

ARE YOU WAITING OUT THE STORMS?

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I will admit to you that this sermon came out of my own grinchiness over our recent weather. How quickly I forgot about being in Pennsylvania and the 90 degree weather. I was begging to be back in Washington! There is a quote that I keep on my cubicle wall at work that really touches my heart and it goes like this:

“Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass, it’s about learning to dance in the rain”.

Remember the old adage...into each life some rain must fall? Even the Bible tells us in *John 17:33* *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

So how are things going for you right now? Some of us are in the sunshine and some of us are in the storm. Sometimes we feel like we are on top of the world and we are truly blessed. But even now we know that storms will come. That’s just the way life is.

How well do we handle the storms of life? You know, even the most faithful of us struggle sometimes when things go wrong. I speak from experience.

It’s easy for us to think we can handle anything. We pray and we are thankful and we truly believe God is in our lives, and He is. But sometimes when things go wrong, especially then, we can’t find God, or we can’t seem to pray, or we think that God let this happen to us and we don’t understand.

But it’s an attitude; a decision you make. *Ps 56:3-4* reads *“When I am afraid, I will trust You. Put TRUST in capital letters. I praise God for His word. I trust God so I am not afraid.”* Powerful words. Many of you know that 18 months ago I was told I had a brain tumor. It was benign but very large and the location was very difficult for surgery. I will admit to you that I was not afraid of that surgery. You see, on the day of my diagnosis God gave me a peace that I cannot explain and I trusted that feeling that everything would be OK. But it wasn’t; at least not to my way of thinking. And yes, I have had my moments of questioning. Why did this happen to me Lord? Is this how it’s going to be now Lord? But actually I have learned in the time since my surgery that everything is OK. OK is a matter of attitude and perspective. It’s how we perceive the situation and how we trust God. Everything is OK. It’s just not the same.

Let me share with you about a dear friend of mine. One of my best friends from my childhood was diagnosed with a difficult cancer. She was given five years to live. She had tremendous faith, but this was hard to accept. Her only son would graduate in seven years and she wanted to be there. She went through two surgeries and two rounds of chemo. She lost one kidney and part of her liver. She remained cancer free for a year or two, but then it returned and there was little that could be done for her. Here is the amazing part. Her attitude was positive and upbeat and she continued to pray and praise God and to witness to others even in her pain. In my estimation, she was a most amazing woman and her life was a testimony of faith and trust. She made it to her son’s graduation and the tumor in her stomach was so large by that time that she had to wear a maternity dress to the ceremony. It never fazed her. She was just so happy to be there. She passed away shortly before he left for his first year of college. I can’t begin to tell you what I learned from this dear woman about prayer and faith and trust. My friend was a pro at dancing in the rain.

None of us knows how we will handle hardship, pain, loss, until we face it. How will we survive our next storm? *Philippians 4:6* reads, “Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need always giving thanks.” And there’s the key...be thankful no matter what is going on in our lives. That may not be easy, but it is so important. You see, God not only knows what we are going through, He will use it for our good if we will trust Him. Trust is so important anytime we are going through difficulties. Trust has to do with courage. We need to see what God wants us to see. We need to see with the eyes of our heart and not the eyes of our head. If we set our eyes on God and praise Him in all things, He will not only bring us through the difficulty but He will teach us something new about ourselves and show us something good from our difficulties. When I think about trust I often think of Peter in the Bible as he climbed out of that boat. His gaze was locked on Jesus and he trusted Him completely. But what happened when he lost his sight of Jesus? He started to sink like a rock. Strong image.

Max Lucado has this to say regarding trusting God: How did Jesus endure the terror of the crucifixion? He went first to the Father with his fears. He modeled the words of PS 56:3: “When I am afraid, I will trust you.”

Do the same with your fears. Don’t avoid life’s Gardens of Gethsemane. Enter them. Just don’t enter them alone. And while there, be honest. Pounding the ground is permitted. Tears are allowed. And if you sweat blood, you won’t be the first. Do what Jesus did; open your heart.

