

SHELTER FROM THE STORM

“Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you by the laying on of hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of Power, of Love and of Self-Discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:6)

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Today I will not fear, for I will call upon the Lord. He will touch me by His Presence and give me shelter from the storm. He whispers in the dead of night so quietly in my ears, *“My Child, be not afraid... rest in Me, for I AM here. You are My Window, My Beloved, through which others look to see; How you’ve kept your courage... amidst your pain, they see your peace. You are to tell them, My Beloved, if they cast their fears aside; look up to Me for strength, I will grant them clearer sight. I will touch them by My Spirit, they will see My Smiling Face; they will know My Father’s Love is what surpasses life through faith. My Word is a lamp unto your feet, so My Child, do not fear. It is by My Voice and through your faith, your path will become clear. The candle I have lit inside your heart will pave the way. It will open up the darkness, so that you cannot go astray. It shall serve to prepare others who have stumbled in the dark. They will see your Light, flee to its Source... and I will touch their hearts. Know My Precious Lamb, your steps are ordered of the Lord. Know that I AM with you...*

I give you shelter from the storm.



When God calls you to do a work, you can be sure that there will always be a storm brewing on the horizon, and just when you embark on the task at hand, the winds of adversity come to blow away any hope that you will ever succeed. It's during times like these, that you must focus your attention on the solution, not the problem. You must focus on, not the storm besieging you, but rather the Sovereignty of God in the midst of the storm. If God wants something accomplished, you can be sure that God will be faithful to what He says He will do: ***“So it is My Word that will not return to Me void, but accomplish what I desire, and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”, (Isaiah 55:11).*** God will bring this work to pass, no matter what circumstance or human influence lies in the way.

The enemy loves to throw temptation our way whenever a major work of God is about to be accomplished. When most of us think of temptation, the first thing that pops into most minds has to do with infidelity and lust; but it encompasses much more than we think. Temptation can come in many forms, the most common ones include distraction, adverse circumstances and those two always seem to be accompanied by some degree of fear. Jesus clearly says, ***“No temptation has overtaken you, except what is common to man. And God is faithful, He will not let you be tempted***

beyond what you can bear; but when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

One night, coming back home to Oklahoma from a weekend getaway to San Antonio, God gave me a tiny glimpse of just how fast storms can come out of nowhere and wreak havoc. It was also a perfect opportunity for me to fall into temptation, by succumbing to fear. That night, I definitely had to keep my mind off the circumstances and onto the Sovereignty of God. We were driving on the toll-way, an incredibly long stretch of freeway en-route to Oklahoma City. Living in the Upper Midwest all my life, I was unfamiliar with the terrain. I did not know we were headed for Tornado Alley. It was already after midnight, we had already been traveling for hours. One child was fast asleep in the back seat and the other was near dozing in the front. I was bound and determined to drive straight through to home; it had been a long and exhausting trip.

I followed a semi going 75 mph on the toll-way, and he and I appeared to be the only vehicles on the road for many, many miles. On the horizon I could see lightning in the distance, and it lit up the entire sky. It made a

string of electricity that looked like huge fingers with tentacles extending out from them. It was a stunning display a crossed the sky, so much so that you could see it peripherally on both ends. This is what illuminated a massive wall cloud. I thought we could out-run what appeared, in my judgment, to be off to the west, and I was certain that our route of travel would let us bypass anything dangerous. I would soon learn that the human mind has an amazing capacity to justify stupidity. Since I had already passed the last truck stop, we were pretty much in the middle of nowhere. I said a little prayer for protection and direction, and the Lord spoke to my heart: *“Just keep your eyes on Me, and enjoy the light show.”* It would turn out to be quite the “light show”. I turned the car radio up, and every song on the Christian station I was listening to, played back-to-back songs about, none other than...storms. Right after the Lord had spoken to my heart, one of my favorite songs came on, *“Praise You In The Storm”*, by Casting Crowns. I found that amusing; sometimes God displays His wonderful sense of humor. I turned the volume up and sang along with the radio, mostly to keep my mind off the looming clouds in the distance. It was a very quiet and peaceful drive for about 65 more seconds. I know this, because mid-song, all hell broke loose. Out of nowhere came a massive lightning strike. It missed, by a hair, the back of the tractor trailer I

was following, about 4 car lengths ahead of me. Just as the semi sped by, the lightning struck the ground with such force, I actually saw smoke from the pavement sizzle. A split second later, I heard the loudest thunder clap I'd ever heard. I had to drive right through it. I've never been that close to lightning in my life. I tend to avoid storms whenever possible, because I'm pretty much an easy target with all the metal in my back; grounded, as they say. My teenager, who was sitting in the front seat, now wide awake, insisted it was ball lightning, because he'd just helped my other son do a science project on it at school. Whatever it was, it nearly blinded me. It took my natural eye a couple of minutes to adjust.

That strike came out of nowhere. Ten seconds later, hail hit my windshield like somebody had dumped a bucket of golf balls as I passed by; and then came the wind and the rain. No little drips to ease into a storm. It was immediate, blinding and torrential. The intermittent wind gusts were so severe; I thought I felt the car move sideways. For all I know, it probably did. All I could do was pray. With the wipers having to move so fast, and my eyes continuing to adjust, it appeared as though I was seeing everything in front of me through a strobe light. Terrified to stop, I did the only thing I felt was wisdom; to fix my eyes on the trail that the semi ahead

of me left behind. I followed in his tracks hoping my tires could get a better grip on the road and minimize the hydroplaning. Decreasing speeds considerably, it took an hour to get through the worst of it. I stayed behind that trailer all the way, so he would pick up the brunt of the wind sheer. That was one of the scariest hours of my life. Adrenaline kicked my fatigue right out the window, and I was now wide awake. Both kids were up at this point, and were looking for funnel formations every time the lightning lit up the sky. Glancing up every now and then, I noticed we were headed straight for the wall cloud as little twisters tried to form in its midst. Thankfully, we couldn't see any touch the ground. The kids thought it was cool. The word "cool" was not what I would use to describe the atmosphere. Other than the grace of God, and perhaps a few heavenly hosts, I honestly don't know how I managed to stay on the road.

