



ENDURANCE
HEBREWS 10:36

Shipwrecked

Enduring when Storms Strike

As a child, I was deathly afraid of storms. I knew thunder couldn't hurt you, but that didn't matter. It was still loud and scary. When a storm came, I would hide my head under the blankets and pray as hard as I could.

Now, as an adult, I love storms. When a big storm comes, my boys and I will sit on the back porch and watch. The wind, the thunder, the lighting, the rain coming down sideways - I love it all.

Storms are interesting to watch, but frightening to experience. **I think everyone has a story from a storm.** I remember several storms in my life. I remember a tornado in the third grade. I remember the storm our cruise ship went through on our **honeymoon**. I remember the tornados that struck Little Rock a few years ago. I remember a **snowstorm** Cindy and I were caught in when we were moving to Arkansas, more than eighteen years ago. I remember wondering if we were going to die somewhere beside that highway, buried in a snow drift.

I love to watch a storm. I don't love going through a storm.

This morning, I'm not talking about the kind of storms that come in nature – rain, snow, thunder and lightning. Instead, I want to talk about the storms that come in life.

It happens without warning. It wasn't your fault. It wasn't anything you could avoid. But, suddenly, you find yourself in a storm – and it feels like it will never end.

No way out. No hope. When you find yourself in the middle of a storm, it feels like it will never end. It seems like you are losing control – not just of one thing, but of everything. You don't know what to do. You aren't sure where to turn. You just know one thing – you desperately want the storm to end!

- **You thought your marriage was forever** – everything was so wonderful. Then, suddenly, here it comes – a storm. Will you survive? How will you survive? Is it over?
- **You lose someone you love – a parent, a spouse, a child, a best friend.** It absolutely rocks your world. You find yourself in a storm, filled with pain and grief. How are you going to make it? How will you survive?
- **Your kids were your pride and joy.** So much potential, so much hope for the future. Then, in a moment it all seemed

to come crashing down. You find yourself in a storm – one that looks like it will never end.

- **Your finances take a sudden turn for the worse.** You lose your job, you lose a client. There it is – a storm. You are in a storm and headed for a shipwreck. It doesn't look like there is any hope.
- **You have been in good health.** Now you find yourself wondering if you will ever be well again. You sit on the edge of your bed and wonder, "How will I ever survive this storm?"
- **Your growing older years aren't what you expected or planned for.** Your spouse dies. You have to attend your own kid's funeral. You are faced with decisions about long-term care. You are in the storm of your life.
- **Someone you love is struck with disease.** It doesn't look like they will make it. Your faith is rocked. How are you going to make it through the storm?

One of the great heroes of the Bible is a man named Paul. He started out as an enemy of the church, a Christian killer. But, Paul had a dramatic God encounter, became a powerful missionary church planter and wrote much of the New Testament.

Now, nearing the end of his life and ministry, **Paul finds himself facing trial – a literal trial.** He has been arrested for telling the story of Jesus. Paul is a prisoner on a ship headed for

Italy, when a storm comes. There is no way their ship will survive. They can't make it. They are going to have a shipwreck.

Last week, we looked at this same passage from the perspective of the sailors and their bad decisions. We learned about self-induced wrecks, when your own decisions and actions lead you to disaster.

Now, I want to look at the same story from another perspective and share with you principles for **Surviving the storms of life.**

Paul is in a **personal storm** – in the prison of a ship, headed for another prison. And – he is not just in a personal storm, but headed for a **literal storm** that threatens the life of everyone on board.

27:1 When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. 2 We boarded a ship... and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us. 3 The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs.

What did Paul do? He asked for help. In the middle of his storm, he went to friends who loved him and cared about him and accepted their help. When you are in a storm, **Ask for help.**

It's interesting, but in a storm, we have the opposite tendency. We withdraw. We don't want other people to know what we are facing, what we are going through. We drop out of church. We drop out of relationships. We hide our hurt and decide to go it alone through the storm. Why do we do that?

It doesn't seem to make sense. When we most need help, we don't tell anyone we want help. Then, we wonder why we feel alone. Why don't we ask for help?

I'm sure there's a lot of reasons, but I can think of several:

Some people are too proud. They don't want to admit they are hurting. Other people might see that as weakness. They'll think less of me if they knew I have problems. So, to keep the deception going, you act like everything is OK, like you have no problems. Really, you're not fooling anyone. Everyone has problems. At one time or another, everyone faces a storm.

Other people don't ask for help because they are **alone**. They never really saw the need for connection with others. Now, when the storm comes, they desperately need that connection. We see that often in church. People never had time for a connection group, or getting involved in a ministry. Then, a crisis hits in their life. Suddenly, they see the need for connection. I have learned: **when you hurt alone, the pain is deeper.**

I know this doesn't apply to any of you, but some people are just **stubborn**. They are convinced they can handle it – that the pain isn't really all that bad. They think they have a plan – they can handle it all on their own. So, they blindly press on, and never ask for help.

