



DR. DAVID JEREMIAH

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

HOPE

LIVING FEARLESSLY
in a SCARY WORLD

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Hope: Living Fearlessly in a Scary World

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Introduction

You are asleep in your bed when your alarm shocks you awake. You pick up your phone and see the headlines filled with news of approaching thunderstorms, overnight killings, fires, stock-market plunges, government scandals, and car wrecks. Instead of jumping out of bed, you pull the covers up over your head. You know what a fearful world we live in, and you dread facing all the challenges of the day.

But maybe your morning fears are not in the news; they're about your job. You live in constant fear of getting caught in the downsizing trend. Or you're apprehensive about a business deal that has your career on the line.

Maybe your deepest fears lie at home. Can you meet this month's mortgage payment? Does your marriage seem shaky? Are your kids worrying you? After a recent service at the church I pastor in Southern California, a young soldier who had just returned from Afghanistan wept as he asked me to pray for him. He feared that he might be losing his family.

Might. That's the word that's haunting him. Our greatest

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fear is the conditional might—the threat of what *might* happen. Fear trades in the market of possibility. Or even impossibility—for fear is the tyrant of the imagination. It imposes itself upon us from the shadows, from its hazy mirror of maybe.

There's no question about it: we live in a world that is often a scary place to be. When we face these fears that prompt us to pull the covers over our heads and retreat from the world, what will we put our hope in? Will we exert our energy in wishful thinking, crossing our fingers that our circumstances will change? Will we hold our breath in the hope that luck will go our way this time?

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It's not a lucky chance. It's not ungrounded optimism. No, it's a rock-solid belief in the character of God. That's not to say we are guaranteed rosebushes without thorns or a life free from tragedy or disaster. But because we know that God is all-knowing and all-powerful and for us, we can face down our fears and trust the outcome of our circumstances to Him.

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The antidote to fear is faith. And faith gives us hope in the midst of whatever scary thing we face. When the apostle Paul was giving counsel to Timothy, his young protégé, he knew Timothy was afraid of something—probably of his assignment to lead the large church in Ephesus. Timothy was raised in a small town in Asia Minor, and Ephesus was the big city. Paul himself had spent three years in Ephesus, building up the church there.

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It was led by a strong group of elders, yet false teachers were causing trouble. And Timothy was supposed to go in and be the leader of the whole thing. What young pastor wouldn't have felt fear at the prospect?

So what did Paul tell Timothy? “Your fear is not from God. What do come from God are power, love, and a stable mental attitude” (2 Timothy 1:7, my paraphrase).

Paul knew that when we get God's perspective on the source of our fear, we can set aside what is not from Him and embrace what is. In all my years of following Christ, studying the Bible, and pastoring well-intentioned Christians, I have yet to find a fear for which God does not have an answer. And the reason is simple: God Himself is the answer to all our fears.

Think about it—fear is almost always based on the future. Sometimes we're afraid because we know what's coming in the future. But more commonly, we're afraid of what we don't know about the future. We're afraid of what might happen. For instance, the Gallup organization asked thirteen- to seventeen-year-olds what they were most afraid of. In descending order, the top ten fears of these teens were terrorist attacks, spiders, death/being killed, not succeeding in life/being a failure, war, heights, crime/violence, being alone, the future, and nuclear war.¹

Notice that all these fears are future focused, and all are merely “maybes.” These teens may encounter none of them. Whether the future is just a minute from now (you're waiting on a doctor's diagnosis) or five years from now (you worry

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about having enough money for retirement), fear's home office is the future.

But what is the future to God? To Him the future is now! We live inside time while God, who made it, lives outside it. We know relatively little about the future, while God knows everything about it. All the events in our lives occur in two time frames: past and future. (The present is a continuously fleeing, infinitesimal moment that becomes past even before we can define it.) God, on the other hand, has only one frame of reference: the eternal now, in which He sees and knows everything, including the future.