After seven or eight more songs, all coincidentally about storms, I just started to laugh. God just kept repeating to my head: *"Just keep your eyes on Me, and enjoy the light show."* Far from enjoying it, I soon began to see what God was trying to tell me; for me to relax, that He was in control. That day happened to be Father's Day, and I have to admit, at one point, I thought we were going Home. With my heart pounding as loud as the claps of

thunder, I prepared myself to meet My Father face-to-face. As I made last minute requests in my head, mostly on behalf of my children, The Lord reminded me of Psalm 91, specifically the verse that makes reference to **“angels lift you up in their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone”**; and then it was as if He whispered in my ear, *“not yet”*, and I knew that we would survive, in spite of what the circumstances looked like in the natural.

That long, 78 mile stretch through what appeared to be continual storms, felt like I was driving through a Star Wars Time Warp. It would take three more hours to finally make it to our front door, but not without one more close call. Thirty minutes before we would arrive home, I took an exit ramp, and found myself in a flood pocket. I do not like floods, of any kind, not even little pockets. When I started to lose control of the vehicle, all I could do was pray, though not in a tangible language. A split second later, as God as my witness, I actually felt the car lift back onto the road so I could make the turn and not slam into the cement guardrail. Was it angelic intervention? I don't know for sure, all I know is that I lost control of the vehicle and it miraculously corrected. Surreal doesn't begin to describe those last few hours on the road. I know God was with us.

The Lord would use this “storm” to drive home a point He was trying to make. We can be driving around life, minding our own business, and we can even notice storms from a distance on the horizon. We can see all the signs of impending danger, but our logic takes over, and we think we can out-run them, using our own judgment; or we can choose to believe that they pose no personal threat to us because they appear so far away. Then out of nowhere, with no warning whatsoever, in the midst of our quiet, peaceful lives, lightning strikes. When we try to recover from the initial blast, and re-focus our vision, the hail comes to demolish and destroy. Soon after, the wind gusts and the rain serve to further blind our eyes to what was once a clear path; all in hopes that we will veer from the course The Lord has laid out for us. Sometimes, storms succeed, but other times, they are a wake up call to stop and pay attention to the warning signs.

When God asks us to do something for Him, whether it be a private matter designed for our personal growth, or a public display for the benefit of many, Satan will always intervene with some type of storm in hopes of destroying our intimate relationship with the Lord. It might be a physical storm where we are robbed of our health, some emotional trauma we experience to stretch our faith, or a storm that affects us in a personal way

from a natural disaster to test our resolve. Satan will always try to interject thoughts, circumstances or people that are expressly contrary to the advancement of the task we know we are to complete. He will try to interject any obstacle he can find that will discourage us from what the Lord has put on our heart to do. The worst assaults tend to come from *within* the camp, not necessarily outside of it. I know, for me, this is true 99 percent of the time. Satan will try to cause confusion, persuading us to reason out our task with human wisdom from well-meaning friends who are perhaps, more mature in the faith than we appear to be. He knows that will accomplish two things: it will make us insecure and doubt what we know to be true; questioning if we *really* heard from God, and this will cause us confusion. Where confusion is, strife will soon follow. Before long, human reasoning will cause you to spend hours, days, months or even years trying to figure it all out and make things fit into a tidy little package. He will disguise the fear of man in the form of anxiety, your lack of knowledge into insecurity and point out the fact that you need to strive for excellence in your service to God lest you become apathetic in your efforts. He will be quick to point out every set back and failure along the way. He will use these tactics as weapons to dissuade and discourage you. Your mind will be fixed on the problem, instead of the solution. We need to understand

that set-backs and failures are just opportunities for success. Thomas Edison is a good example. He made *ten thousand* attempts to create electricity, yet every time he failed, he kept trying. His attitude was simple; he had just discovered ten thousand ways it didn't work. The point is, he kept trying, and finally succeeded with the very next attempt. This is the key. When we are on the precipice of victory, Satan will come at us with everything he's got in his arsenal. If we can see our failures like Thomas Edison saw his, it could be our very next attempt that will launch us into the desires of our hearts. The only way we will get those desires met, is if we first give God the desire of *His* Heart. God's desires are very simple. They are our obedience, loyalty and faithfulness. Herein lays the problem for most of us, if we're honest. Those things will cost us something we are sometimes unwilling to sacrifice: time and effort.

The enemy knows that the more time we spend in fellowship with the Lord, the more we will understand His Character; in turn, the more we will want to serve Him. He also knows that the more time we spend with the Lord, God will strengthen us with His Word, we will develop discerning of spirits, a very important spiritual gift that will be quick to point out the enemy's schemes. Satan is jealous and he despises obedient hearts; he despises

loyalty and he shutters at faithfulness. He will do anything to veer us off the plotted course. If he cannot dissuade us by spending time with the Lord, he will discourage our efforts with one thing after another. It's during times like these, that we need to remember God's loving-kindness. God allows Satan to buffet us occasionally, because He sees the bigger picture. God allows the enemy of our souls to interfere for one reason: to prepare our hearts for the real persecution yet to come. One might call it Spiritual Boot Camp; we're being given a sneak preview of events yet to unfold when prophecy is finally fulfilled at the return of Jesus Christ. God wants to know how far we will go to serve Him with our whole hearts.