Sometimes, the reason you don't ask for help is that you **don't want to hear another cliché** – another pat answer from someone who really doesn't listen. Maybe you have heard this one: **“This will build character”**.

You know what? Thanks a lot. That's really what I needed. I needed someone to tell me this will build character. I don't want to build any character. What good is character if I am destroyed or dead? Keep your character. I'm just trying to survive.

Or this one: “Remember – **what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger**.” That's pretty encouraging. Doesn't make a whole lot of sense. I've got a question. If I get hit by a bullet that doesn't kill me, does that make me stronger? Of course not. I am wounded. **Wounded, I am weaker, not stronger**. If you are going to give me a tired out cliché, at least give me one that is true.

Another reason people don't ask for help is because **we have a tendency to overreact to the takers in life**. We meet them all the time. They ask for help, but it's a strategy, not a one-

time need. If you help them, they will still need help. They are unwilling to change their lifestyle or their decision making pattern. They've always needed help and will always need help until they make changes. Watching people like that leaves a bad taste in your mouth. You overreact to that and say, "I never want to be needy like those people" and you miss out on receiving help.

If someone asks you for help at church, please ask one of the pastors. Takers target churches and church people. I am all for helping people. I am not for helping manipulative thieves who prey on God's good-hearted people. I don't want you to enable people who aren't willing to change their bad habits or patterns. Ask us.

Some people don't ask for help because they **"don't want to be a burden"**. I hate that. That's unscriptural. Paul said, "Bear one another's burdens. In this way, you fulfill the law of Christ." I decide what burdens me, not you. How is praying for you going to burden me?

Others are **too embarrassed** to ask for help. They would never walk to the front of the building for prayer. After all, "What will people think?" They'll think you are wanting prayer.

If you don't ask for help, do you know what happens?
Most of the time, you don't get help. People don't automatically see and sense your need. Ask.

I had a lady call me. She was mad because no one visited her when she was in the hospital. She let me have it for about five minutes. She didn't cuss, but used every Christian cuss word she could think of. Finally, she took a breath. I said, "I am so sorry. Please forgive us. I want to fix the problem so it doesn't happen again. Who did you tell you were in the hospital?" It got real quiet on the other end of the line. She didn't tell anyone. Somehow, we were just supposed to know.

I know – that's a lot of different reasons. I'm sure I didn't hit them all. **What's really sad is how many people take that same approach to God.** They are so busy trying to figure things out, they don't stop and say, "God, help!" They don't let others pray for and with them. When you are in a storm, ask for help.

4From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us... 7We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty... 9Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them 10"Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also."

What an encourager, huh? Paul says, “You know what? This isn’t going good at all!” When you are in a storm, **Be realistic.**

Have you ever met someone who is in a horrible storm, but pretends it isn’t there? Too many of us have been taught wrong - **“Don’t confess it. If you confess it, it will be worse.”**

Maybe there is a situation where that is true. But, most of the time, if you are in a storm, you know it. Confessing it is not going to change anything. Be realistic.

If you **break your leg**, it is broke whether you confess it or not. If you need **surgery**, you need surgery. If you have a **fever**, is God really going to make it worse because you say you have a fever?

If you are **declaring bankruptcy**, you are broke, regardless of whether you confess it.

If your **kids are away from God**, is it going to make them more away from God because you admit it?

It’s not a lack of faith to acknowledge the truth. When we acknowledge the truth, when we are realistic, we are simply **establishing the framework for a miracle.** Do you know why some people don’t experience healing? They don’t admit they need it. Be honest. Be realistic.

...¹⁴Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the “northeaster,” swept down from the island. ¹⁵The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶As we passed to the lee of a small island, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. ¹⁷When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. ¹⁸We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. ²¹After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. ²²But now **I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.**

At the very worst moment, when all hope seemed gone, Paul said, “Guys, don’t get too down. We’re going to lose a lot, but we are going to make it!”

When you are going through a storm, **Speak in faith.**

Right about now, you are saying, “Wait Rod – **I thought you said to be realistic. Now, you are telling me to speak in faith?**” “Isn’t that the opposite? I’m confused.”

Remember – **being realistic is not an enemy of faith.** Paul was honest about the storm. But, **Paul had been through storms before.** Paul knew the God who created the wind and the waves. Paul knew the same God who had delivered him from prisons, riots, beatings and stonings would deliver him from the storm. So – what did Paul do? He spoke in faith.

Speak with faith in the middle of your storm. “Sounds good Rod, but how in the world do I do that without sounding like some religious wacko?” I’m glad you asked. Let me give you a few examples.

“My retirement account may be in deep trouble, but I’m not going to lose my life or my trust in God. I know God will protect me and sustain me. God will provide for me. I will continue to trust Him and obey Him. I won’t let this storm turn me away from trusting Him.” **Speak faith in the middle of your storm.**

“I may be sick, but I will not be defeated. My God is faithful. He designed my body. He can heal my body. I put my trust in Him.” Speak words of faith in the middle of your storm.

“My kid may be far from God, but it’s not over. I have a promise from God.”