That's why God is the answer to all our fears. If God is good and loving (and He is), and if God is all-powerful (and He is), and if God has a purpose and a plan that include His children (and He does), and if we are His children (as I hope you are), then there is no reason to fear and every reason to hope, for God is in control of everything.

I know—that's good theology, and you probably believe it. But you still have fears and apprehensions and a hollow place in the pit of your stomach, either sometimes or all the time. The great author Edith Wharton once said that she didn't believe in ghosts, but she was afraid of them. It's one thing to know something with the mind, and another to believe it with the heart.

How do you help a little child face her fear of the darkness? First you appeal to the mind. You turn on the light and show her there's nothing scary in the room. Then you help her attune her heart to what her mind has accepted. This is

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the process of faith, for all of us. We accept that God is in control, and on that basis, we shift our burdens to His perfect shoulders.

But what about our shaky future? Pessimism doesn't work, because it's another form of mental enslavement. Optimism may have no basis in reality. The one way to walk with hope and confidence into an unknown future is to stake everything on the power and goodness and faithfulness of God.

To understand why God is the answer to all our fears, we must understand what the Bible says about fear. And it says a lot. It tells us more than three hundred times not to fear. "Fear not" is its most frequently repeated command. The word *afraid* occurs more than two hundred times, and *fear* more than four hundred. And lest you think our Bible heroes were fearless, more than two hundred individuals in Scripture are said to have been afraid. And not all these were the "bad guys"; many were the main characters—David, Paul, Timothy, and others.

Biblical heroes were regular people who had to learn the same things you and I have to learn—to drive out fear by increasing their knowledge of God, to shift their focus from their present fear to their eternal hope, to replace what they didn't know about the future with what they did know about Him. They had to put away childish things (being afraid of everything) and grow up in their faith and understanding.

I wrote this book because I see fear as a real and present danger in the body of Christ. Many Christians are not living

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lives free of fear, and there can be serious consequences when hope is absent.

Jesus came to “proclaim liberty to the captives,” and I believe that includes those held captive by fear (Luke 4:18). He also says that truth is the key to freedom (John 8:32). And here is the truth: God is good (Psalm 119:68), God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and God has a future filled with hope for His children (Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:28-29). God is a refuge and a fortress, a shield and a defender for those who trust in Him (Psalm 91:2-4). For those reasons, and more . . .

*You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,
Nor of the arrow that flies by day,
Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness,
Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.
A thousand may fall at your side,
And ten thousand at your right hand;
But it shall not come near you.*

PSALM 91:5-7

As you read this book, my prayers are that you will grow in your conviction that God is the answer to all your fears, that as you look to the future you will see nothing except His power and love guarding your every step, and that you will find the truth that sets you free to live the hope-filled life God created you to enjoy.

CHAPTER 1

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM

*Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble
from the wicked when it comes.*

PROVERBS 3:25

When the *Andrea Gail* left Gloucester Harbor in Massachusetts on September 20, 1991, and headed into the North Atlantic, no one could have known that this fishing boat would never be seen again. Only a bit of debris ever turned up, and the six crew members vanished forever.

In his book *The Perfect Storm*, author Sebastian Junger immortalized the fate of the *Andrea Gail*. A film followed, featuring George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg. But these stars, big as they are, played only supporting roles. The real star was the storm itself—a terrifying, relentless oppressor born of fierce wind and mountainous waves.

It was meteorologists who named this cataclysmic tempest

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“the perfect storm.” I might not tend to use the word *perfect* to describe something so terrible, but once you understand the meteorologist’s usage, “perfect storm” makes perfect sense. It is merely a vivid way of saying “worst-case scenario.” In the case of the *Andrea Gail*, it was the simultaneous occurrence of the toughest weather conditions possible.

Three deadly elements came together in October of 1991: a front moving from Canada toward New England; a high pressure system building over Canada’s east coast; and the dying remnants of Hurricane Grace, churning along the eastern seaboard of the United States. Strong weather was coming from three of the four points on the compass, all of it converging on the little *Andrea Gail*.