I felt it was important to point out the fact that Judas Iscariot followed Jesus for three and a half years, as His disciple, yet clearly, he wasn't saved. He accounted for the ministry's treasury, he faithfully served Jesus as a disciple, but yet he ended up betraying the King of Kings, for just a few pieces of silver. This should be a strong lesson for all of us who profess to be Christians. If we don't serve God with our whole hearts, if we just serve out of habit, or because we're good at it, or because we're expected to, yet we don't surrender our hearts fully to Him, we are not true Disciples of Christ. If we depend on works, or performance, or the accolades of men,

we are not true Disciples of Christ. We only appear to be faithful until the rubber meets the road. If we are not fully surrendered, we might maintain faithfulness to the task at hand, but we will inevitably betray the One we say we love; and it will be to our destruction, just like Judas Iscariot. There are so many examples, in today's society, of high profile ministers, and some we cannot see that are in leadership. A large number, although not all, of the ones you see falling under public scrutiny, I suspect, are self-appointed and not God-appointed. God just allows them to flourish to prove His inevitable point. He allows the wheat to grow alongside the tares, because one day, He will separate them by His very Own Hand. God is certainly the only One Who can judge the heart, but we need to be on our guard, and listen to the warnings that scripture provides, lest we fall prey to deception.

Deception can come in at any moment, and it can happen, even to those chosen as the elect. One minute you can be getting Divine Revelation from God, and the next minute, you can be serving Satan without even knowing it. There are those in ministry who would disagree strongly with me, but they are only disputing the Word Himself, as it is written throughout Romans 7:13-25. The Apostle Paul clearly outlines the agony he battles

with his flesh on an ongoing basis; how he does what he *doesn't* want to do, and that which he *does* want to do, he doesn't. He can't seem to jump off this vicious merry-go-round he sees himself on. Who we end up serving in any given moment depends on how well we can distinguish one voice from another. It's all boils down to discerning the voice of God, versus our own human inspirations, as well as that of the enemy's.

If we look at the story of Peter, in his conversation with Jesus in the Upper Room just before He was to be crucified, we can see a picture of this seemingly impossible paradigm: a faithful servant of God who just so happened to be a tool in the hands of Satan, to fight against the very King he served. I believe God allowed this because of His Love for us, so that we could see we're not alone, when good people do bad things. In the first part of the conversation, Jesus asks a pointed question to His disciples. ***“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus answered and said unto him, “Blessed art thou, Simon (son of Jona): for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in Heaven.”*** (Matthew 16:16-17).

When Jesus broke the news to them that He would be crucified, Peter

rebuked the Lord and begged Him to save Himself, that what Jesus knew was God's will, could not possibly be true. We find Jesus' reply just moments after He had told Peter he would be a rock of stability for the entire Church: ***“But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but of those that be of men.”*** (Matthew 16:23).

The reason that Jesus rebuked Peter was because even after all the time he spent with Jesus, sitting and learning under his teaching, he *still* couldn't discern the difference between God's Divine Revelation, and the inspirations of Peter's own heart. Peter was blinded by the rushing winds of adversity blowing a tumultuous whirlwind of emotions through his mind; he was definitely in a storm. I feel for Peter every time I read this. Any one of us could be Peter under these same circumstances. We think we're being loving and supportive, trying to spare the one we love any pain, and certain death. We might even try to talk them out of whatever looks crazy in our eyes, when in reality, we're not helping at all; we are serving Satan by denying the Cross. I don't believe it was anymore intentional for Peter, than it is for you and I when it happens, but God peered through the depths in Peter's heart and saw his fear. Fear of the unknown or what the

outcome will be can cause us to do the unspeakable. Our human gut reaction to fear is to engage denial and try to circumvent the very thing that brings pain, in order that we can save ourselves and the ones we love. Some would call that wisdom from a natural perspective; but in this case, God saw it as rebellion. The only way we can avoid denying the Cross of Christ, is to learn how to distinguish the voice of God, from every other voice.

Distinguishing the voice of God is not easy. Every one of us will miss it from time to time, even under the best of intentions. To discern the voice of God, from our own human inspirations or imaginations requires knowledge of, not only God's Word, but of His Character. We need to know and understand what the little nuances mean. A relationship with the Lord is very much the same as a marriage between a husband and wife. When you share a marriage relationship with someone, you pick up on little things. You are able to finish their sentences before they utter a word, and with just a look on their face, you will be able to read their heart and assess a need. When they close their eyes, you fall asleep; when they breathe in, you breathe out. True Intimacy requires synchronicity, and time. Time spent between yourselves, up close and personal, is needed in order to

understand the ebb and flow of a healthy and closely knit relationship. Communication is the key to longevity, just as it is in your relationship with God. He desires that you know Him so well, that if He should sigh, you will instinctively know what it means; if you should hear Him cry, you will be sensitive enough to listen and respond accordingly, just as you would for your husband or wife. The only clear way to distinguish the voice of God from our own, or that of our adversary, is simple enough; yet it is very difficult to put into practice at times. If what we hear lines up with scripture and God's Righteous Character, it is of God. If it promotes self or causes division and factions, and draw more attention to us, than to God Himself and His Saving Grace, then chances are, it is not from God. There's another thing one needs to consider: timing. In verse 20 of Matthew, Chapter 16, right after Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God; Jesus immediately tells them *not to tell anyone who He is*. Knowing ***what to do*** for God is one thing; added difficulty is knowing ***when to do it***. Timing is everything with God, and it literally can mean the life or death of a soul.

This conversation in the Upper Room that Jesus had with Peter was left as an example to show us how easily our old natures can rise up out of nowhere, and how easily Satan can sweep in and use well-intended people

as weapons in his own hand. When our old natures rise up, we will certainly revert back to demanding the easy route. Taking the easy route is one sure way to walk alongside your adversary unawares, and by the time you figure it out, you're already sinking in quicksand. True discipleship is never easy, but it's well worth it. There are so many more benefits to following Christ, yet mainstream society constantly bombards us with things that promise to make our lives so much easier. Teachers of another gospel, and even those who are well-intended and passionately serve the Lord, get caught up in the flow, and justify what they teach, sugarcoating it with other promises God has made so that it *looks* like it's a message from God. They take out of context, the true meaning of those legitimate promises, preaching prosperity without pain, for example, and we fall for it because it caters to our flesh and our own desires. We don't want to hear about the trip, we just want to reach the destination. The downside to all this is that the more we cater to our flesh, the more desensitized to things of the spirit we become, and when that happens, it follows that we will indulge ourselves and avoid persecution whenever possible; we will deny the Cross. Seldom do we want to get out of our own comfort zones. We can even delude ourselves into thinking that we're promoting Godly peace, when we avoid persecution and trials; the justification being that

persecution and trials cause us to “lose our peace”. True peace is active, never passive, and the long-term benefits of true peace are wrought only through persecution and trials. This is where faith is fortified and resolve is born.

