

Stormy Seas

Understanding
God in the
Midst of Life's
Tempests

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Chapter 1

A Disrupted Journey

Many people gathered around Jesus to hear Him speak by the Sea of Galilee. In fact, so many had come that He waded into the water, climbed into a nearby boat, and continued to teach them from the boat, using it as a platform so that all could hear and see Him.

He taught them many things, speaking in parables and using stories and allegories to help them grasp precious truths. For days, people had followed Him, clamored around Him, and sought Him wherever He went. He had taught, instructed, and encouraged, but now it was time to rest. He said to His disciples, “Let us cross over to the other side of the lake” (Luke 8:22). They sent the people away and entered the boat, setting sail for the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

The Sea of Galilee spread out before them, vast and beautiful. Grebes floated in the shallows, turning their bottoms up as they fed on underwater algae. Armenian gulls flew over the sea; their white bodies glinted in the sunlight. Overhead, little swifts twirled and swooped after insects in the air. The water lapped gently against the sides of the boat. It rocked in peaceful rhythm. Exhausted, Jesus fell asleep in the back of the boat. They sailed along peacefully, and the disciples enjoyed the rest and solitude.

His life of ministry

Jesus’ days were busy. Just a few days prior, He had healed a leper. The man, plagued with the contagious malady, had run to Jesus,

kneeling before Him. Everyone had recoiled in terror from the man, lest they come in contact with him and be defiled. But Jesus did not run. He had looked at the man with compassion.

“If You are willing, You can make me clean,” the leper had cried.

Jesus had reached out and touched him. “I am willing; be cleansed.” And immediately the man was healed (Matthew 8:2, 3). There was celebration and joy.

And later in Capernaum, a centurion’s servant had been healed of palsy. Then, in Peter’s house, Jesus had healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever. By the end of the day, people had begun bringing the sick and the demon-possessed to Him, and He healed them all (Matthew 8:5–17).

In spite of His miracles and the thoughtful tenderness He showed to everyone, the majority of the religious rulers continued to reject Him as a prophet and the Messiah. They continually sought occasions to argue with and harass Him. They even accused Jesus of being evil (Mark 3:20–30). Nevertheless, Jesus continued to go about the work of His heavenly Father, bringing hope, freedom, and joy to people wherever He went.

The windstorm

Suddenly, the boat in which Jesus and His disciples were traveling jerked from a violent gust of wind, interrupting the peaceful sailing. An explosive squall fell upon the Sea of Galilee. It agitated the water into a fury of battering waves—so much so, that the boat began filling with water. The disciples, buffeted and assailed by the wind and waves, fought to rid the boat of incoming water. The boat reeled and dipped in the angry sea as they scooped up the water with cupped hands, garments, or whatever else they could find. Every time they scooped water out, it seemed that another wave of water poured into the boat. It appeared to fill faster than they could empty it, and every attempt seemed futile. They thought fearfully, *We might actually sink!*

“Awaken Jesus!” one of them yelled.

“Doesn’t He care?” another one said.

“Master, Master!” A disciple tapped at Jesus’ sleeping form. “We are perishing! Do you not care?”

Jesus awoke. He saw the great storm violently raging around them, waves splattered in His face, and He saw that the disciples were terrified. He saw the water in the boat sloshing and splashing back and forth. He arose. “Peace!” His voice thundered with authority. “Be still!” Immediately, the wind ceased. The great storm that had terrified the disciples had suddenly turned into “a great calm” (Mark 4:39).

Pause. Take in the scene. Listen to the gentle lapping of the water against the boat, with its familiar creaking, and the gentle, rhythmic thump of the ropes on the side of the boat. The wind-torn sails hang quietly, resting. The white-knuckled grip of every man slowly relaxes. Their breaths release.

Jesus fulfilled prophecy by stilling the storm: “He hushed the storm to a gentle whisper, so that the waves of the sea were still” (Psalm 107:29, AMP). “You rule the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them” (Psalm 89:9, AMP).

Jesus’ disciples then stared at Him in awe, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (Mark 4:41, AMP).

What would it have been like to experience a great storm turn abruptly into a great calm, as the Bible describes? The closest I have ever gotten to this type of experience was when I decided one day to get some work done in my garden. As I was outside working, suddenly, the wind rushed upon me. I had seen the storm coming but did not think it would blow in that fast.

The wind pushed and pulled on my clothing. It whipped up the dirt and dried leaves in my winter-worn garden. The pine trees at the edge of the meadow whirled and waved in the unseen air currents. I rushed into the house and shut the door behind me. Holding my breath, I paused in the silence of the house. It was still. It was quiet. It was calm. It was safe.

In the tumultuous experience of Jesus and His disciples on the Sea of Galilee, there are rich lessons for us to dwell upon. Let us consider some of them.

Did Jesus promise smooth sailing across the lake? No.

Jesus never promised His disciples complete calm and safety all the way across the lake. He never said, “Let us cross to the other side of the lake with no problems or struggles or storms.” He simply gave them a directive. He pointed them across the lake. He told them of their final destination.

During this storm, the wind-torn and wave-washed disciples turned to Jesus. What did they ask Him? The disciples shouted at Jesus over the raging wind and crashing waves: “Do You not care that we are perishing?” (verse 38).