On their own, warm air, cold air, and moist air are hardly noticeable. But when wind patterns force them together, the result can be lethal. The last radio transmission of Billy Tyne, the captain of the fishing boat, came at 6:00 p.m. on October 28, 1991. He reported his coordinates to the captain of his sister ship, the *Hannah Boden*, saying, “She’s comin’ on, boys, and she’s comin’ on strong.”¹

The popular book and movie brought the term “perfect storm” into common usage, but the concept is as old as humanity. People have always had to deal with the convergence of multiple rough circumstances. So much can go wrong so quickly that we shake our heads and say, “When it rains, it pours.”

We’ve all been there, haven’t we? Your child gets sick, and your car breaks down on the way to the doctor. All the while

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it's pouring rain, and your spouse isn't answering the phone. One or two of these difficulties aren't so bad, but when they arrive together, they can form quite a storm.

As frustrating as such storms can be, much worse can happen. Today, in our faster, more crowded, and more complex world, a few little squalls can quickly become "the perfect storm." When multiple conditions converge and threaten critical areas of our lives, such as finances, relationships, jobs, and health, we question how much more we can endure. Somewhere there's a point at which we reach critical mass. Once there, we wonder whether we will stay afloat or go under like the *Andrea Gail*. Knowing that could happen strikes fear into us.

The fate of the *Andrea Gail* demonstrates two specific kinds of fear that we all experience. The first is that gut-level, adrenaline-drenched fear that the crew felt in the midst of the storm. They were afraid because their lives were on the line. This kind of fear is beneficial; it's a necessary instinct for survival. No doubt the fishermen of the North Atlantic feel a little surge of that fear every time they leave port. One poor decision in the face of threatening weather could mean death. But that doesn't stop these men and women. Reasonable fear is a healthy, normal part of the job description. If they couldn't handle it, they'd be in some other line of work.

But there's another kind of fear that can immobilize us completely: the fear of fear itself. Fear in the midst of the storm is instinctive and beneficial. Fear of a storm that *could*

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happen is not. It's an intrusive emotion that can lead us to a greatly diminished life. The imagined fear becomes so vivid that we no longer distinguish it from reality, and for some of us, that fear becomes so debilitating we can hardly get out of bed in the morning. Though the sky is clear, we're devastated by thoughts of rain. Inside a storm, at least we can look the beast in the eye. But with the fear of fear, the imagined monster is always just on the other side of the door, looming large, even though it doesn't exist.

Everyone must face fear, but for the believer, its fangs are drawn in because we are protected by an overarching umbrella of hope. Nonbelievers must contrive coping mechanisms, all of which are ineffective. Fatalism ("we're all doomed") doesn't work. Existentialism ("we're all clueless") leads nowhere. Optimism ("hey, it's all good") lets us down because it's a lie. It's *not* all good. There are things in life worth fearing.

We need a perspective on fear that takes into account the perfect storms of life but also reassures us that there's a safe harbor within reach. We can't put away all fear, but we need not live as its slaves.

That's where Jesus Christ comes in. As we put our hope in Him, this world and its emotions look different in the light of His goodness, power, and wisdom. Fear is simply a fact we must deal with in a fallen universe, but in the Bible we learn that fear can be managed. In God's Word there is a wealth of guidance on dealing with storms, perfect and imperfect.

The Probability of Storms in Our Lives

When evening had come, [Jesus] said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.

MARK 4:35-37

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all relay the story of a perfect storm in the lives of Jesus' disciples. On that night a quiet boat ride turned into a terrifying brush with death. While Matthew (8:23-27) and Luke (8:22-25) cover the basic facts, Mark's version of the event is the most detailed (4:1, 35-41).

The Gospels record that Jesus was near exhaustion, and His twelve disciples were reeling from the rigorous training He'd been giving them. The crowds had been overwhelming. Sick people, craving His healing touch, had flocked to Jesus on every street. The disciples stood in awe of their Master's miracles and were astonished that He expected them to perform miracles too. Their lives were being turned inside out.