“My marriage may be falling apart – it may look over, but God still has a plan for my life and for my family. I will stay on course with His plan. My marriage can be restored. God has a plan to bless me and provide for me.”

Be realistic. Acknowledge the storm. Then, speak words of faith in the middle of your storm. When you speak words of faith, you gain strength as you remember the power of your God. Those words of faith begin to rebuild your hope.

Your words of faith will also inspire others to hope and believe. **You want to see your friends come to Christ** Anyone can talk about God when it’s all going good. They are watching to see what you do in the middle of a storm.

Storms reveal what’s inside you. **What’s inside this tube? It certainly looks like toothpaste.** But, you don’t know it really has toothpaste in it, until you squeeze it. When you squeeze it, when you put it under pressure, what’s inside of it comes out.

Storms squeeze you. They put you under pressure. And, in the face of a storm, what’s inside of you will come out. People are watching and wondering: “Let’s see if they stick with that God thing now.”

How in the world did Paul speak words of faith in his situation? The storm was raging. He was headed for a shipwreck. How did Paul have faith? Where in the world did it come from? Listen to the next verse:

23Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me 24and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ 25So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.

Paul was able to speak words of faith because he had a word from God. An angel let him know – “You and everyone with you will live.” Late at night, in the middle of the raging storm, **an angel appeared and said, “Do not be afraid.”**

We don’t know where – but somewhere in that ship, **Paul got alone, by himself.** How do we know that? The angel appeared the night before and nobody but Paul knew it. Paul knew he needed to hear from God. So, Paul found a forgotten corner of the cargo hold and began to pray. And, in his quiet moment, he received a word from God.

When you are in a storm, you have so many voices, telling you so many things:

- “You’ll never make it.”

- “Give up.”
- “You need to do this”
- “You need to do that”
- When you are drowning, you don’t need people yelling instructions for how to swim. You need saving!
- “Hey – don’t forget – you are building some character”

There comes a point in the storm where you don’t need to hear from a person, you need to hear from God. Get away from the crowd. Find your quiet place. Get alone with your Bible and your God. You need to hear from God.

Listen for His voice. Listen for His encouragement. Oh – **you may not hear an audible voice.** An angel may not appear to you. But, do you know what? It might. God can do that.

Maybe you will hear His voice as you read through your Bible. You may hear His voice in the words of a song. You may hear His voice as I preach my message. You may hear His voice as you listen to a podcast in your car. You may hear His voice through the words of a friend in a prayer.

This is so hard, but if you want to hear the voice of God, you must get away from the storm. **When you are in the midst of a storm, it seems to occupy every waking moment.** Every phone call, every conversation, every thought – it all seems to

add to the storm. Get away from the storm. Get away from the raging roar of the storm so you can hear God's voice.

That's why church is so important. We come to this place – for many of you, this is the only place where you feel safe from the storm.

- Here – you are **loved** – in spite of the storm
- Here – you are **accepted** – in spite of the storm
- Here – you are **safe** – away from the storm
- Here – you can **sense and feel the presence of God.**
- Here – you **find others who are willing to be there with you**, love you and care for you – no longer alone in the storm.

That's why I am so big on **resolving conflict Biblically** – on not letting our church be a place where gossip and unresolved conflict exist. You need to know – **when you come to First Assembly, you are safe from the storm.** If ungodly people try to make this safe place a storm place, I will deal with them.

So – come in these doors. Get hugged by a greeter. Find a comfortable place to sit. Then, when the music starts, when we begin to worship, set aside that storm. That's one of the most important reasons to worship. **When we worship, we forget about the junk we came in with.** Instead, we are caught up in the presence of our creator – an awesome God. So – close your

eyes, raise your hands, relax, breathe in His presence where you are safe from the storm.

Come forward to the front and let us love you and pray for you. Feel His love and our love – away from the storm.

Today, I want to speak to those of you who are currently in the midst of a storm. I want to share with you not my words but **His words** – straight from His word, the Bible.

*Is. 41:10 So **do not fear, for I am with you;***

do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you;

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

11 “All who rage against you

will surely be ashamed and disgraced;

those who oppose you

will be as nothing and perish.

12 Though you search for your enemies,

you will not find them.

Those who wage war against you

will be as nothing at all.

*13 **For I am the LORD, your God,***

who takes hold of your right hand

and says to you, Do not fear;

I will help you.

Ps.27:1 ***The LORD is my light and my salvation—***

whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life—

of whom shall I be afraid?

2 *When evil men advance against me*

*to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me,
they will stumble fall.*

3 ***Though an army besiege me***

my heart will not fear;

though war break out against me,

even then will I be confident.

4 *One thing I ask of the LORD,*

this is what I seek:

that I may dwell in the house of the LORD

all the days of my life,

to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD

and to seek him in his temple.

5 ***For in the day of trouble***

he will keep me safe in his dwelling;

he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle

and set me high upon a rock.

6 *Then my head will be exalted*

above the enemies who surround me;

*at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the LORD.*

Back to the first principle – ask for help.

PRAYER TIME