

## **The Storm Clouds Gather**

A defect in the baby's heart?

*No. Not possible.*

Karen sat beside her husband, John, in the doctor's office. They'd come in that morning for a routine five-month ultrasound, both excited to see the fuzzy black-and-white photos of their first child.

She'd expected to hear "everything looks good." Instead, the doctor spoke in a serious but sympathetic tone about "a combination of several other markers" and "the high chance of a life-limiting condition."

*How could God allow this to happen?*

One week later, Karen and John met with the fetal heart team at the children's hospital where Karen worked as a nurse. Those doctors confirmed the ultrasound results, then delivered more devastating news: their daughter's life might not be measured in years but in hours. Maybe minutes.

Each week became a cycle of grieving, hoping, praying, accepting, and grieving again. "Knowing I could lose her hurt in a place I'd never felt pain before," Karen said. "I didn't ask God for much. I just prayed that He would have mercy on us ... even though I didn't know what mercy looked like in our situation."

### **What Is a Storm?**

Storms come, often with gale-force turmoil and towering waves of grief. A doctor delivers a life-changing diagnosis. A spouse walks away from a marriage. A car accident takes the life of a loved one. A business spirals into bankruptcy.

*A storm is any hardship God allows to sweep through our life that is outside our control and requires total dependence on Jesus.* The devastating results can upend our emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Yet the God who creates the gentle breeze on a sun-drenched summer day also gives life to the fierce storm that *splinters the cedars ... and strips the forest bare* (Psalm 29:5, 9).

### **Why Does God Permit Storms?**

Hurricanes and other violent storms are part of the ecological balance of the earth's weather. For example, they can help distribute the earth's heat and stabilize climates. They can also benefit ecosystems by enriching soils with fresh nutrients. Similarly, our heavenly Father has designed storms for our lives to provide balance for our faith journey and to promote our spiritual growth.

Many Bible verses proclaim that God is the Lord of fair and foul weather. The prophet Nahum observed, *The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet* (Nahum 1:3). The psalmist wrote, *Praise the Lord from the earth, You great sea creatures and all the depths; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word* (Psalm 148:7–8).

These passages prove that storms aren't random acts of an indifferent God. His way is in them; they fulfill His word. For example, they may reveal some areas of our lives that aren't under the Holy Spirit's control. Or they may show us where our perspective is self-centered rather than God-centered. Thankfully, God's love, grace, and power will also be manifested in these storms, giving us a greater view of God and of His purpose for our lives.

### **The Goals of This Study**

The lessons we can learn in life's storms are clearly seen in the storms Jesus led His disciples into and through. The lessons were progressive—a part of God's plan to mature their faith and equip them for ministry.

Our study of the first storm the disciples experienced is divided into six major topics:<sup>1</sup>

1. **Preparation:** How does God prepare us today for tomorrow's storms?
2. **Foundation:** How can Jesus be our solid support in the midst of the storm? In what ways does God's Word provide a foundation that enables us to persevere through trials?
3. **Manifestation:** What do storms reveal about Jesus, about us, and about our Enemy, the devil?
4. **Expectation:** What four responses did Jesus expect from the twelve disciples in their storms? What does He expect from us?
5. **Education:** What can we learn about God, the devil, and ourselves during adversity? What falsehoods about God, the devil, and ourselves might we need to discard?
6. **Ministry:** How can God use our hardships to minister to others after the storm ends?

Each lesson includes five daily readings, followed by a Scripture passage to study and a few application questions. Two additional, optional study questions are provided for those who'd like to dig deeper into the daily topic. Facilitators of group studies may want to use some of these additional questions in weekly discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> A more extensive study of both storms that Jesus led His disciples through can be found in *The Journey Series, Book One and Book Two*. Information about these books is provided at the end of this study.

The authors share these stories, insights, and principles with you as fellow Christians. We haven't arrived on the shores of a storm-free spiritual paradise. Yes, we've passed safely through some turbulent waters, but dark clouds still appear on the horizon of our lives—more frequently than we anticipate.

Storms can be terrifying. They can challenge everything we believe about ourselves and about God. But with Jesus as our pilot and the Holy Spirit as our companion, storms can be weathered. No matter how choppy the waters, Jesus's peace can steady us, and His love can sustain us. We can emerge from a storm with a heart full of hope.

**PREPARATION**

**God is always preparing us today  
for tomorrow's storms.**

## **Lesson One: Day One Misconceptions about Storms**

Unbearable back pain sent Connie to the doctor's office. X-rays revealed a large kidney stone that could only be removed by cutting into the kidney.

Twenty-four years old and 2,600 hundred miles from parents, Connie and her husband, Truman, were shocked. In full-time pastoral ministry at a mission in Spokane, Washington, they'd been sailing along smoothly, excited about their walk with God and how He was working through their lives.

Then the storm hit.

With no medical insurance, they had no way to pay for the bills that would come. "I prayed for God to heal Connie," Truman said. "I wanted a miracle."

"I knew God could do it," he said, "but as I walked the halls of the hospital during her surgery, I questioned Him. I asked, 'Lord, if we are serving You, why is this bad thing happening to us?'"

### **Stone or Bread?**

No matter how long we've been Christians or how thoroughly we're involved in ministry, storms have a way of exposing areas where our trust in God needs to be strengthened.

When Truman wondered about the "bad thing" of Connie's surgery, God reminded him of something Jesus said:

*"Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:9–11)*

With that assurance firmly fixed in his mind, Truman said, "My worry was replaced with peace; my doubt replaced with faith, and I had a deep assurance that Connie would be fine. God would take care of all our needs."

Some things—such as major surgery and piles of medical bills—may look like stones, feel like stones, and weigh us down like stones. But with one bite of faith, we discover that the "stone" is "bread" from a loving Father who gives good things to His children.

### **God Meant It for Good**

Perhaps more than any other biblical character, Joseph learned the lesson of stones and bread. God spoke to Joseph in a dream and revealed that he would become a leader and a

blessing to his family. Sounds wonderful, right? Joseph thought so. But when he told his brothers and father the amazing news, they weren't as thrilled as he had hoped. In fact, his older brothers hated him even more and his father rebuked him (Genesis 37:1–11).

If you'd been Joseph, would you have expected the path to leadership and blessing to include the following?