Now Jesus was speaking near the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The crowds began to press in so hard that He was almost shoved back into the water. He climbed into a boat, pushed out a few feet, sat down, and continued teaching (Mark 4:1). By the time He had finished, it was evening. Since Mark devotes almost thirty verses to the event, it must

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have been a significant teaching session, lasting several hours. Jesus must have been exhausted. The crowd, however, was not about to leave. Desperately needing rest, Jesus and the disciples simply remained in the boat and set sail for the eastern shore, where Jesus sought to minister next.

The elements of a perfect storm were gathering. First, Jesus was utterly exhausted (Mark 4:38). Second, the disciples, too, were tired and emotionally befuddled by their extraordinary experiences with Jesus. Third, it was already nighttime—late to be setting out to cross the sea. Fourth, a small flotilla of eager followers was trailing them, meaning that when they landed, rest would remain elusive.

Then there was the sea itself. The Sea of Galilee is like a bowl of water nestled nearly seven hundred feet below sea level. It is both fed and drained by the Jordan River, which enters at the northern end and exits from the southern end. Mountains flank nearly every side, forming valleys and gulches that set the stage for howling winds. When the cool air from the mountains swoops through the valleys and collides with the warm, moist air hovering over the sea, violent storms can erupt in a matter of minutes.

And that is just what happened. “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling” (Mark 4:37). Mark uses a Greek word for *windstorm* that can be translated “furious squall” or “hurricane.” Matthew describes the storm as a “great *seismos*,” or earthquake—as if the sea were being shaken by the winds (Matthew 8:24).

Fatigue. Confusion. Darkness. Tempest. The perfect storm

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had arrived. It was as if all their fears had combined and crystallized. As fishermen, they had a deep, fearful respect for the turbulent water. As men, they had a deep but relatively untested respect for Jesus. But now this Jesus—the One they had left everything to follow—had led them right into the storm. To make matters worse, He had dozed off, having no apparent concern for their safety or the disaster that now seemed inevitable. They must have wondered whether they had taken the right step in following Him. There was a lot they still didn't know about this man. Could He even deliver them from the disaster that now seemed inevitable?

Just as sudden storms are inevitable on the Sea of Galilee, sudden storms can descend upon our lives as well. When this happens, the disciples' predicament becomes ours: How is it possible to place your hope in a God who allows perfect storms to assail us?

The Paradox of Storms in Our Lives

The disciples were following Jesus wherever He went, assisting Him in all His ministries. They were listening to His Word and helping Him preach the Gospel, yet they found themselves being tossed up and down by a storm and in real danger of drowning. The disciples were learning a difficult lesson—one every believer must learn: we can find ourselves in the middle of God's perfect will and in the middle of a perfect storm at the same time!

That day by the Sea of Galilee, God's will couldn't have been

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clearer to the disciples: Jesus had said, “Let’s go!” They didn’t call a meeting to deliberate; they didn’t pray; they didn’t seek counsel from others. God’s will had been right there in front of them, so without hesitation, they got into the boat. And now the thing that loomed right in front of them was death.

This unexpected peril was something new for the disciples. So far, following Jesus hadn’t been overly costly—little more than quitting their jobs and getting a bit of carping and criticism from local religious leaders (Mark 3:22). But they had faced nothing life threatening. In fact, it had been just the opposite; they were close associates of the most popular person in Galilee. They’d been welcomed in small towns as heroes. This movement of God was working, and all systems were go.

Then came the perfect storm. It certainly raised some questions.

Many people believe faith is some kind of insurance against high blood pressure and heartache. *Trust God and you’ll have no worries.* But a great paradox of Christianity is that trusting Christ doesn’t keep the storms away. In fact, sometimes it pushes us into deep and turbulent waters.

Jesus faced a perfect storm when He rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. He knew what He was about to face—unthinkable torture and death—and He dreaded it. In the garden He cried out, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). He was fully aware of the storm He was heading into.