And be specific. Jesus was. “Take this cup,” he prayed. Give God the number of the flight. Tell Him the length of the speech or sermon. Share the details of the job transfer. Tell Him the time of the surgery. He has plenty of time. He also has plenty of compassion.

He doesn’t think your fears are foolish or silly. He won’t tell you to “buck up” or “get tough”. He’s been where you are. He knows how you feel. And he knows what you need. That’s why we punctuate our prayers as Jesus did. “If you are willing...”

Was God willing? Yes and no. He didn’t take away the cross, but he took away the fear. God didn’t still the storm, but he calmed the sailor.

Don’t measure the size of the mountain; talk to the One who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulders, talk to the One who holds the universe on His.

(Max Lucado from He Chose the Nails)

The times when we find it hardest to trust God, those are the times we need to trust Him the most. Hear the words of *Jeremiah 17: 7-8* *But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.* Strong, sturdy, unshakeable. What we need to do is give it to God! We are not meant to worry! We need to trust God, give Him the problem, and let Him show us the way to walk through the storm. And when we give it to Him we need to be patient and let Him work it out. DON’T TAKE IT BACK! This week in my Upper Room devotional, I read about a woman who was a worrier and in an effort to really give her worries to God she wrote them down and put them in her Bible. This represented release and trust to her.

I want to share one more story with you. Perhaps some of you have heard this before. It is the true story of a Baptist Minister in the South. His name is Don Piper and his book was recommended to me as I was recovering from my surgery. It is an amazing story and truly an inspiration. It speaks to what we have been talking about this morning.

Don Piper was the Youth Minister for a very large Baptist Church and he was on his way home from a Christian Conference when he came to a long bridge. As he got to the end of the bridge a large semi-truck came too fast around the corner and completely crushed his car and pushed him into another vehicle. He was pronounced dead at the scene by no less than six paramedics. But he lived. He lived to

be removed from that car by the 'jaws of life' and to almost lose one leg. He lived to go through 28 surgeries to put him back together and he lived to trust God to make something of his crumpled life. 35 years old, married with two children, he felt as if his life was over.

Don Piper's storm was truly life changing. His body would never be the same again and his disabilities were great. But he did not give up. He challenged God, and asked a lot of questions. At times he wanted to die. But eventually he realized that God was in charge in his life and that he needed to trust God to know what was best for him. If you talk to Don today he will tell you that his life is better for what he learned about himself and his relationship with God. His willingness to follow God's wishes and do the best he could led to a new and expanded career, to a new world-wide ministry and to a closer relationship with God. He could have given up so easily. No one would have faulted him. But he decided to dance in the rain!

Is it always better after the storm? That's a hard question to answer, but generally, yes. Great storms bring great change. And not just bad things, but good things can be hard to get through as well; a new job, a move across country, weddings, empty nest time. Life is full of changes; some of them more difficult than others.

Life is what we let God make of it. Rejoice and remember that God loves us, just the way we are. Just the way He made us. And the people in our lives will continue to love and accept us as well because they know the One who made us.

Hear the words from a popular Christian singing group that fit so well:

“Praise You in This Storm” – Casting Crowns

I was sure by now You would have reached down and wiped my tears away;
Stepped in and saved the day. But once again, I say amen and it's still raining.
And as the thunder rolls I barely hear You whisper through the rain “I'm with you”.
And as Your mercy falls, I raise my hands and praise the God who gives and takes away.

I remember when I stumbled in the wind
You heard my cry to You and raised me up again
My strength is almost gone how can I carry on if I can't find you?
And as the thunder rolls I barely hear You whisper through the rain “I'm with you”

Chorus

And I'll praise You in this storm and I will lift my hands, For You are who You are,
No matter where I am; And every tear I've cried You hold in Your hand
You never left my side and though my heart is torn, I will praise you in this storm.

What storms are you facing today? How's it going? Are you tired? Are you frustrated? Do you want it to be over?

Isaiah 40: 29-31 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Praise Him. Praise Him in the storm and He will be there. He will show us the way out. He will give us strength, and hope and peace, and if we need it He will even give us dance lessons. AMEN