- Thrown into a pit (Genesis 37:24)
- Sold into slavery (Genesis 37:28)
- Framed for a crime (Genesis 39:14)
- Thrown into prison (Genesis 39:20)
- Forgotten by the butler (Genesis 40:23)

And yet during those hardships, the Bible reveals these truths about Joseph's life:

- Prospered under Potiphar (Genesis 39:2)
- Prospered under the prison warden (Genesis 39:20–21)
- Encouraged his fellow prisoners (Genesis 40:4, 9–13)
- Exalted to a high position in Pharaoh's court (Genesis 41:39–44)
- Saved the lives of his father and brothers (Genesis 45:5–8)

Joseph was seventeen years old when he was thrown into the pit; he was thirty when Pharaoh put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt (Genesis 37:2; Genesis 41:46). Thirteen years is a long storm! But when Joseph looked back on his hardships, he said to his brothers, *"You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive"* (Genesis 50:20).

Joseph faced an uncontrollable set of horrific circumstances, yet he didn't worry, complain, or panic. The circumstances humbled Joseph, yet he remained confident God was in control, and he became a blessing to those around him—Potiphar, the prison warden, the butler and the baker, Pharaoh, the people of Egypt, and, eventually, his older brothers who'd initiated Joseph's troubles in the first place.

How did Joseph maintain a godly attitude? He put his trust in God. Likewise, the better we get to know God and His nature, the better we'll handle storms too. Knowing God doesn't simply mean gathering knowledge about Him. It also refers to the illumination we gain from God's Word as we allow the Holy Spirit to reveal its truth to us and lead us into an intimate relationship with Jesus.

When Jesus leads us into a storm, He intends for it to bring about good. Consider what the apostle Peter wrote to first-century Christians who endured much hardship: *But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you* (1 Peter 5:10).

And what about Connie and Truman? Connie came through surgery fine; a church in Louisiana took a love offering for them that covered the cost of the medical bills. And their faith grew.

**Life Lesson: Storms are not “stones”—something evil sent by an uncaring God. Storms are “bread” from a loving Father who intends to bring about good in our lives.**



### **Storm Preparation**

#### **Study God's Word**

Read Genesis 45:4–11 and 2 Corinthians 4:8–18.

1. How is Paul's perspective on hardship similar to Joseph's?
2. What do you think it means to “manifest the life of Jesus” in our bodies?

#### **Apply God's Word**

Consider the following misconceptions about storms:

- a. If I sail with Jesus, He won't allow storms to touch my life.
  - b. If I'm following Jesus, there won't be many storms.
  - c. It's the devil, not God, who sends storms.
  - d. Storms are accidental. They have no relationship to God's sovereign work in my life.
1. Have you ever allowed yourself to embrace one or more of those ideas? What prompted you to do so?
  2. Change the four misconceptions into true statements. Here's an example. If I sail with Jesus, storms will touch my life, but He will help me get through them.
  3. Rewrite 2 Corinthians 4:16 in your own words, applying it to a specific problem you're facing. For example: I'm not going to lose heart. Even though I lost my job, I'm going to trust that God can bring good out of my current unemployment in a way that far exceeds my expectations.

**Prayer**

Lord, whatever it takes, I want to go on with You. I want to mature in my love for You and learn every lesson You want to teach me in the storms of life.

**Optional Study Questions**

1. Read all three gospel accounts of the first storm in the following passages and write down a few more truths about storms: Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25.
2. Read Joseph's story in Genesis 37, 39–45. List each time a “stone” becomes “bread.” Think about a past incident in your life. Can you see how it was bread rather than a stone?

**Notes**

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## **Lesson One: Day Two** **Jesus Prepares Us for the Storm**

“Do you feel like God has abandoned you?”

“No. I know he loves me.” Wad of tissues in hand, Denise looked at David, the Christian counselor who sat across from her. “Even in this.”

David had opened the session by saying, “Tell me your story.” So she did.

Denise and David talked for over two hours about her husband's inexplicable behavior, her daughter's bewilderment, her son's rage, and her frantic phone call for an appointment.

When David asked about her background, she sketched a picture of her Christian upbringing, her love for God and His Word.

“God's been preparing you for this trial your whole life,” he said. “He's going to see you through it.”

Denise rubbed her thumb against the cold surface of her wedding band. Oh, how she wanted to believe him.

### **Jesus Prepares Us**

“Jesus Loves Me” might've been one of the first songs you sang as a child. Or maybe you didn't hear about His love until you were an adult. Either way, His love for you began in eternity past and will continue forever. And because He loves you, He's committed to your eternal well-being, even if that journey takes you through some violent storms.

Let's see how that principle played out in the lives of the disciples:

*Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. ... Now when he got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” But He said to them, “Why are you so fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” (Matthew 8:18, 23–27)*

Do you think it strange that Jesus sent His disciples into a furious storm that nearly sank the boat? They had committed to follow Jesus wherever He led them, yet He sent them into danger. Didn't He care about their fear or safety?

And after He calmed the storm, instead of comforting the disciples, Jesus asked, “*Where is your faith?*” (Luke 8:25). Why was He so disappointed in them?

### **What Jesus Expects**

When Jesus called the Twelve to be disciples, He didn't give them a detailed outline of where, when, how, and why. Mark 3:14 says, *Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him*—follow, watch, listen, and learn from Him.

As they followed Him, He prepared them for what lay ahead. Every word He said, every person He ministered to, and every demonstration of His character were all preparation for the first storm.

Consider Jesus's encounter with the leper in Matthew 8:1–3:

*When [Jesus] had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

What faith lessons could the disciples have learned from the leper's example? Do you think they noticed his confidence in Jesus's power? How could that have helped them in the ensuing storm?

We can be equally confident that God is preparing us today for tomorrow's storm. In fact, it would be completely out of character for Him to allow His beloved children to enter a storm without preparation.

When David, the Christian counselor, said God had prepared Denise for a marital crisis, he referred to the biblical foundation her parents had laid and she'd built upon. God had been strengthening and securing Denise's faith for decades. As difficult as the storm was, her foundational faith in God and His love for her helped her weather the storm. God hadn't sent her into the storm unprepared.

You also can be sure that your loving heavenly Father is involved in the events, circumstances, and people of your today in preparation for your tomorrow. Consider these factors:

- What is God teaching you in your private devotional time with Him?
- What are you learning as you minister in your church?
- What biblical insights are you gaining as you listen to sermons, read Christian books, and participate in small-group Bible studies?
- What is going on at your workplace or within your family?

Similar to the disciples' experiences, the people, places, and events God brought into our lives before our past storms prepared us for those difficult times. Unfortunately, like the

disciples, many of us yield to fear and doubt in a storm because we didn't learn what Jesus wanted to teach us in those preparation lessons.

When we accepted God's gift of salvation, we were enrolled in Jesus's School of Discipleship. Let's be good students. Let's pay close attention to what happens today so we'll be prepared for tomorrow.