The disciples in their tossing boat weren’t cognizant of

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these underlying spiritual issues. Fear gripped them, pushing aside all concerns about being in the will of God. But they were about to learn a priceless lesson: there is security in the heart of God's will. Storms are not punishment for lack of obedience; oftentimes they are the *result* of obedience! Those men were in that storm because they had jumped in the boat when Jesus said, "Let's go!"

You will follow Jesus into a storm someday. And you will learn that, although it may be overwhelming, it's the safest of all harbors.

The Presence in the Storms of Our Lives

He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

MARK 4:38

Juan Carlos Ortiz is a well-known preacher, evangelist, and author originally from Argentina. He once related a conversation he had with a circus trapeze artist about the security a safety net provides. The performer said yes, the net does the obvious—it keeps performers from being injured should they fall. But it does much more. "Imagine there is no net," he said. "We would be so nervous that we would be more likely to miss and fall. If there was not a net, we would not dare to do some of the things we do. But because there's a net, we dare to make two turns, and once I made three turns—thanks to the net!"

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Ortiz saw an application for Christians: “We have security in God. When we are sure in His arms, we dare to attempt big things for God. We dare to be holy. We dare to be obedient. We dare, because we know the eternal arms of God will hold us if we fall.”²

The disciples had yet to learn the nature of their “net.” If they’d realized the full power and authority Jesus held, they would have laughed and shouted at the wind, “Bring it on!” Facing a storm is exhilarating when we are protected by something even more powerful.

Our degree of fear is a gauge of our degree of faith. When we’ve trusted Jesus and come through the storm, we become more fearless. If we’ve never really done that, the storm will reduce us to quivering jelly, as it did those disciples.

Some people do believe in the power of God, but they’re not sure about His presence. That’s a significant deficiency in one’s faith. *Will He really be there when I’m in a crisis? Does He care about me?* We can believe in a powerful God who can create a universe, but if He is absent when needed, how does that belief make a difference? Isn’t His absence basically the same as if He didn’t exist at all?

This was the crisis the disciples faced. They knew that Jesus was there, but apparently they didn’t realize He was God. This meant they were unaware of God’s presence. Thus, they didn’t know what Jesus could and would do. As I witness the fearful lives of many Christians, I’m convinced that the disciples aren’t the only ones in that boat, so to speak.

John Paton was a nineteenth-century Scottish missionary

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who labored for a lifetime among murderous natives of the New Hebrides Islands. He often faced danger as various tribesmen sought to kill him. He wrote, “Without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my dear Lord and Saviour, nothing else in all the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably.”³

He said that it was in those most dangerous of moments, when he faced the weapons of men, that he saw the face of Christ most clearly.

On one occasion Paton hid within the branches of a tree as the men below searched for him. He heard their murderous threats, yet he knew he was safe in the arms of Jesus. “Alone, yet not alone!” he recalled. “My comfort and joy sprang from the promise, ‘Lo, I am with you always.’”⁴

On the Sea of Galilee, an exhausted Jesus slept on a cushion in the rear of the boat with the waves crashing all about Him. The image is striking. How did the disciples view Him? Apparently, they saw Him as a man much like themselves, even though He possessed the supernatural power to heal the sick and feed the hungry, and—as they would soon find out—the power to calm the wind and the waves.

The Peace in the Storms of Our Lives

*He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea,
“Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was
a great calm.*

MARK 4:39

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The disciples must have wondered how Jesus could possibly nap with the waves crashing and the wind howling. They shook Him, yelling for Him to wake up: “Do You not care that we are perishing?” Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace, be still!’ And the wind ceased and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:38-39). The crisis was at an end. No doubt one could hear the pounding heartbeats of twelve shocked men.

The passage tells us that Jesus rebuked the wind, just as a parent would rebuke an unruly child. He dealt with demons in the same way—He rebuked them (Luke 4:35). And the wind obeyed Him just as demons did. He had power over both the natural and the supernatural.