There are some doctrines out there that actually teach avoiding persecution at all cost, and claiming that this the way to achieving God’s abundant life. One thing is pretty consistent about Satan; he will always encourage us to escape the Cross. Jesus, on the other hand, clearly points out the fact if we belong to him - if we are a true Disciple of Christ - we are to take up our own cross, without fear, and follow Him, (*Matthew 16: 24; Luke 9:23*). This is where we discover what we’re made of. If we follow in our Savior’s steps, and dare to voluntarily allow God to nail us to our own proverbial crosses; that is, to surrender everything we are, lay it bare before God’s Altar, and give up everything we think we want, we will discover that what we lose is to our gain. The things we think are important to us will pale in comparison to what God will give us, and there will be joy inexplicable in ways we never imagined. We will be able to see that it is here, at “our cross”, where wisdom gives birth to discernment, and the fruit of peace that passes all human understanding will become evident to all.

When I asked the Lord how Peter, a man who walked on water, could be praised for his great faith one day, and yet be rebuked by the Lord so severely in the next. How could one be “saved”, yet in blatant rebellion to God’s Word? I wondered about their relationship with one another, how strong it really was. God led me to the records of Matthew, where Jesus first met Simon Peter with his brother Andrew, (*Matthew 4:18*). As He walked by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus changes the name of Simon, which literally means “*weak and shifty*”; to Cephas, which by interpretation, means “*a little stone*”, perhaps signifying a babe in Christ, (*John 1:41-42*). When I was studying this verse for teaching purposes, I thought it was important to expound comparatively on it. We see in *Matthew 16:18*, Jesus calls him Peter, which means “*a giant rock*“. Why would Jesus refer back to Peter as “*a little stone*” a few chapters after He already told him he was “*a giant rock*”? I believe that Jesus was calling his faithful disciple by the character he would later display, as He read the thoughts and intents of Peter’s heart, as their relationship evolved and grew more intimate. ***“And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever thou***

shalt loose on the earth shall be loosed in Heaven.” (Matthew 16:18).

This verse is commonly translated from the Latin language, but it should be translated directly from the Greek text. Scripture, when seen in its root form is so much more powerful when properly defined; anything less waters down its meaning and gives way to misinterpretation and false doctrine. This verse, in particular, was one that was presented miserably askew to me when I was first saved, within the charismatic faith movement I was a part of for so many years. They taught that “*we had power and dominion and whatsoever we bound and loosed would come to pass.*” Partially true. We do have dominion and power, but we cannot go beyond the parameters God outlines in His Word, lest we become ensnared by pride and ultimate rebellion leading to our spiritual deaths. We are not little “mini-gods”, we are not “god-men”; we are made in God’s Image, and we are supposed to reflect His Character in godliness. There is a big difference. Let’s take a look at how this verse really should’ve been translated, and you will clearly see the difference.

“So, I tell you, then, that you (Peter) are a stone, but I will build My Church on this rock, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. Still, I will give

*you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, but whatever (or whoever) you might bind on earth **must have been bound in Heaven**, and whatever (or whoever) you might release on earth **must have been released in Heaven**”, (Matthew 16:18 - original Greek).*

If you didn't catch it, go over it again. Whatever we choose to bind on this earth, this literal verse implies that it must *first have already been bound* in Heaven; and whatever we loose on earth, must *first have already been released* in Heaven. We can't change our environment on the supernatural level unless it has already been pre-ordained by God to be so. Anything that goes beyond the Cross of Christ is error. The error is when we think, by the confessions of our mouths, we can “bind and loose” at **our wills**, whatsoever **we desire**, instead of carrying out God's Will and His desires. We cannot manipulate God, and if we try to manipulate His Word to suit our purposes, we are guilty of rebellion, which in God's eyes, “...*(is as) the sin of witchcraft; and stubbornness (is as) iniquity and idolatry.*” (1 Samuel 15:23). According to this verse, Peter was in rebellion, and tampering with idolatry.

But God is merciful. He knew that Peter was about to encounter possibly

the worst emotional storm of his life. The Bible doesn't record it as such, but what would soon follow, had to do with taunting to Peter, it couldn't have been far from the worst. I cannot even imagine the agony he felt so deep in his soul when he realized what he had done. God knew the part of Peter that was weak, (Simon) would deny Jesus, yet The Lord understood Peter's heart (his passion to follow Christ), and encouraged him anyway. Notice that Jesus at one point, as recorded in the Book of Luke, called Peter by his birth name again, by the name of Simon. By calling him this twice, He was alluding to the fact that Peter would definitely drift, albeit momentarily, back to his old nature and become "*weak and shifty*" even though he was a man of great faith. He had already walked on water by this point in time, as recorded in Matthew 14:29; and that is a feat that requires great faith, no one could argue with that.

But Jesus read Peter's heart, when He reverted back to calling him Simon; He was telling Peter that God could read his motives and his fears as He addressed him this way. Out of compassion for Peter, Jesus tried to warn him. Peter knew what his namesake meant, so when Jesus addressed him by his birth name, Peter knew it was a warning. "***Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that***

your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers,” (Luke 22:31). The word “asked” should literally be translated “demanded”, and “turned back” should really read “converted”. Peter was obviously “saved”, but converted, in this case means, that he would acknowledge his sin, repent and turn from it.

Jesus knew, as the time of His own impending death, that Simon, (the weak and shifty one), would be persuaded by the spirit of fear, and he would indeed do the unspeakable: deny Jesus not once, but three times, before the cock crowed, just as Jesus said he would. And yet, Jesus saw the man of faith he would later become; Peter, the rock on which His Church would inevitably stand. Jesus assured him that he was praying for him, that even though he would fail, he would indeed return to the faith, and God’s ultimate plan would succeed. Peter would allow his natural fears about Jesus’ death, to trigger his old nature, but God saw that he would be strong enough to overcome his old nature, acknowledge his sin and repent, and then return to become the symbol of a rock; an unshakable foundation upon which the Gospel would be built. We know this because Peter’s instructions from the Lord were to *strengthen the others in their faith*.