**Life Lesson: God is preparing you today, on land and in the light, for what you need in the storm in the night on the troubled sea.**



### **Storm Preparation**

#### **Study God's Word**

Read Matthew 8:1–3, 5–13, 14–17, and 23–27.

1. How did the people in these verses demonstrate faith in Jesus?
2. What do you learn from Jesus's response to their faith? Why is faith so important to Jesus?
3. What might the disciples have done differently in the storm if they'd pay closer attention to Jesus's encounter with the leper, the centurion, Peter's mother-in-law, and the others He healed?

#### **Apply God's Word**

1. With whom do you identify most—the leper, the centurion, or the disciples? Why?
2. Think about a past storm. How did God use people, places, events, and biblical teaching to prepare you for that storm?
3. If you feel you failed to learn the lessons God had for you in a past storm, do you think you'll have to take that test again? Why or why not?

**Prayer**

Lord Jesus, I want to be prepared for the storms ahead. Open my eyes to see how You're preparing me today for tomorrow's storms. Open my heart to Your teaching.

**Optional Study Questions**

1. Read Matthew 6:25–34. What principles in this passage would have helped the disciples prepare for the first storm? How can those same principles help us?
  
2. Read Genesis 12:10–20 and Genesis 20:1–17. In what ways could the Genesis 12 experience have prepared Abraham and Sarah for the Genesis 20 experience?

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## **Lesson One: Day Three**

### **Jesus, the Perfect Shepherd**

“Dad, a friend of Brenda’s asked me out on a date Saturday night. Can I go?”

Denise’s dad lowered the newspaper he’d been reading. “Is he a Christian?”

“I don’t know,” she said, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. “He came with Brenda’s boyfriend to the basketball game tonight. He seems like a nice guy.”

She studied her dad’s face. “Come on, Dad. It’s just one date.”

The corner of his mouth curved into a half smile. “Doesn’t the youth group still meet at Brenda’s house on Saturday nights?”

“Yeah.” *Oh, please don’t say what I think you’re going to say.*

“Then tell this guy you’ll meet him there. That’ll show whether he’s interested in spiritual things or not.”

Her heart sunk. “But Dad ...”

“No buts. Until I get to know this young man better, you’re not getting in a car alone with him.”

#### **Jesus Leads Us**

One of Jesus’s favorite ways to describe Himself was as a good shepherd (John 10:11). A shepherd always goes before his sheep. He has already seen what they’ll face tomorrow, so he’s never taken by surprise. If a roaring lion is nearby, the shepherd will defend the sheep. If there’s a mountainous road ahead, he’ll prepare the sheep for the journey.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were led in the wilderness by *the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night* (Exodus 13:21). In the New Testament, Jesus became the light that all people could follow because the glory of God dwelt in Him (John 1:1, 6–9, 14). Therefore, everywhere Jesus led, the disciples could be sure they were there by divine appointment—walking in the path the Light of the World had chosen.

Some might say it was easy for Israel to follow God’s leadership in the wilderness because they could see the cloud; likewise, the disciples had the advantage of Jesus in the flesh to lead them. But what assurance do we have that our shepherd is leading us?

Primarily, God has given us the Bible, and He’ll never lead us contrary to what’s contained in His written Word. He has also given us the Holy Spirit, who lives within us to guide us *into all truth* (John 16:13). If we’re sensitive to His leading, He’ll provide the *peace of God which surpasses all understanding* to confirm His will (Philippians 4:7).

God also uses some other confirmations:

- Principles He has built into our lives through experiences
- Examples of mature believers and their counsel
- Opened and closed doors of opportunity

When we combine all these factors, God's leadership can be clear for us too. We should be mindful, though, that unconfessed sins will grieve the Holy Spirit and cause us to misunderstand God's will. So, because we are sheep that often go astray, we must also be honest about sin in our lives and confess it regularly (1 John 1:9).

### **Jesus Disciplines Us**

What about sheep that don't stay as close to Jesus as they should? Will He still prepare them for tomorrow? Yes. Because of His unending love and amazing grace, yes. Even if we aren't actively pursuing our Shepherd, even if we're not listening to His voice, He will pursue us and, if necessary, use His rod of discipline:

*Your rod and your staff, they comfort [reassure] me. (Psalm 23:4)*

*My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges [punishes] every son whom He receives. (Hebrews 12:5-6)*

Just as Denise's dad loved her too much to allow her to date a boy he didn't know, our shepherd loves us too much to allow us to walk into danger without warning and preparation. And even if we choose the dangerous road, He won't allow us to go astray indefinitely. He will interrupt dreams and goals that lead us away from Him, then steer us back toward His will for our lives.

Jesus has a great purpose and plan for each of us. We therefore should be thankful for every kind of preparation He leads us into.

**Life Lesson: Jesus, the perfect shepherd is always involved in our lives. If we will not hear His voice, then He will use His rod to draw us close to Him.**



### **Storm Preparation**

#### **Study God's Word:**

Read John 10:1-30.

1. What are the characteristics of a good shepherd?
2. What dangers do the sheep face? How does the shepherd protect them?

3. What are the characteristics of a good sheep? Do you consider yourself a sheep that usually follows or one that usually goes astray? Why?

**Apply God's Word**

1. How easy or difficult is it for you to listen to the Good Shepherd's voice? What makes it easy? What makes it hard?
  
2. When have you felt the comfort of the Good Shepherd's presence? When have you felt the discomfort of His rod of discipline? How did both experiences prepare you for your current situation?
  
3. Are there people in your life—parents, teachers, pastors, friends—who have shepherded you? Briefly describe how one of them has impacted your life.

**Prayer**

Dear Shepherd, I know You have a greater purpose for my life than I may be experiencing. I realize You've been preparing me for tomorrow. I want to submit to both Your voice and Your rod. Help me be an attentive sheep.

**Optional Study Questions**

1. Read Psalm 23. List the characteristics of a shepherd that David highlights. Alongside each characteristic, describe a time in your life when Jesus has shepherded you in that way.
  
2. Sin can prevent us from hearing our shepherd's voice. Read 1 John 1:5–10. Ask God to reveal any ways you are walking in darkness. Ask Him to show you specific ways to walk in the light. For example, you could ask Him to send a more mature believer to walk alongside you.

**Notes**

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## **Lesson One: Day Four** **Jesus, the Perfect Teacher**

“Three to six months of recovery?”

“Yes, at least that long.” Denise’s husband, Mace, bit into his hamburger, chewed, then swallowed. “I don’t want to go back to work too early, like I did after my knee replacement.”

The severe break in Mace’s foot required major surgery. Four screws, a rod, and a plate would be inserted. He’d walk again, but his repaired foot would never shrink to its former size twelve.