This enormous display of miraculous power should have quelled any remaining doubts in the minds of the disciples as to who Jesus was. Only God has such authority. The Old Testament tells us that He has power over nature: “He calms the storm, so that its waves are still” (Psalm 107:29; see also Psalm 89:9; 93:4). Before His disciples’ eyes, Jesus demonstrated that He possessed power that could emanate only from God. Apparently they hadn’t grasped this fact until they saw Him halt a storm in its tracks. Some things must be seen to be believed.

During their three years of following Jesus, these men witnessed ever-greater displays of God’s power through Him. They believed, not because they were taught, but because they were shown. The disciples were like newborn spiritual

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babes whose eyes were slowly opening to the true identity of this Man they followed.

God is committed to developing our spiritual sight as well. And He often uses the storms of life to show us that we can put our hope in Him—His power, love, and wisdom.

Joni Eareckson Tada illustrates how drawing on the power and peace of Jesus transforms her life:

“O God,” I often pray in the morning, “God, I cannot do this. I cannot do this thing called quadriplegia. I have no resources for this. I have no strength for this—but you do. You’ve got resources. You’ve got strength. I can’t do quadriplegia, but I can do all things through you as you strengthen me [Phil. 4:13]. I have no smile for this woman who’s going to walk into my bedroom in a moment. She could be having coffee with another friend, but she’s chosen to come here to help me get up. Oh, God, please may I borrow your smile?”⁵

Our loving heavenly Father is kind and patient with us when the storms of life overwhelm us and fill us with anxiety. He is gracious to show us His power even when we are beginning to wonder if He is asleep or absent, even when our cries to Him for help are permeated with doubt. But we can face whatever circumstances await us with courage if we just reflect on God’s faithfulness and place our confidence in His great power and loving purpose for our lives.

The Purpose of Storms in Our Lives

Did Jesus bring about this storm simply so He could calm it and build His disciples' faith? The Bible gives no direct answer, but I'm inclined to say no. He had no need to create new storms to demonstrate His true nature, because this fallen world stirs up more than enough trouble on its own. He builds our faith by using the storms that are already there. So I see no reason to believe that Jesus went to sleep for any other purpose than to catch some much-needed rest. Yet He was quick to use the storm as a teachable moment. The storm brought Him their full attention, and the lesson would never be forgotten.

Since you are a human being, I think I'm safe in saying you have no shortage of storms in your life. As someone has said, we're always in one of three places: heading into a storm, in a storm, or emerging from a storm. Because we live in a fallen world, trouble of some kind is woven into the fabric of life. Until these storms hit, we live with "delusions of adequacy," as someone put it. We think we have it all under control—until suddenly we don't. Storms cut us down to size and cause us to fear what we cannot control.

Although God does not create the storms in our life, He does what Jesus did that night on the Sea of Galilee. He uses the churning seas to demonstrate His power and strengthen our faith in Him.

C. S. Lewis explains it like this:

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God, who has made us, knows what we are and that our happiness lies in Him. Yet we will not seek it in Him as long as He leaves us any other resort where it can even plausibly be looked for. While what we call “our own life” remains agreeable, we will not surrender it to Him. What then can God do in our interests but make “our own life” less agreeable to us, and take away the plausible source of false happiness?⁶

God knows we need Him, and He knows we forget how much we do. Sometimes He allows the storms to rage so they will send us scurrying to Him, as did those disciples in that tossing boat.

David, the psalmist, discovered the value of the storms God allowed him to go through:

*It is good for me that I have been afflicted,
That I may learn Your statutes.*

PSALM 119:71

Jesus allowed the winds to rage in order that His disciples would learn to trust Him. Through the storms of life, our Lord teaches us many precious lessons. He reminds us of our own emptiness and our total dependence on Him. He teaches us to fear God with astonished reverence and not to fear the storms.

The Product of Storms in Our Lives

[Jesus] said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

MARK 4:40-41

Jesus was gentler with His disciples than He was with the wind. While He rebuked the wind, He only asked His disciples two questions: "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" (Mark 4:40). With these questions, Jesus reveals a key spiritual truth: the opposite of faith is unbelief; the opposite of faith is *fear*. Belief breeds confidence, while unbelief breeds fear. Essentially, Jesus was saying, "Why are you afraid? Do you not yet trust God, whose power is present in Me?"