Now why would God allow Simon Peter to strengthen other people when he just denied, not only the Cross of Christ, but the Very Son of God? His mercy, plain and simple. God knows that our spirits might be willing, but our flesh is weak, just as Jesus told His disciples at the Garden of Gethsemane, (*Matthew 26:40*). He knows that when fear comes into play, sometimes we return to our old natures. But God looks deeper than what man can see, and He also knows if and when we will repent and return to Him, so that we can carry forth His Light. In the Garden, Jesus simply asked his disciples to pray; in fact, He specifically addressed Peter, to warn him that he might fall prey to temptation. That night, they all fell asleep anyway, and as a consequence, Peter succumbed to the very thing Jesus tried to warn him about. Before temptation comes, God always warns His Children.

To sum all this up, before we can do *anything* for God, before we can defeat any storm that arises in our lives, we must first acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and He is our Deliverer. The second thing we need to understand is that God, The Father, is ultimately in control of the end result, no matter what we do. Additionally, we must acknowledge that we are human, with character flaws, dents and dings, and we will miss

it from time to time. But the most important thing is this: if we fail in our efforts to obey the voice of God; if we do our best to try and measure what we hear by the Word of God; if what we hear lines up with God's Righteousness and His Character, even though we may fail, God will consider it a success. Even if we mess up miserably, God can turn it around for His good. He can turn our efforts into seed, so that a foundation is laid, and He can send another to water that seed, and yet another to nourish what we initially planted. God's Word will build upon the stones we lay, and He will build a wall that will turn into a fortified city, impenetrable to our enemies. If we can keep all those things in mind as we endeavor to serve the Lord, the enemy is less likely to use fear and circumstance to discourage us, and we will be able to weather any storm that comes our way.

When the enemy tries to veer us from the course we know God wants us to take; when Satan turns up the heat, we need to call fire down from heaven. The way we do that is simply act on the Word Itself. Since most of what we encounter is in the battlefield of the mind, we would do well to engage our adversary with the mindset of 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, ***“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war like the world does. The weapons we***

fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

When God called Ezekiel to speak to the dry bones and prophesy them into life that they might live, he wasn't going to a people who would receive him with open arms. I would hazard to guess that Ezekiel had to take many a personal thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. I would imagine this man so frustrated, that he had to beat his flesh to death, in order to fight rejection and ridicule, and continue to be obedient to what God had planted in his heart. The people Ezekiel was sent to, hadn't listened to the Lord Himself, so they weren't about to listen to him; God Himself said that. This fact did not dissuade Ezekiel, for he knew that it was his obedience to what God told him to do that was important, not the fulfillment of the actual task; or of it coming to fruition. If he failed, it wouldn't be for lack of trying. When God saw that Ezekiel displayed a pattern of obedience, He knew He could trust him with one of the most important jobs in the history of Israel: to prophesy Life to their dead, lifeless bones; to speak the very Breath of Life into their spirits that they might have hope and live to declare the works

of the Lord. God saw the insolence of the people of Israel, how proud and overbearing their attitudes were, and so He equipped Ezekiel with every tool he would need to successfully complete his mission. He gave His prophet the same hard-headedness that He knew Ezekiel would come against in his ministry. God always equips us for the things He asks us to do. God knew the overwhelming amount of rejection and persecution His prophet would suffer at their hands, so He shielded Ezekiel's heart and made it strong and impenetrable, so that he would be able to carry out his commission.

This is where most of us miss it. God gives us a task, and somewhere in the middle of it, when the going gets tough, we forget that God is in control. We panic and take the reins and try to fight the inevitable persecution that follows with our limited understanding. For most of us, I believe it is an unconscious gut reaction. We are so conditioned to fighting for what we believe in, that we forget whose battle this really is, and invariably step outside of God's Will. We listen to the enemy plant vain imaginations in our heads that tell us we need to "protect the ministry", we need to "follow through with excellence". When we succumb to inner talk that reduces a supernatural battle to a natural one; when the battle becomes what we can

do about a situation, versus what *God* can do; we fall prey to those controlling and critical spirits that God despises. We need to realize what the enemy doesn't want us to remember: that in *our* weakness, *God's* power is made perfect. If the enemy can get us to put that truth on the back-burner of our minds, and keep us focused on our abilities instead of God's abilities, then he has ensnared us successfully. Our intentions might start out admirably, and our motives might seem perfectly innocent, but we end up compromising the original plan; inadvertently calling evil, good; and good, evil. Compromise is always evil in the eyes of God; it causes people to stumble and fall away from Him. God doesn't need our protection and while He wants us to serve Him with excellence, He does not want us to fall prey to the enemy's snares in the midst of our assignments.

God does not want us to adopt an attitude of perfectionism. God is the Only One qualified to call Himself Perfect. Perfectionism is a form of idolatry. He doesn't want us being so proud and puffed up that we *think* will never make any mistakes. Truth be told, we will always make many mistakes in our service to The Most High, for the simple fact that we are human, and we are frail. It is not by works we have been redeemed, we are simply sinners, saved by grace, and we will always fall short of the Glory of God. When we

take the reigns of a given situation, and try to control things, no matter what we *think* our motives are, even justifying our actions as mere zealousness; when we think we should follow man's plan to success; follow some pattern or formula, or program, we put ourselves above the knowledge of God and we make ourselves out to be fools. Moreover, our stubborn hearts commit iniquity and idolatry before the Lord, just like Peter was guilty of. It's not easy to follow Christ, it comes at a price: our pride and often times, persecution. The greater the trial, the greater the testimony.