It was the recovery time, not the surgery, that most concerned Denise. Both their son and daughter were in college. Her freelance editing business had just begun to turn a profit. They’d counted on Mace’s job to supplement his teaching pension. How would they pay their bills if he couldn’t work?

### **Why Are You Doubting?**

Remember Jesus’s response to the disciples’ fear and doubt in the first storm? *But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?”* He used the same description in Matthew 6:30 when He taught them about worry: *“Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”*

Clearly, Jesus expected the disciples to trust Him. But they didn’t—at least not as fully as they should. The Matthew and Mark accounts of the storm record two questions that reveal the disciples’ lack of faith:

*And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”* (Mark 4:38)

*So the men marveled, saying, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”* (Matthew 8:27)

The first question challenges Jesus’s love for them: does He care? The second question challenges Jesus’s power: is He able to care for them? Both questions are foundational faith issues. If we can’t answer them with a confident yes, then our ability to grow through life’s storms will be greatly hindered.

Let’s consider one experience that should have given the disciples the answer to those questions:



*And when [Jesus] came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her.*

*When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."*

*Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."*

*So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And [Jesus] presented him to his mother.*

*Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." (Luke 7:12–15)*

How does Jesus demonstrate His love in that story? How does He demonstrate His power? Do you think the word *all* in the phrase *then fear came upon all* includes the twelve disciples?

The purpose of Jesus's teaching was to reveal God and His ways to the disciples. Nothing He did or said was random. Consider the following verses in the Sermon on the Mount:

*Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.*  
(Matthew 6:8)

*Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.* (Matthew 7:7–8)

These principles, along with many others, could have prepared the disciples to face and overcome their fears in the first storm. *Yes, Jesus cares.* He has proven He loves us so He won't allow anything to harm us. *Yes, Jesus is able.* He has already proven His power, so no storm can sink us.

### **And What about Us?**

When God allowed Mace to injure his foot so badly that he wouldn't be able to work for an extended time, he and Denise didn't know how they'd pay their bills. But they knew the promises of Matthew 6:8 and Matthew 7:7–8. Therefore, they prayed daily for strength to rely on God's love for them and His ability to provide income.

Did they inherit a million dollars from a distant relative? No. But month by month, God ensured their bills were paid. One Sunday, a friend handed Denise an envelope and said, "Someone wanted me to give this to you." Inside were ten crisp one-hundred-dollar bills. A few weeks later, Denise cleaned out a file cabinet and found an old life insurance policy that could be cashed in. Again and again, God proved Himself faithful.

No matter how difficult your problems may be, God has already once and for all proven His love for you by the death of Christ on the cross:

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins. (1 John 4:9–10)*

His power to do anything for anyone at any time has been proved by the resurrection:

*That you may know ... the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 1:18–20)*

Even if your storm is severe and long, don't listen to the wind or look at the waves. Hang on to these two great truths: Yes, Jesus cares and, yes, Jesus is able.

If those two truths are rooted in your heart, you'll be able to withstand any storm.

### **Understanding the Storm ... or Understanding Him?**

Far too often, we want to know why God allowed the storm. All the while, God wants us to take our focus off the storm and put it on Him. He'll never lead us where His love hasn't prepared us and His power can't sustain us.

So what was Jesus doing to prepare His disciples for the storm? He was revealing Himself to them: I am the Good Shepherd. I will lead you. I am the perfect teacher. I'll teach you everything you need to know when you need to know it.

In the violent storm of Matthew 8:23–27, the disciples cried out, "*Lord, save us! We're perishing!*" What if they'd responded with faith rather than fear? Suppose Peter had said, "Fellows, we'll get through this. We've seen Jesus manifest authority over demons, disease, and even death. I believe He has authority over storms."

John might have joined in, "You know, guys, Peter's right. Not only have we seen His power, but everywhere He has led us, He has been moved with compassion on those in need. Can any of you name one time Jesus refused those who cried out to Him or believed Him? I'm convinced He won't lead us where His love and grace won't sustain us."

Jesus would have praised them instead of rebuking them, right?

Jesus has revealed Himself as a good shepherd and a wise teacher. Knowing that, will you respond with faith or fear in the storm?

**Life Lesson: We will successfully navigate the storms of life to the extent that we know, understand, and trust the character of God.**



## **Storm Preparation**

### **Study God's Word**

Read Luke 5:1–26.

1. How do these three stories demonstrate Jesus's love for people?
2. How do these three stories demonstrate Jesus's power over the physical and spiritual realms?

### **Apply God's Word**

1. Think about the events of the past week. How has Jesus demonstrated His love for you? How has He demonstrated His power?
2. In 2 Peter 1:3, the apostle offers this encouragement: *His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises.* Think of a past storm and then answer these questions:
  - How did Jesus, the perfect shepherd, lead you?
  - How did Jesus, the perfect teacher, prepare you?
  - Is there a specific “great and precious” promise in Scripture that encourages you in difficult times? Write it on a 3x5 card and post it in a prominent place—your computer monitor, the refrigerator, or the bathroom mirror. Read it often.

### **Prayer**

Dear Divine Teacher, Thank You for being my perfect teacher. Thank You for Your patience. Open my heart to Your instruction.

**Optional Study Questions**

1. Read Matthew 8:14–16. What could the disciples, especially Peter, have learned about Jesus through the miracles this passage records?
  
2. In what ways can the truths contained in the following passages strengthen our confidence that Jesus cares and that He is able?
  - 1 John 4:8
  - 1 John 1:5
  - Deuteronomy 32:4
  - Jeremiah 32:17
  - Isaiah 40:28

**Notes**

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**Lesson One: Day Five**  
**The Call to Commitment**

Connie and Truman were content among friends and family in their local church. Then came a call to start a mission church 2,600 miles away from home. The couple knew God wanted them to go, but Connie's father questioned their decision.

"Why can't you minister in a church close to home and be happy?" he asked. "How can you be sure it's God's will to minister in a small town in Washington State?"

Tension mounted.

One day on the patio of his backyard, Connie's father said to Truman, "I feel as if you're stealing my daughter away from me." Just then a dog trotted through the yard. Connie's father pointed to it. "I have more respect for that dog than for you."

His words cut deep, but Truman didn't answer.

A few weeks later, Connie and Truman packed a four by six foot U-Haul with their possessions. Truman's parents sent them off with prayers, blessings, hugs, and kisses. But the young couple received only harsh words from Connie's broken-hearted parents.

Connie's heart was broken too. She cried for fifty miles. But she knew they had to be faithful to the call of God.