The disciples apparently assumed that Jesus was indifferent to their plight. They cried, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Elijah's suggestion that Baal might have been asleep is precisely the complaint the disciples leveled at Jesus: "You're sleeping while we're drowning! Wake up!"

Maybe there's a specific fear claiming your attention today. Whatever that fear is, it will only be amplified by failure to place our hope in God. He is not sleeping. He is here; He knows every thought in your mind, every feeling in your heart. While you stare with apprehension or even terror at the dark skies, He focuses on the person He is forming you

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to be. He sees those storms as growing pains—part of the formation process. He knows that a storm may be the very thing that awakens you to deep faith in Him.

What really intrigues me about this account is that Jesus replaced their fear with *more fear*! After gaping in awe at the suddenly calm and windless sea, “they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, ‘Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!’” (Mark 4:41). Several Bible translations say, “They were terrified.” They suddenly realized they were in the presence of a power they had never imagined—a power residing in a Person mightier than the violence of a stormy sea.

At this point, the disciples were still learning the extraordinary truth the apostle Paul later expressed in Colossians 1:16: “By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth.” It never entered the disciples’ heads that Jesus actually *created* the Sea of Galilee, that the winds and waters are *His*. The disciples in that boat-shaped classroom were beginning to recognize that Jesus was greater—and more fearsome—than anything or anyone they could imagine.

The disciples’ fear made a critical transition from being self-centered to being Christ-centered. They no longer worried about drowning; now they were in awe of Jesus and felt a new sense of security in Him. Debilitating fears were being replaced with the empowering fear of God, whom they dimly began to realize was present in the Man before them.

Jesus wants us to be overcome with awe and wonder at

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His power so we're never deeply frightened again. If He has to use every storm that tears at our sails, He will do it because He's determined to bring us to maturity.

The Promises for the Storms in Our Lives

Before the disciples set out on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus said, "Let us cross over to the other side" (Mark 4:35). If Jesus named a destination, it was certain they would reach it. Could there be a storm? Certainly. Would it be a comfortable voyage? No assurance of that. The disciples could have worried about seasickness, but they didn't need to worry about drowning. Jesus had told them where they were going.

It's really no different for us. From our point of view, the days ahead are uncertain. We don't know their content or their count. But we know our destination. We've been told that Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-3). The Word of God is filled with such promises, and to grasp them is to have the cure for fear.

God's Word Assures Us of a Safe Landing

Notice what Jesus said to the disciples as they began their journey: "On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, '*Let us cross over to the other side*'" (Mark 4:35, emphasis added). Now consider what the text says about the end of the journey: "Then they came *to the other side* of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes" (Mark 5:1, emphasis added).

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God's Word assures us of a safe landing: we will make it to the other side. There are two kinds of destinations that deserve our attention: temporary destinations and our ultimate destination. God assures us that we will arrive at our ultimate destination—life in His eternal Kingdom. That promise alone should dispel all manner of fear—fear of storms and the fear of fear itself. If God says that those in Christ will be saved, they will be saved.

But are we guaranteed passage through every storm en route to that ultimate destination? No. Think of all the saints who died as martyrs. I find it significant that, once death was certain, many of these heroes of the faith died without fear. They could do so only because they had complete faith in God's assurance of their ultimate destination.

Could you die like that? If your day were today, would you feel the joy of knowing you were going to reach the farther shore? In Christ, death loses all power to terrify.

God's Word Alerts Us to Expect Stormy Seas

I find it illuminating that the apostle James, the half brother of Jesus, used the metaphor of a stormy sea when he talked about trials (James 1:2-8). He says we will encounter storms in this life, and without faith we will be “like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6).

“My brethren,” James writes, “count it all joy *when* you fall into various trials” (verse 2, emphasis added). Note that he doesn't say *if* but *when*. Clear skies are never promised in

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the Bible, though some struggle to embrace that idea. Even Jesus, who lived a perfect life, was given no exemption from storms. Hebrews 5:8 tells us that He was allowed to suffer, and Romans 8:32 explains why, telling us that God “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.” God allowed His Son to suffer so that we might be spared the punishment we’ve earned and go on to enjoy every good gift God gives us.