We need to drill it into our heads that persecution exists for a reason; to show us what we're made of and to demolish our personal pride. How well we weather persecution with humility will determine how far God uses us to minister for Him. God despises pride, He will accept no part of it, for any reason. Pride always comes before a fall, and sometimes that fall comes in the form of persecution and trials; but not always. Sometimes the righteous in Christ suffer persecution, not because they've done something horrible in the eyes of God; but because they have *proven their faithfulness* in service, and God may require a circumstance to occur in their life to bring *others* to conviction.

Job, whose name means “persecuted”, is a perfect example. He had everything, and he lost everything. Satan petitioned God for the opportunity to attack Job because he wanted to convince God that Job only served Him because he was so blessed on this earth. God allowed Satan to strike every part of Job’s life, though he was not allowed to take his life. Job’s well-meaning “friends” made him think that the reason for his tormented life was his fault; he knew differently. It is pretty clear that God was watching how other people were judging Job, and this is the reason, I believe, that God blessed Job later in his life, multiplying everything he lost in the eyes of everyone who persecuted him. Job was honest, forthright with God in his heart, and most importantly, faithfully repentant. He certainly wasn’t perfect, he had problems just like you and I. He even lashed out at God for all that had been taken from him, yet in the end, he came to understand that God was God, and He was not. For this, God considered Job a righteous man, and he received the rewards of a righteous man.

Isaiah, whose name means “Salvation of The Lord”, was one of the most popular and honored prophets in his time, yet people began to despise him for delivering messages that no longer tickled their ears. Isaiah’s messages were rather harsh and certainly confronting, stressing holiness

and righteousness and the justice of God. The people of Isaiah's time were so spiritually deteriorated, that they were serving themselves up to other gods; they were corrupt, engaging in idolatry, even though they professed to be religious. Isaiah found himself in the eye of the storm, as he saw hypocrisy for what it was, yet he was faithful to deliver messages from the mouth of God, and he accepted the winds of adversity with grace and humility, understanding Who held the Heavens in place.

Jonah was another strong personality. Jonah was the son of Amittai, (which means "My Truth). According to Jewish tradition, Jonah was the boy brought back to life by the Prophet Elijah, (some scholars record it as being the Prophet Elisha), and so he shared many of his characteristics, particularly his desire for strict judgment. The story of Jonah holds a two-fold characterization: first as the reluctant prophet who wants to see the doom and destruction of the heathen city of Nineveh, and secondly, as a type and shadow of the Son of Man, who is compassionate toward a Gentile nation.

Jonah was commanded by the Lord to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire at a time before they ascended to great power. Assyrians

were one of the most heinous and vicious enemies of Israel, who were notorious for torturing their prisoners of war with such vicious acts against humanity, it was likened unto Adolf Hitler's reign; yet God was telling Jonah to deliver a message of repentance. God desired that the people of Nineveh come to understand their ignorance in following the Assyrian Empire who was leading them to hell. Jonah was very close to the Lord, he knew His Heart, and he knew first hand, the loving compassion God has on anyone who sincerely repents and comes to Him with humility. Jonah wanted nothing to do with the salvation of these Gentiles. He judged them based on their heinous acts, their immoral conduct and their evil, idolatrous ways. But God looked deeper. In contrast to Jonah's lack of compassion, God exhibits His compassion as recorded in Jonah 4:9-11. God states that *"there were more than one hundred twenty thousand people in that city that didn't know right from wrong"*, and He even mentions their animals. He was trying to stress to Jonah that these were people with condemned souls without intervention. Jonah didn't want to preach repentance to these people he saw as pure evil, he didn't want to "contaminate" the body of believers in Yahweh, the God he so loved; he decided to run. God had previously told Jonah to prophesy destruction to this nation for their wicked ways, and now God was changing His mind, or so it seemed. The Assyrian

Empire was a Satanic one, straight from the abyss. This empire was saturated in occultism, magic, immorality, and just about anything one can imagine. It was pure anti-God. In their propaganda, they dared to call the Lord of Heaven, a deceiver. That would offend the best of us, to call the Lord of Heaven and Earth, a deceiver. Jonah was a reluctant, and non-compassionate prophet, and in his mind, they didn't deserve redemption.

When Jonah decided that the people of Nineveh weren't worthy of salvation, he ran away from God in the other direction. Jonah was about to find out that God is God, and he was not. What could he possibly have been thinking, that there was someplace he could hide where God couldn't find him? Silly thought, indeed. Still, Jonah attempted to go his own way, rebelling against The Almighty. Funny, when you run, God only lets you run as fast and far as you can, until you find yourself exhausted. And then He opens your eyes, and lets you see that you haven't been going anywhere, you've just been on a stationery treadmill going millions of miles to nowhere.

Many of the Assyrian kings saw themselves as gods. They were always acting in the opposite of the God of Israel. They always showed the

strength and the pride of their god, (a statue of half human being and half bull), against the Lord Almighty. They wanted to demonstrate that their god was even stronger than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This was a people that Jonah personally despised, yet God chooses him to prophesy. Jonah tries to avoid his responsibility by going to Joppa, finding a boat and sailing to Tarshish; the opposite direction of Nineveh. We would be wise to learn a lesson from Jonah, on what attitude **not** to adopt. To teach him a lesson, God allows Jonah to go his own way for a little while. When the ship heads out to sea, a huge storm arises from seeming nowhere. The sailors, being terrified and helpless to help themselves, cry out to Jonah, after casting lots and discovering that he is to blame for the storm, (Jonah 1: 14).

Jonah admits to it being his fault, and tells them if they throw him overboard, the storm will cease. They try to make it back to shore, but fail. They finally throw Jonah overboard and the sea calms. Jonah ends up being swallowed by a large fish. While he remains alive, in the belly of this great fish, Jonah prays to God for forgiveness. It took him 3 days and 3 nights to come to his senses. God hears His prophet, and He forgives. God commands the fish to vomit him out on the shore of the sea. Must've

been quite a picture; but Jonah got the point, that's the important part to note. When God spoke to Jonah the second time, and told him to return to Nineveh, he went, and prophesied judgment with no mercy whatsoever to the people, *"in 40 days comes destruction"*. The Ninevites ended up believing this word from the Lord, although they had no guarantee that God wouldn't destroy them; Jonah left no room in his message for mercy. The king of Assyria appointed a public fast, complete with sackcloth, beginning with himself, down to the least of them, including the animals, they prayed to the God of Abraham for forgiveness. God had mercy on them, because He knew they would repent; they would turn from their wicked ways. God relents His judgment, and spares them from destruction for a period of time.