**"Follow Me"**

Shortly before the storm story of Matthew 8, the gospel writer recounts Jesus's encounter with two men:

*Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."  
Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (Matthew 8:19–22)*

Both men thought they were ready to follow Jesus. But when He pressed them for commitment, they faltered. Jesus's cryptic responses issued a challenge. Could it be Jesus was saying, "Are you asking Me to commit to you and your kingdom, or are you willing to commit to Me and My kingdom?"

We face the same dilemma. We want Jesus to be with us, but we also want Him to bless our plans and commit to our goals. Jesus, however, says, "Follow me. Commit to My plan for your life, then all these other things will be added in the right order at the right time." (Matthew 6:33, paraphrased).

There's a difference between seeking a blessing from Jesus and seeking Him, the Blessed One. And until we settle the issue of commitment, we won't be able to withstand the storms He leads us into.

### **The Comfort Issue**

The scribe said he would follow Jesus anywhere. But Jesus saw something in that man's heart that he didn't see himself: a penchant for comfort.

Jesus didn't teach that all His disciples must take a vow of poverty and become itinerant missionaries, without homes or possessions. Rather, He emphasized that true disciples cannot allow things to own them or hinder their work in His kingdom. His response to the scribe reflected a point He'd made in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25)*

Jesus saw that the scribe valued things too highly, and therefore he wouldn't embrace the hardships of following Jesus with the right attitude. We too must recognize that Jesus isn't inviting us to join Him on a luxury cruise vacation.

Storms have a way of tearing down much of what we've built for our comfort and convenience. If we're spending most of our time, energy, and finances on building our kingdom, Jesus might lead us through a storm in which we suffer some loss. But He'll also use those losses to help us realign our priorities.

### **Moving Beyond Comfort**

Jesus will never allow us to stagnate. He continues to move us toward a deeper, fuller commitment. Even if we continue to pray, read the Bible, and serve in the church, we may find that our joy in following Jesus has diminished. When that happens, the Holy Spirit might prompt us to pick up the pace by undertaking a new challenge. He might also convict us to lay aside some activity or habit that's slowing us down.

Hebrews 12:1–2 shows us how to overcome our tendency to seek comfort and stagnate:

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

If we keep our eyes on Jesus and His example of endurance, we'll be less likely to value comfort more highly than we should.

### **The Priority Issue**

The second man also wanted to lay down some conditions: “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” At first glance, it seems to be a reasonable request. But on closer examination, this prospective disciple might have been using a figure of speech that meant “I’d like to follow you now, but I need to wait until my parents die”—which could have been years away.

Jesus isn’t teaching that we should dishonor our parents. In fact, He rebuked the Pharisees for their failure to care for their parents (Matthew 15:3–9). What Jesus seems to be saying is that we must be willing to rearrange our priorities and relationships by placing them under His lordship:

*Jesus said, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:37–39)*

When Connie and Truman decided to go to Washington in spite of her father’s objections, they placed their commitment to Jesus above their desire to please her father. Eventually, God mended that rift. Her parents visited them in the Northwest, witnessed God’s hand on their ministry, and supported their mission.

Not every family conflict ends that way. But we can trust God to be faithful to us if we are faithful to Him, for *He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him* (Hebrews 11:6).

### **The Right Response**

To build our lives around ourselves is part of our sinful human nature. We are incurably biased toward ourselves, so we seek to interpret everything in light of how it benefits us, including God’s will. Therefore, we shouldn’t be surprised when God allows storms to test our motives. Nor should we be surprised when God doesn’t bless plans we initiate and attempt outside His will.

The reluctant disciples in Matthew 8 could’ve responded one of four ways to Jesus’s high demands:

- Turn away in discouragement
- Rebel and say, “Who gave you the right to make such demands on my life?”
- Do their best to live up to His demands on their own—and fail
- Humble themselves and transfer their faith from what they could do for Jesus to faith and dependence on Him

The key to getting our priorities in line is getting to know Jesus better. The more we understand and know God, the more we love and trust Him. If we commit to spending

time with Him, we'll soon be willing to rearrange our priorities. Love has a way of doing that, doesn't it?

**Life Lesson: God may send storms to take us out of our comfort zone and realign our misplaced priorities to help us make a full commitment to Him.**



### **Storm Preparation**

#### **Study God's Word**

Read Esther 3–4.

1. What problem arose that threatened Esther's enviable position as queen?
2. What motivated her to move out of her comfort zone and rearrange her priorities?
3. According to Esther 4:15–17, how did she prepare her heart and mind to do the right thing?

#### **Apply God's Word**

1. Consider the following list. In what ways have you altered or given up things in these areas to follow Jesus? Are there things you need to alter or give up to commit to Him more fully?

Finances	Work
Time Management	Family
Hobbies	Ministry

2. What do you most admire about Esther? Do you think you could risk your life to save others? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever faced a dilemma similar to Connie and Truman's? What did you do? Would you handle it differently now? Why or why not?



**Prayer**

Loving Savior, I want to follow You wholeheartedly. Please help me move beyond my comfort zone. Please show me where I need to rearrange my priorities. I know You love me and that You'll do what's best for me.

**Optional Study Questions**

1. Read John 6:22–71. What were some people seeking from Jesus? What made them turn back from following Him? What is crucial to commitment according to this passage?
2. Read Luke 7:36–50. Contrast the unnamed woman's commitment to Jesus and Simon's commitment to Jesus. Do you identify more with Simon, his guests, or the unnamed woman? Why?

**Notes**

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**FOUNDATION**

**God never sends us into a storm  
without first providing a firm foundation  
to support us.**

**Lesson Two: Day One**  
**Falling in Love with Jesus**

For their first wedding anniversary, Denise wanted to purchase Mace a gift he'd cherish. No fancy watch or expensive clothing for him. He was practical. He loved to build things. So while he was at work one day, she went out to the shed and looked at his tools—drills, hammers, screwdrivers, saws, clamps, along with boxes and boxes of screws and nails.

He seemed to have everything.

What could she buy?

Frustrated, she went to Sears. Surely someone there would have a recommendation. A salesman suggested an all-in-one tool. "That'll cut down on what he has to carry around."

Confident she'd made a wise purchase, Denise took it home and wrapped it.

Their anniversary arrived. Gifts were exchanged. Mace bought her a pair of pearl earrings to match a necklace he'd given her while they were dating. She was thrilled.

But when Mace opened his gift, his eyes signaled disappointment not happiness.

"What's wrong?" Denise asked.

Mace hesitated. He obviously didn't want to hurt her feelings. But after she repeated, "tell me" a few times, he explained, "These combo tools aren't as durable or powerful as the ones I already have ... and I don't really like this brand anyway."