If Jesus had to suffer, why would we think ourselves exempt? After all, as He explained, “a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master” (Matthew 10:24). Then He told them not to fear the storms that inevitably would assail them (verse 26).

Jesus gives us the key to surviving storms in His story about two houses: one built on the sand, the other on solid rock. The sand represents the shallow, shifting, and unreliable values of worldly culture. The rock represents the unshakable truth of God (Matthew 7:24-27). As the storm rages, the first house quickly topples into the sand and washes out to sea. The other stands firm, withstanding the force of the most violent winds. In decades of ministry, I have often seen the truth of this parable vividly demonstrated. People who place their hope in God withstand every storm because they have built their lives on the only foundation that cannot be moved.

God's Word Announces That the Savior Is on Board

The disciples were too inexperienced with Jesus to have a faith devoid of fear. Perhaps you're the same way. You identify

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with Christ, but you draw no assurance as the clouds roll in. When the sky darkens, you might wonder whether you should step into the boat with Jesus or stay ashore in hopes of avoiding the storm. The problem with that choice is that it's a false one. You can run, but you cannot hide. The storms will find you. You don't get to decide whether the rain is coming; you only get to decide whether to carry an umbrella.

"But He is sleeping," you say. "He doesn't care." Don't let His seeming silence lead you to conclude that He isn't with you. He says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). As He told His disciples, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Those are promises, and He has yet to break a promise. That He will be with you is the most certain fact of your life. What's uncertain is your grasp of that fact—your ability to trust and to build your house upon that truth. It's the only storm-proof foundation in existence.

Adoniram Judson was America's first foreign missionary. He devoted his life to God's service, and yet he lost his wife and then, three months later, their infant daughter, Maria. Judson was overcome with grief. He had been away, doing his Father's business, during his wife's illness, and he found it nearly impossible to forgive himself. He wrote, "God is to me the great Unknown. I believe in him but I find him not."⁷

In spite of this anguished expression of aloneness, Judson didn't lose his faith. Sometimes the rains pound hard enough to drown out all other voices, and we struggle to hear Christ calming the storm. But that doesn't mean He isn't calming it.

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The storms pass, and we hear the voice of God once again—
this time through a new wisdom tempered by our struggles.
And we realize that He was there all the time.

*God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear,
Even though the earth be removed,
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of
the sea;
Though its waters roar and be troubled,
Though the mountains shake with its swelling.*

PSALM 46:1-3

God's Word Affirms That Faith Drives Out Fear

Charles Spurgeon uses two biblical examples to show how one's faith can grow to be stronger and more complete. The first is David, who says, "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You" (Psalm 56:3). The second example is Isaiah, who says, "I will trust and not be afraid" (Isaiah 12:2).

Charles Spurgeon compares the faith of these two men to medicines, with Isaiah's being the stronger brand. He tells about a man who got the chills but gave thanks for the prescription that helped him through them. A neighbor said, "Thankful for that? I have something that would keep you from getting the chills in the first place!" If you have a faith that helps you deal with fear, said Spurgeon, good

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for you. But why not go after a higher-grade faith that is fear resistant?⁸

When the disciples stepped into the boat with Jesus, they did not even have the first kind of faith. They didn't put their hope in Jesus, so their fear escalated to sheer terror. When Jesus awoke and calmed the storm, the dawning realization of who He really was ratcheted their faith to a new level. Later we learn that they became utterly fearless, proclaiming the truth of the Kingdom in the face of all kinds of storms. Had they possessed mature faith that day in the boat, they could have curled up and napped with Jesus with no regard for the storm raging about them.

No matter what your trouble is, you can call on God in the midst of it, and He will calm the storm. But deep is the joy of the one who calls on God *before* the storm, for he will find that his faith drives out all fear.