
- _____ Breastplate
- _____ Shoes
- _____ Shield
- _____ Helmet
- _____ Sword

In what ways do women sometimes leave their armor lying on the pew instead of putting it on every day?

Where is your sword? Why should you keep scripture readily available for fighting?

If you do not feel that you are in a war, what does this indicate?

Our weapons are described as not _____
but _____ in _____.

Our weapons enable us to bring every
_____ into _____ to the
_____ of Christ.

How can we capture every thought?

Read the following scriptures in the side column and fill in the blanks below.

We may be _____ in spirit (Matt. 5:3)
and also have a “spirit of _____”
(Gal. 6:1); or we can have a spirit of
_____ (2 Tim. 1:7), or even
one of _____ (Rom. 11:8).

Discuss these spiritual mindsets in relation
to “billows of change” that create spiritual
storms.

How does Ps. 42:11 reflect comfort for the
troubled spirit?

Storm: a strong or violent outburst, upheaval; a violent, sudden attack on a fortified place; extreme anger or rage.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds . . . bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:4–5).

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3).

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7).

“God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.” (Rom. 11:8).

What typical daily concerns bring physical storms?

Poor health, troublesome events, failing finances, endless care-giving, and unsatisfying careers, to name a few.

... Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah . . . went to him and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.'" Then he . . . prayed to the Lord, saying, "Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight" (2 Kings 20:1-3).

Lazarus, full of sores . . . laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores (Luke 16:20-21).

How Storms Benefit Us

Storms awaken us to issues.

Storms remind us of Christ's suffering.

Storms erase pride.

Storms cause us to look past the here and now.

Storms present new opportunities to prove faith and mercy.

Storms show God's power.

Storms create stronger love bonds.

Bible characters are not fictional examples. On the contrary, they suffered, reacted, and rejoiced like us. Refer to the side text and write the appropriate answers to the following questions. What physical distress did each of the following people suffer? How did each example respond to his problem?

_____ Hezekiah
_____ Lazarus

Other examples are the Israelites (Ex. 16:3); David (2 Sam. 12:15-23); and Paul and Silas (Acts 16:19-25). Write your thoughts on these and other Bible characters who suffered physical distress:

Find at least two verses that reinforce the concept that storms do indeed benefit us:

1. _____
2. _____

Study the following people and describe their spiritual storms:

Ahab (1 Kings 21:1-4)

Scribes (Mark 12:38-40)

Some Thessalonians (2 Thess. 3:11)

We often pick and choose actions, locations, jobs, etc., already knowing the dangers they mean to our futures. How do we rationalize our unwise decisions?

When it comes to following God's Word, why do we not have the freedom to pick and choose what we personally think?

If you are overwhelmed with responsibilities, how can you to reduce the load?

Why do women refuse to give themselves a breather, to take a little time to revive their spirits?

List activities that revive the spirit and anchor the soul. (Examples: singing, gardening, swinging, hot bath.)

List two scriptures that will encourage you to be still. Print and tape to your mirror, so you will read them every morning this week.

1. _____
2. _____

I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live (Deut. 30:19).

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand (Prov. 19:21 ESV).

But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand (Isa. 64:8).

"Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved."

—William Jennings Bryan

Women on the Run

Often women's storms are brought on by multi-tasking. They are keeping the home and family, as well as being involved in church activities. Some even add working outside the home. Frustrated by the onslaught, even the most relaxed of them are pleading for just a few hours of relief.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22–23).

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

*If it had not been the Lord who
was on our side,
When men rose up against us,
Then they would have swallowed
us alive,
When their wrath was kindled
against us;
Then the waters would have over-
whelmed us,
The stream would have gone over
our soul;
Then the swollen waters
Would have gone over our soul
(Ps. 124:1–5).*

Peace in the Midst of the Storm

A Christian does not always choose damaging winds of change. Those winds often result from the poor choices of others or even from natural disasters. What can a Christian do? (Draw from Gal. 5:22–23 and 2 Cor. 10:5.)

Throw Out the Lifeline

Write your plan to reach out to someone this week, applying the principles learned in this lesson.

No Small Tempest

Mental Illness

*Experiences, trials, and failures generally
supply us with exceptional vision.*

In late September 2005, I spent a lot of time on my knees, fervently praying for the lives of my family and neighbors! Winds passed over our house at 129 miles per hour! That was no small tempest! The authorities called her Rita. The nation was still awed by Katrina, the worst storm ever to hit our coast, so the masses failed to see Rita's damage done to the lower Gulf Coast of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. She was indeed the storm that finished what Katrina started.

Warnings went out prior to Rita's onset, but with thousands of refugees from Katrina settling in or headed north, there were no accommodations for hundreds of miles, so we "shored up," took in our family members, and prayed. Bobby used the lumber we had recently purchased to finish the inside of our barn home to board up all outside windows and doors. The darkness indoors equaled that of the outdoors. All the remaining building supplies and equipment were at the mercy of the wind because there was no way they could be secured. For what seemed like hours, our family huddled together in the innermost room. The high wind drove the rain into the center aisle—around, over, and under the doors—so Bobby and I swept and mopped ankle-deep water all night. At last Rita passed. The next day we surveyed the damage