Denise had failed to please Mace because she didn't know him as well as she thought she did.

**A Lack of Understanding**

Before the disciples encountered their first storm, they'd seen Jesus heal the sick and cast out demons. They'd experienced the power of His authoritative, soul-stirring teaching. They'd answered the commitment question with a resounding yes. They'd forsaken everything to follow Him.

So why did they falter in the first storm?

The problem didn't lie in their experiences or in their commitment, but in their understanding of who Jesus is and what He had come to earth to do. They didn't realize His earthly ministry would last only three years. They never imagined that He'd be arrested and crucified.

Like every other Jew, they'd also been taught that the Messiah would deliver them from their oppressors and rebuild David's kingdom. They didn't understand that Jesus would return to heaven and leave the building of His Church to them.

Because they didn't truly know Jesus, they misunderstood much of what He did, including the storms He led them into.

If we misunderstand God's ways, we might miss the purpose and lessons He has for us in the storms too.

### **Commitment Grows As Love Grows**

In grace, God creates the desire to do His will within us, and then He calls us to follow Him. He works *in* us so that He can work out His will *through* us:

*For it is God who works in you both to will and to do his good pleasure.*  
(Philippians 2:13)

*He is able to do exceedingly abundantly about all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.* (Ephesians 3:20)

Our commitment to follow Jesus should be the outgrowth of our love relationship with Him. It's much easier to leave the safety of the shoreline and set sail with Jesus when our hearts are devoted to Him. But how do we fall in love with Jesus?

First, we embrace the truth that He never *drives* us to do His will; His love *draws* us to do His will. Psalm 37:4 says, *Delight yourself also in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.*

Many people misinterpret this verse's meaning. God isn't a heavenly Santa Claus who says, "Now if you're real good, you can have that dream job you've always wanted." When we fall in love with Jesus, an amazing thing happens: our desires change. What He desires becomes what we desire.

The Hebrew word translated *delight* could mean "pliable." If we'll be soft and pliable clay in the Potter's hands, then He'll reshape our desires so we'll desire what He desires: *But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are our potter; and we are all the work of Your hands* (Isaiah 64:8).

Our main business is to love Jesus and grow in grace. How do we do that? We invest our time in habits and activities that draw us closer to Him; we avoid habits and activities that pull us away from Him.

For example, reading is one of Denise's favorite pastimes. When she was in her twenties, one of her friends loaned her a romance novel written by a well-known, prolific author. Soon Denise invested a couple of hours each night and much time on the weekends to these novels. As a single woman, she relished the premise of each novel: out there

somewhere was the perfect mate who'd love her completely. Living in the fantasy world of the novels was much more exciting than living in her mundane world as an overworked teacher.

Then God brought a man into Denise's life. But her head was still filled with the ideal men in the novels. Her expectations of what love looked like were skewed by the fantasy world created in the novels.

Fortunately, when Mace and Denise began to talk about marriage, she turned back to the book that gave the true meaning of love: the Bible. She studied the passages about love and marriage. Instead of novels, she read books on God's view of love such as *The Mystery of Marriage* by Mike Mason.

Denise realized how foolish she'd been to devote so much time to a false view of love and marriage. And the more time she invested in reading God's Word and books based on His Word, the clearer she understood how damaging the other books had been.

### **The Race Set before Us**

The writer of Hebrews gives us the picture of an athlete who prepares for a race: *Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us* (Hebrews 12:1).

Just as Denise couldn't properly prepare for marriage without laying aside the novels, we can't run the race God has set before us without laying aside habits and activities that weigh us down. There may be habits in your life right now that damage your relationship to God and your ability to do the work He has called you to do. Like Denise, you may not even recognize them as weights or distractions.

A weight is anything that distracts us or delays us from fulfilling God's purpose for our lives. These weights might not be considered sins by the world or by some of our Christian friends, but if God's Spirit burdens our heart with them, He'll lead us to lay them aside.

There may be activities and habits other Christians can adopt in moderation, such as reading romance novels. And that's fine for them. But you may not be able to moderate those activities or habits, so out of love and obedience to God, you'll lay them aside.

### **The Right Ruler**

Denise's understanding of love was skewed because she used the wrong standard to define it. That can happen to any of us in any area. If we use the world's standard to define success, fulfillment, or happiness, we'll be pulled away from God rather than toward Him. We'll be pulled away from truth toward lies.

To the Ephesians, Paul wrote, *We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting* (4:14).

How do we avoid that? By measuring all things by the ruler of God's Word:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man [and woman] of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)*

Like the Bereans who Paul praised in Acts 17:11, we can search the Scriptures to find truth and direction. To avoid error, we strive to *be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let [our] requests be made known to God* (Philippians 4:6). Then His peace will guard our hearts—assure us of what is right and protect us from what is wrong (Philippians 4:7).

Falling in love with Jesus is a lifelong adventure. Understanding who He is, exploring His purposes, and aligning our desires with His desires involve a daily walk with Him. Brick by brick, day by day, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we build a foundation of intimate fellowship with Jesus.

**Life Lesson: Our commitment to follow Jesus should be the outgrowth of our love for Him.**



### **Storm Preparation**

#### **Study God's Word**

Read Matthew 16:13–23

1. What were some of the misconceptions about Jesus?
2. What did Peter understand correctly? How did Jesus respond to that?
3. What did Peter misunderstand about Jesus? How did Jesus respond to that?

#### **Apply God's Word**

1. Peter understood that Jesus was *the Christ, the Son of the Living God* (Matthew 16:16). What does that mean to you? How does that knowledge affect the way you live each day? What changes in your daily or weekly routine might help you live out that truth more consistently?

2. Jesus told Peter, “*You are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men*” (Matthew 16:23). Consider your perspective about the following. What would be a “things of men” attitude? What would be a “things of God” attitude:

Family responsibilities  
Career success  
Financial security

Friendships  
Entertainment  
Recreational activities

**Prayer**

Lord, I want to know You better. Reveal the misconceptions I have about You and Your will for my life. Align my desires with yours.

**Optional Study Questions**

1. Read John 9:1–41. What misconceptions did the disciples, the crowd, and the Pharisees have about Jesus and the blind man He healed?
2. Read Ephesians 5:22–33. What guidelines for marital love does this passage give? How do these guidelines differ from the ones our culture exalts? How does love for Jesus improve our ability to love our spouse?

**Notes**

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## **Lesson Two: Day Two** **Standing on the Promises**

Connie sat on the first pew. Her husband, Truman, stood behind the pulpit ready to preach his first sermon in a small church in Washington State—to an audience of one.

Connie sang the opening hymn with Truman, put her offering in the plate when he passed it to her, listened to the sermon, and sang the closing hymn.