Was this true? Did Jesus not care whether they perished? Yes, He did care! Oftentimes, when we face difficulties, our first reaction is to ask God, “Do You not care about me? Where are You? Do You not see the trial I am going through?”

Where was Jesus during this storm? He was in the boat *with* them. He was weathering the storm *with* them, but His relationship to the storm was very different from theirs. (We will look more closely at His reaction in later chapters.)

What did Jesus ask them? “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” (verse 40).

Do His questions shock you? They confused me at first because they sounded as though Jesus was being insensitive. I had to spend some time praying and thoughtfully reflecting on what He meant before I came to understand what He was *really* getting at. I concluded that Jesus understood that a situation like they were in would definitely bring out the *feeling* of fear. Fear is a natural human response when we are faced with a seeming life-or-death scenario.

Feeling fearful in a circumstance like the one the disciples faced in the storm is natural. So I think that Jesus’ question was aimed at helping them understand why they let fear consume them to the point of thinking that He did not care whether they lived or died. This is the danger of entertaining fear and dwelling in its dark perceptions; it can override the truth. The Bible warns us against this “spirit of fear” in 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

Is the “spirit of fear” from God? No. The spirit of fear locks us into thinking of all the worst possible outcomes. It keeps us up at night, pacing the floor. It paralyzes us. It twists the truth and cripples us. It is this kind of fear that God tells us not to let loose in our minds, because this fear comes from Satan, and he is trying to throw us off balance and keep us from moving forward in faith.

Faith over fear

Look at what Jesus told the disciples before they set sail. Where did He say they were going? “He said to them, ‘Let us cross over to the other side of the lake.’ And they launched out” (Luke 8:22). So with no apparent worries about their journey, they set sail to the other side of the lake. Notice that Jesus did not say they would “attempt to make it.” He said, “We *are* going to the other side.” His words were a sure command of confidence.

God has given us every reason to trust Him. If we feel like we lack evidence for that trust in our own lives, the Bible is jam-packed with real-life accounts of His saving the day and making a way where there seemed to be no way. There is far too much evidence throughout the Bible of God’s providential intervention in dangerous situations for us to lose faith when we face danger.

The very thing that distorted the disciples’ perceptions of Jesus’ love and care was the spirit of fear working overtime to corrupt their faith. It is the same spirit of fear that works in our minds to corrupt our faith and distort our perception of God’s love and care for us.

Jesus was more reliable and trustworthy than any other person the disciples had ever met. His wisdom and authority extended past anything they had ever heard or seen. He had never let them down or given them a reason to doubt or distrust Him. And on that day, Jesus had told them *ahead of time* exactly where they were going, and they had ample reason based on their past experience with Jesus to completely trust that they would safely end up at their destination—*no matter what might happen in between*. Even though it appeared to the disciples that their boat *could* sink, *they should have known it would not* because Jesus had promised they

would surely arrive at their destination.

In the middle of this violent windstorm, they lost sight of God's ability to follow through with His divine plan for their lives. God's Word, His foresight, His vision, and His initiative for them *was like a promise that would prevail no matter how dire their situation or how dangerous their circumstances might have seemed during the journey.* Hence, Jesus' question: "Why do *you* fear? Why do *you* have so little faith? Because what I have promised, that I will surely fulfill."

Before we tumble into lamenting over our wobbly faith, especially in trying circumstances, it is important to understand that we have an enemy seeking to destroy our faith, and his tactics are at work on every level in our lives. "Be sober [well balanced and self-disciplined], be alert and cautious at all times. That enemy of yours, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion [fiercely hungry], seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8, AMP).

The devil is not a strange-looking creature with a pitchfork and hooves for feet, but a powerful, beautiful angel fallen from heaven. The Bible explains that "war broke out in heaven" as one of the highest angels became corrupt in his thinking, envious of God, and increasingly selfish (Revelation 12:7). Eventually, "the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (verse 9). Further, the Bible warns us that "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

His very first attack on the innocent couple in the Garden of Eden was to introduce a twisted insinuation, a clever deception, and a careful manipulation of the facts that God had laid out to Adam and Eve. It was Satan's plan to instill doubt in God's word and guidance, and that is still one of his highest aims today.

Sometimes God's plan is vivid in our minds, and we launch forth, following His guidance, aiming in the right direction, with every intention of following through to the other side of the lake, so to speak, like Jesus has told us to do. But as we set sail, unexpected trouble comes down upon us, and it greatly disrupts our journey.

Suddenly, our intent to make it to the other side of the lake turns into simply trying to hang on and bail the water from the boat. The struggle consumes our minds. No longer can we see with the eyes of faith the intended destination and the divine plan. And no longer do we trust that God can actually bring us safely into the harbor.

Notice how Satan works on our minds: in the midst of a sudden, stormy trouble, he uses fear and confusion to cause us to doubt God's Word and guidance. Driven by the spirit of fear, doubt starts to overrule our faith.

Oftentimes, our vision of the journey of our lives is a vision of smooth sailing, silent waters, and beautiful sunsets. And when that vision is turned upside down, we tend to doubt God's Word, His provision, His love, and His care for us. Suffering is never on our agenda, so we tend to wonder how it could possibly be part of God's plan for us!

Finding ourselves in a great storm, where it appears that we might perish, does not mean that God does not care about us or love us. It is easy to trust God when the waters are calm, but God wants us to learn to trust Him *in the storm*.