Even though Jonah did what the Lord commanded him, and the end result was the salvation of thousands and thousands of people, Jonah wasn't happy about it; he was embittered. While he waited for news to see if God had indeed spared them, Jonah went outside the city, made a shelter for himself, and continued to question God with an angry heart. I'm sure Jonah had good intentions, after all, they were enemies of God; Jonah loved God and he loved his people. He didn't want evil to infiltrate what he

held as precious, and by introducing the Assyrians to Yahweh, that's what he felt he was doing. Not only was he jealous, wanting to keep God all to himself and "his people", I think he was questioning more than just God's decision. Jonah couldn't see beyond his own anger and the inspirations of his own heart and I think deep down, Jonah was afraid. Perhaps he was trying to discern if he really heard God's voice the first time, when he was told to prophesy destruction to the same city and yet later, he would be told to prophesy repentance. When God *appeared* to change His mind, it didn't make sense to him. Jonah didn't realize that God would use him and his experiences for thousands of years after he had been long gone. He gave us one of many pictures of our reality today, so that you and I could clearly see how religious denominations could develop and how easy it would be to cause division among them. Because God is merciful, He answered Jonah, but it was in the form of an object lesson. God caused a plant to grow over Jonah's shelter to give him shade from the sun. Later, a worm bites the plant's root and it withers. Jonah is now exposed to the full force of the sun; he becomes faint, and fed up in his frustration, and wants God to take him out, permanently.

Instead of agreeing to take him Home, God engages His prophet in further

conversation and asks him how he can be so angry over a plant that grew, withered and died, when he could've cared less for human beings that would be condemned to eternal damnation. He didn't have anything to do with their creation, so how could he decide what should happen to them? God was giving Jonah a reality check; putting things into perspective. He was making Jonah become aware of the fact that God was the One Who, not only created plants and people and animals, but He caused them to flourish at His will or die by His hand. He made every one of them, therefore, He could do anything He wanted. He used that plant as an object lesson, in a story left for us throughout history, to prove one simple point. Anything that God creates is for His good pleasure, period. It is His, to do with whatever He desires, even the things we consider evil in our limited understanding.

Jeremiah was considered the weeping prophet, because of the deep sorrow he felt in his heart for an unrepentant nation, the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the ultimate exile of its people. Nobody listened to Jeremiah, persecution was everywhere. He was the most heroic of all the prophets because he had thoughtless courage to endure all the persecution and problems in his life without quitting. He was the last

prophet to live in a decaying nation, like the one we now live in. This historical record of Jeremiah serves as a type and shadow of what we are now going through; the last revival we are to experience before we too, go into captivity, just like the Israelites. This is an example to us, what the apostate church, as recorded in the Book of Revelation, will look like. You could say that Jeremiah was called to a ministry of failure because he never saw the fruits of his labor. The people didn't take God seriously, and did what they thought was right in their own eyes. They didn't bother to check to see if it was right, if it sounded good, they just went ahead and did it. They had lost a copy of the original law, so they no longer had access to the Word of God. It had been lost through all the false gospels, and sadly, it continues to be lost. We have so watered down the true gospel of Jesus Christ through the ages, with man's opinion of its interpretation, and even blatant mistranslations of the original texts. Because the people of Jeremiah's day misplaced or refused to seek out God's Holy Word, they ended up adopting the values of the world around them. They thought, if they just applied what they *thought* was right, it would go well for them.

Even when we don't overtly do anything wrong, but do what we think is right in our own eyes, if it is not what God's Word says, we are just as guilty

of doing wrong. We cannot adopt the values of the world around us; we cannot force God's Word into a tidy little box. Imagine the world and its values as a box. We gift wrap it, seal it up with Scripture tape, with bits and pieces stuck on the ends, just enough to hold it together, and then we give it back to God, thinking it's an acceptable gift. When we wrap up our hearts in that kind of box, and give it back to God, thinking that it is an acceptable offering, that box becomes nothing but to serve as our own tombs. We must give our hearts to God, fully saturated in His Word, not one that's just held together at the ends with little pieces. When we only offer little bits and pieces back to God, we end up compromising and we gradually sink lower and lower on a moral scale. We might find ourselves worshipping other gods, although our eyes will be blinded to it; we will bring about bickering and quarreling and strife; and just like the people of Jeremiah's day, we might even end up forming military allegiances with other nations around about us, to our own demise. Jeremiah proclaimed judgment to the people as God instructed, just like God is proclaiming judgment to the Body of Christ today. God will break down all our walls, destroy and take away everything we hold dear; He will judge with a weeping heart. God, in His mercy, allowed Jeremiah to look beyond some 70 years later to see God's restoration. He allowed Jeremiah to see the ultimate dispersion of the

people of Israel, and the final gathering back of the nation that will usher in the millennial reign. In a dungeon, in a slime pit, he wrote the vision; what he saw happening in the future. This would be the New Covenant, communion with Christ Himself, and he painted a clear picture of the forgiveness God would offer His people, both Jew and Gentile, (*Jeremiah 31*).

Jeremiah faced unimaginable opposition, but he made it through his many storms because he was faithful to God. He delivered, not only messages of warning, but words of encouragement to the people. While Jeremiah never saw the fruits of his labor, while he never acquired fame, fortune or received the accolades of men on this earth; God considered him a great success. By any worldly standard, Jeremiah was a complete failure, and I'm sure he battled the storms of rejection and unbearable loneliness as he questioned himself. No one listened to him, he was penniless, he didn't have any friends and he was rejected by his own family.