She and Truman were both discouraged. Who wouldn't be? The following week, Truman again went door-to-door in the neighborhood, sharing the gospel when possible and inviting people to come to the Sunday worship service.

Week after week, Connie was the only member of the congregation—Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. By the end of the eighteenth service, tears streamed down her cheeks. How could they pay their bills with a congregation to support them? Perhaps Truman had misunderstood God; maybe he wasn't called to be a preacher. Maybe he could serve God in some other way. Should they go back home to Louisiana? Maybe her parents had been right all along.

She saw the struggle in Truman too. "Are you sure God called us here? If He sent us here, wouldn't people be responding?" she asked after another discouraging Sunday. "You have a business degree. We could return home and you could get a good job."

Waves of doubt swept into their boat. The winds of circumstances howled. Had they missed God's will in coming there?

### **A Firm Foundation**

Sometimes the purpose of a storm is to unsettle the settled, to shake the shakable, or to dislodge the temporal. Jesus told the story of two house builders: one built on a foundation of sand, the other on solid rock.

*"Therefore," [Jesus said], "whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rains descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who builds his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house; and it fell. And great was its fall." (Matthew 7:24–27)*

Jesus taught this lesson early in the disciples' learning process. He made it plain that storms would come: the wind will blow, the rain will descend, and the floods will come. Storms never ruin the house built on the Rock—Jesus. But storms do reveal what we value: the unshakable eternal values as well as the flimsy temporal values in our lives.



### **The Promises of Jesus**

All three gospel accounts of the first storm include the outcome Jesus promised when He instructed the disciples to get into the boat:

*He gave command to depart to the other side. (Matthew 8:18)*

*When evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." (Mark 4:35)*

*And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." (Luke 8:22)*

Jesus told the disciples they'd reach the other side of the Sea of Galilee. If they had clung to that promise in the midst of the storm, do you think they would have responded differently?

Jesus places incredible importance on belief:

*Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:28–29)*

It isn't sweat, toil, hustle, or hype that pleases Him. It is believing what He says. This is the faith that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6) and releases the power of God in our lives. So when Jesus said "the other side," the disciples should have believed they'd reach their destination no matter what happened on the journey.

Just as Jesus gave the disciples a promise before they encountered a storm, He gives us promises to cling to until our storm passes. When He gives us His Word, we can count on it. When Connie and Truman needed reassurance that God had called them to that small church in Washington State, He provided it. Truman said, "I decided it was the devil and my old flesh that wanted me to give up in the midst of the storm. God had given me His Word to leave Louisiana and come to Washington State to minister. I wouldn't allow my emotions to move me. Jesus had said, 'Fear not, only believe.'"

What storm looms on your horizon? Jesus has promised that you will reach the other side. Are you fearful? Ask yourself these questions:

- Is there something about this storm Jesus isn't aware of?
- Is there something about this storm Jesus can't handle?
- Will Jesus abandon me in the boat?
- Are my circumstances outside His sovereign control?
- Will He go back on His promise to get me to the other side?

As we learn to live by faith and not by sight, we wrestle with our emotions and our reason. They both cry out in the storm: "Let me see and I will believe." But Jesus may not answer those cries. He often responds, "Believe even when you do not see."

What does Jesus want us to believe? Consider His response to Thomas in John 20:29. Jesus said, “*Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*”

How did Thomas express his belief? He said, “*My Lord and my God!*” (v. 28). What did that signify? The word translated “Lord” is *kyrios*—the Greek equivalent of two Hebrew words—*Jehovah* and *Adonai*. The word translated “God” is the Greek equivalent of *Elohim*. By saying “My Lord and my God” Thomas affirmed three truths: Jesus is *Jehovah*, the One True God of the Old Testament. He is *Adonai*, Lord and Master of all people, and He is also *Elohim*, the Creator and Sovereign of the Universe.

Like Thomas, we can make the enlightened choice to believe the truth about Jesus. Then when the storm hits and emotion threatens to unseat our will, we’ll be able to keep our emotions in check. Why is this so important? In calm waters, our *will* rules, but in stormy waters, our *emotions* tend to rule.

### **Flying Solo with Jesus**

Learning to walk by faith not by sight is similar to learning to fly a plane. One pilot described his flight training this way:

First, you fly with a flight instructor who becomes your personal tutor. You watch and listen. Then, with the instructor by your side, you go through the steps of flying the plane one by one. Gradually, you learn to do all that you saw your instructor do.

When it’s time for you to take the controls, the instructor chooses a day with good weather conditions. With the instructor by your side, you grow comfortable using your sight and your senses to fly the plane. Eventually, you’re ready to fly solo. Again, the instructor chooses a day with good weather conditions. You’ve learned enough to fly competently in good weather, but you’re not yet prepared to fly at night or through storms.

As you gain experience, you learn to depend more on the instrument panel than on your senses. The instruments tell you the truth about altitude, horizon, position, and speed. When you learn to trust your instruments more than your feelings or senses, you can fly above the clouds and during the night safely. You’re also prepared for an unexpected storm.

The spiritual parallel, the pilot concluded, is clear: “What the instruments are to the pilot, the Word of God is to the Christian who’s learning to walk by faith.”

We tend to view our emotions, reasoning, and gut feelings as good guides. But the Bible tells us otherwise: *The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps* (Jeremiah 10:23).

Again and again, Scripture instructs us to depend on the only infallible instrument panel for our lives:

*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eye. (Psalm 19:7–8)*

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)*

*Your words were found, and I ate them, [Jeremiah said], and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart. (Jeremiah 15:16)*

Had the disciples depended on the instrument panel of Jesus's words and refused to let their emotions be influenced by the storm, they would've made it to the other side without panicking.

And what about Connie and Truman? On the seventh Sunday, when they drove into the church parking lot, several other cars were already parked there. Each Sunday thereafter, more people came.

During those eighteen sermons Truman preached with only the two of them present, God was drawing Connie to Himself. Soon after the church began to grow, Connie responded to the invitation given at the end of the service. "Truman," she said, "God has shown me that I'm lost. Don't try to tell me I'm a Christian." In the pew where she'd sat and doubted, Connie accepted Christ as her savior. Connie also became the first person baptized in the new congregation.

God has a purpose in every storm. This storm revealed that Connie's profession of faith in Christ, as a teen, was only an emotional decision, not God's true work of salvation. The storm also tried Truman's faith: he needed to stand firm on the promise to start the church even when there were no visible results.

**Life Lesson: When God gives His Word to us, we can stand on it. It is a sure promise from the One who cannot lie.**



### **Storm Preparation**

#### **Study God's Word**

Read Psalm 119.

