

“Faith to Tackle the Storms”

Major Nancy Halverson
IM Division

It was 4:31 a.m. on January 17, 1994 when the scariest “storm” of my life jolted us awake. It was an earthquake that caused a lot of damage throughout Southern California, and a lot of damage to our sense of security. As we felt the shaking and heard the groaning of the house, for a moment, I was scared we weren’t going to survive. For days we felt the effects of that earthquake with numerous aftershocks, it was a scary time that affected us emotionally and mentally. Luckily, the physical cleanup at the house was not too hard for us, but the emotions and fear left behind was harder to sweep away. We had to turn to our faith in God to walk us through the aftereffects of the “storm”.

Storms, trials, struggles, are a part of life that we all experience. Do you hold onto your faith through them? Do they make your faith stronger for the next storm? Are you walking through a storm right now where you need to put your faith into action?

As a Christian God is deeply invested in your spiritual growth. He uses the storms of life to wean you from dependence on yourself. He’ll intentionally put you in situations where you need to trust Him more fully.

Consider three passages from Matthew as you consider how God is trying to build your faith through the storms of life.

1. Faith that Follows where Jesus leads

As we grow up, the best way we learn is by following the example of someone else. In many cases that is our parents. When we learned how to tie our shoes, or cross the street safely or to cook, we likely didn’t do it on our own, but followed closely as they showed us what to do. In this text the disciples are learning and growing in their faith by following where Jesus leads. They followed Jesus as he led for three years, but in this instance, it was into a storm.

READ: Matthew 8:23-27

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” 26 He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

Jesus led the disciples onto the boat. At this point they believed in Him, and they obviously trusted him to lead them, otherwise they would not have followed. It is one thing to believe in something, it’s another to trust and even more to obey. We need all these to follow Christ. We must be willing to trust and obey Christ as Lord of all things in our lives. Our faith is built up when we follow where Jesus leads no matter where that

takes us. Sometimes it is into a storm, but our faith tells us that Jesus is there with us in it. In this passage Jesus was asleep on the boat. This is an example that we can live by.

Psalm 4:8 reminds us "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety."

Is there somewhere right now you're afraid to follow Jesus because it might be into a storm?

2. Faith that obeys when Jesus tells you to go

The beginning of our faith journey is like learning to walk as a baby. We depend a lot on our parents to help us, pick us up and keep encouraging us to try again. When we've been walking in our faith for a little while we become like teenagers. As a teenager, sometimes we just need to listen to what we are told to do because it's what's best for us. Now we look at a time after the disciples have been walking with Jesus for a while and He sends them out without Him.

READ: Matthew 14:22-33

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Jesus MADE the disciples get into the boat without Him. He knowingly and purposely sent them into the storm, it was no accident. They could have refused but instead they obeyed the word of the Lord. During this storm they did not have the luxury of waking Jesus to help them because he wasn't there. He let them struggle in the storm for hours in their own strength before he came to them on the water. When he showed up, he did not explain anything, he just offered his presence in the storm. Here he showed them his power over creation and control over chaos not just from within the boat but outside the boat as well.

When they realize that it was Jesus, Peter makes a bold move and asks to meet Jesus in the tumult. Jesus tells him to come but doesn't calm the storm for Peter. In faith and obedience Peter walks on the water, but then he becomes scared by the wind. He takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to sink. Jesus asks Peter why he doubted, He does not question Peter's faith, for he stepped out of the boat and obeyed Jesus' words.

Here, Jesus is stretching and growing Peter's faith through his obedience. The disciples are slowly learning to trust when Jesus is with them in the boat AND now when they are unaware of his presence in the storm. This story holds the promise that Jesus comes to us during the storm and reminds us we need not be afraid because He is present with us. We need only to trust and obey.

This is the story of every Christian. Our story too, as we move back and forth between doubt and faith, sometimes focused on the storm and sometimes focused on Jesus.

[Psalm 56:3 When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.](#)

In what situation in your life do you need to put your faith to work and step out in obedience?

3. Faith that is Tested

How do we know when we've truly learned something and grown in our knowledge of a subject? In school we had tests to determine whether we were learning and growing in knowledge. Sometimes we did well and sometimes we did not. Do you recall a time when you did not pass a test?

So, too, as we grow in our faith, we will be tested in many circumstances. The disciples faced many kinds of tests of their faith during their time with Jesus. As they're nearing the end with Jesus, they will face one of the biggest tests of all.

[READ: Matthew 26:31-35](#)

[³¹ Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:](#)

["I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."^{\[a\]}](#)

[³² But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." ³³ Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." ³⁴ "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." ³⁵ But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.](#)

The disciples had been growing in their faith as they travelled with and served alongside Jesus. Peter's walk of faith is shown throughout the gospels as he tries, learns, and fails. In this Scripture portion we see his confidence in himself, but he seems to forget that on his own he is weak. We, too, must learn to trust God's strength for help in every situation. Our faith is consistently tested as we weather the storms of life. We can be confident only when we look to Him for our strength.

God allows testing because He knows we need trials to deepen our roots and our relationship with Him. If things are easy, we are quite content to just drift along. We go to church, pick up our Bible now and again, and hang out with others who call themselves Christians. We consider ourselves strong, mature, and a prize among God's saints. However, our roots are actually shallow. Unless we are tested, they will remain shallow. If you talk to people who have been through great trials, they will often tell you

how much their faith grew during that time. When they were at their weakest, they had to trust most fully. And that is when they found the Lord to be most faithful.

Recently, I experienced a time where my faith was tested. May of 2020 my husband and I were told that we would be moving to a new appointment. It was in the beginning of Covid, in the height of uncertainty and fear. I asked God over and over to change this situation. When moves were announced nothing had changed, so we began preparing to move, yet hoping that God would change the outcome. I had to either accept that God wanted me to walk in obedience and faith on the path that lay ahead of me or step out of that path toward something else. It was a decision we struggled with and though we accepted that path we continued to struggle with the decision. I've felt like a caterpillar during these past two years. I'm in the cocoon where I'm supposed to be but struggling with the process before turning into a butterfly. I feel like I've been battered a bit by this storm, but God continues to work in my life as we go through it. He has shown His presence in it and I'm thankful because I couldn't do it without Him.

Peter went through a serious testing as Jesus was taken away. He had been so confident that he would never desert Jesus but when the time came, he gave in to fear and denied the Lord. Peter wasn't the only one who faltered that night. The other disciples ran away. This test of faith was a hard one, but it brought the disciples to even greater faith that would lead them to do great things for the building of God's kingdom and the church. Even when we fail, God is there to restore us when we come back to him. As long as we don't turn our backs completely, if we repent, God will restore us and our faith will grow stronger through the storm.

Song #498 in the Salvation Army songbook talks about different aspects of faith. Verse 4 says:

"The faith that cannot fail,
That makes salvation sure,
Anchored within the heavenly veil,
The faith that will endure."

Can you think of a time when your faith was tested? How did you hold up, did you fail or come through it stronger?

No matter what storms you might be going through, hold fast to your faith that cannot fail. It is a faith that will endure and will be strengthened by the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. With God, your faith can tackle any storm, nothing is impossible with Him.