Persecution bothered Jeremiah and he begged God to take vengeance. There was mocking, scorn and contempt. For God's sake, Jeremiah bore reproach. He was lonely, without a bride. God's hand was upon him

because Jeremiah was filled with indignation. We try to do the right thing and get mocked for it. We get depressed and people assume we're disobedient or backslidden. That wasn't the case for Jeremiah, anymore than it is for you and I who get discouraged from time to time. Jeremiah was feeding on the Word, he knew he was called by God's name, and he witnessed to that fact. Jeremiah was clearly separated from what God considered evil, he wasn't backslidden. Generations may change, but the hearts of men are timeless. We think we have all the formulas down. We tend to judge, even the elect, who faithfully serve, but we neglect to make allowances for the fact that they, like us, are human. Thankfully, God knows what lies beneath our discouragement, and He refreshes us in due time. One thing Jeremiah knew for certain, and never lost sight of, was the fact that he had been called to ministry, even before he was formed in his mother's womb, (*Jeremiah 1:5*). God would mold him, as a potter would mold a lumpy piece of clay into a beautiful vessel, and he would be used to pour out the very Wellspring of Life from his mouth. So it is with the rest of us born in this age. We are but clay in the hands of a Potter, to be used at His will, to yield ourselves to the Lord in service, so that He can use us to pour out the Water of Life to others. God is always greater than the circumstances, no matter how negative they are. When we get our eyes off

ourselves, God prevails and He delivers us. We need to learn to lean on the strength of the Lord, and not on our own efforts.

We live in the days of all the prophets of old, but these several mentioned stand out in the forefront. The Weymouth New Testament translation draws a pretty clear picture of society as it is today: ***“But of this be assured: in the last days grievous times will set in. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, profane. They will be disobedient to parents, thankless, irreligious, destitute of natural affection, unforgiving, slanderers. They will have no self control, but will be brutal, opposed to goodness, treacherous, headstrong, self-important. They will love pleasure instead of loving God, and will keep up a make-believe of piety and yet live in defiance of its power. Turn away from people of this sort. Among them are included the men who make their way into private houses and carry off weak women as their prisoners – women who, weighed down by the burden of their sins, are led by ever-changing caprice, and are always learning something new, and yet are never able to arrive at real knowledge of the truth. And just as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so also these false teachers withstand the truth – being as***

they are, men of debased intellects, and of no real worth so far as faith is concerned. But they will have no further success; for their folly will be as clearly manifest to all men, as that of the opponents of Moses came to be.” (2 Timothy 3:1-9).

Living in such a day will certainly insure that those who try to remain faithful to God’s Word, will encounter opposition, and storms of every kind. Just like the prophets of old, we will need to be steadfast in our convictions and fearless in our efforts. We will need to enter into obedience, keeping in mind that we may never see the fruits of our labor, as was the case of Jeremiah. At times, we may try to run from God like Jonah, and think our ways are higher than God’s, but the important thing to remember is that we come to our senses and do what God says. We may lose everything like Job, we might be despised among men like Isaiah, and we will definitely encounter more people like Ezekiel did. We might even walk on our “proverbial water”, having great faith like Peter and doing great exploits for God one minute, and then fail miserably in the next and end up betraying the ones we love. When we mess up, we need to be quick to repent, and God will surely restore us for His good service.

One thing is for sure, storms will come whether we want them to, or not. They will come through obedience, and they will come through disobedience; scripture proves that. Ultimately, though, God is in control of the final outcome. The best way that we can avoid being destroyed in the midst of a storm is to take on the mind of Christ, and try to model our behavior after His, (*1 Corinthians 2*). We can look to men for examples, but we should ultimately look to the Only One Who can truly read the hearts of men, and that is Jesus Christ. We need to be mindful of those who are battered, shattered, and those who are ready to leave their calling. We need to offer them God's Word, with compassion and not judgment, so that they will have strength to endure. We need to pray without ceasing, so that the Body of Christ will come into unity as the Bride that Christ is coming back for. We need to offer words of encouragement, instruction and correction when needed; though not by our interpretation, but measured by the standard of God's Word and only His Word. Most importantly, we need to study it for ourselves, lest any man lead us astray into diverse doctrines and deception. We need to have courage and persevere in our efforts. While the enemy will try to convince us that we've failed, but it is not a walk of perfection God is after, it is a walk of submission to His Will – and obedience to His Word. God does not expect us to do His job; He expects

that we will do only ours, and leave the rest to Him.

We must introduce people to the Truth, lest they waste away in a river of piranhas that will strip them of any flesh so that they will die like the dry bones in the desert. We have the privilege and ability to bring hope to the hopeless and help to the helpless. God will hold us accountable if we cater to our flesh and take the easy route, when there is a message to deliver that will save souls from eternal damnation. We cannot be corpses walking around just mimicking Life, buffing our white-washed tombs and hope that no one will notice, because someone always will. We need to defeat the fear of man, so that it does not defeat us. We cannot allow apathy, fear of becoming unpopular, or our preconceived notions of God's justice, interfere with what we are all called to do. Our task is clear in scripture: *to lead out those who have eyes, but are blind; and those who have ears, but are deaf, (Isaiah 43:8).*

To be a true and faithful witness, we cannot be afraid to fan into flame, the gift from God. We are to boldly proclaim the return of Jesus Christ without the fear of consequences from crossing socio-religious and political lines. We are here to be His Witness to the world, to prove God's faithfulness.

We need to remember that none of us is insignificant, and if we only have a little birthday candle to hold up, we need to remember what happens when we light it in the dark. That teeny little light is able to illuminate the deepest darkness.

The candle I have lit inside your heart will pave the way.

It will open up the darkness, so that you cannot go astray.

It shall serve to prepare others who have stumbled in the dark.

They will see your Light, flee to its Source... and I will touch their hearts.

Know My Precious Lamb, your steps are ordered of the Lord.

Know that I AM with you... I give you shelter from the storm.

God never promises that our lives will be without storms, He just promises that we will never be alone when they hit.