1. According to verses 9–11, what does the Word of God have the power to do?
2. What is the psalmist asking God to do in verse 18? Why would that be a good prayer to pray every time we read God's Word?

3. What will God's Word do in our lives according to verses 97–106?
4. What is the role of God's Word in giving us comfort, light, and direction in the midst of storms? Try to apply the word *storms*, each time you read the word *affliction* in the following verses: Psalm 119:50, 67, 71, 75, 92, 107, 153.

**Apply God's Word**

1. Do you feel that you allow circumstances to influence your emotions too much?
2. Do you feel that walking by sight (feelings) has limited where, when, and how Jesus could use you in service? Why?
3. Why is it important that we learn to fly by the instrument panel of God's Word?
4. Can you describe a time in which you stood on the Word of God instead of allowing emotions, gut feelings, or logic guide your actions?

**Prayer**

Lord, I know Your promises are true. Help me stand on Your Word when I'm tempted to doubt. Give me a love for Your Word and the desire to read it every day.

**Optional Study Questions**

1. Read the story of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. What does this story teach us about walking by faith, not by sight?
2. Read Luke 1:26–56. How did the word of God given through the angel Gabriel enable Mary to respond to her unplanned pregnancy with faith not fear?

**Notes**

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## **Lesson Two: Day Three** **The Presence of Jesus**

Denise's heart beat faster with each step upward. Her best friend, Lois, said something, but Denise didn't respond. She was too distracted by the swirling tracks of the roller coaster that towered above them.

"Don't worry," Lois said. "It's not as scary as it looks. It'll be fun."

Denise had already confessed her fear of roller coasters to Lois. Rides with steep downward and upward tracks terrified her. She'd nearly fainted on her one and only roller-coaster experience at Busch Gardens.

Of course it was fun for Lois. She loved amusement park rides. "I've never thrown up once," she'd boasted.

Denise had—on the Tilt-a-Whirl at the Orange Festival.

"I'll be right next to you," Lois said. "I'll even hold your hand if you want me to." She grinned. "But you'll probably be clutching the safety bar with both hands."

*Not funny, Lois. Not funny at all.*

"It's perfectly safe. I've ridden dozens of roller coasters," Lois said. "You'll be fine."

Denise turned and hurried down the steps.

### **The Power of the Word**

Jesus didn't send His disciples into the first storm alone. He was in the boat with them. Unfortunately, just as Denise wasn't assured by Lois's presence or promises at the amusement park, the disciples weren't assured by Jesus's presence or promises in the storm. They were too busy thinking about all that could go wrong in the storm.

But what if the disciples had focused on what they knew to be true rather than allowing fear to take control?

Suppose one of them had said, "Jesus is our shepherd. Just this morning I was reciting King David's shepherd psalm as I prepared for the day. He said, '*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me*'" (Psalm 23:4).

"And I was thinking about the passage read in the synagogue last week," another could've added, "from the prophecies of Isaiah. God said, '*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.*' Surely, we have nothing to fear in this storm."

What if one of the disciples had been meditating on Psalm 46 that morning?

*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. (vv. 1–3)*

What if all day long he'd been thinking about what he'd do if his world was shaken like that? Would he have recognized that God had prepared him for the storm in the night by bringing Psalm 46 to the forefront of his mind in the morning? He could've helped calm the other disciples by saying, "Hey, guys, you know what I've been thinking about all day?" His personal meditation on God's Word could have prepared all of them to feed their faith not their fear when the storm arose.

The disciples needed to learn that the Word of God is a sure foundation in the storms of life. So do we.

### **Sensing the Spirit's Guidance**

God gives us faith to believe, then He puts that faith to the test. Once we pass the test, we grow in faith to believe Him more and more and more. One way to grow our faith is to be sensitive to the verses the Holy Spirit impresses on our hearts throughout the day:

- When we read our Bible in the morning
- When we see verses that we've displayed in our house
- When we listen to a song or a sermon
- When a friend shares a verse with us
- When we talk with friends or family at mealtime
- When we review how God worked in our life at the end of a day

Once we believe the Word, our faith is often tested to see if we'll cling to sight, circumstances, feelings, common sense, and people, or if we'll cling to the Word of God. Faith is like a muscle. It grows stronger as we exercise it. And if we respond to the truth God reveals to us, then we're better prepared for the storm. If we can't get through the current storm by trusting God, we won't have the kind of faith needed to trust Him in future storms.

### **Strengthening Our Faith**

In the Bible, Abraham is called the "friend of God" (James 2:23). But he didn't start out as God's friend. God chose Abraham, called him out of a life of idolatry, and then helped him develop the faith that led him into a deep friendship with God.

Let's review a few tests God gave Abraham to prove the genuineness of his faith.

- God comes to Abraham and gives him a promise: If you leave this land, I'll make a great nation out of you. (Genesis 12:1–3)
- Abraham believes, trusts, and leaves. (Genesis 12:4)

- Abraham's faith is strengthened as he travels to the land of promise. (Genesis 12:4–6)
- The Lord appears to Abraham again and amplifies the promise. (Genesis 12:7)
- Abraham builds an altar and worships God. (Genesis 12:7)
- After Abraham is settled in the land, God tests his faith with a famine. (Genesis 12:10)
- Abraham must choose to live by faith (and stay) or yield to his feelings and reasoning (and leave). Was it better to go to Egypt where there was food or remain in Canaan and starve? (Genesis 12:10–13)
- Abraham chooses to leave. (Genesis 12:10–12)
- In Egypt, his fear leads to a lie and a reproof from God. Abraham repents and returns to the place where God promised to bless him. (Genesis 12:14–20)

Why didn't Abraham stay and trust God to provide food for him, his livestock, and his household? The Bible doesn't say. Abraham's actions suggest that he yielded to the natural fear of starvation. Or maybe he simply followed what common sense and his neighbors (maybe his wife too) advised him to do.

What might have happened if Abraham had stayed? Genesis 26 gives us a clue because Abraham's son Isaac faced a similar test of famine. God promised to bless Isaac if he remained in Canaan. Isaac obeyed. What was the result of his obedience? *Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him* (Genesis 26:12).

Thankfully, God didn't give up on Abraham after one lapse of faith. He continued to work in Abraham's life—and his wife Sarah's. Each test of faith today prepares us for a greater test tomorrow. When God asked Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham was prepared to obey. That certainly was the hardest test Abraham ever endured. But he passed the test and became a model of faith we can all follow:

*Abraham, who is the father of us all ... who, contrary to hope, in hope believed. ... He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore, "it was accounted to him for righteousness. (Romans 4:16,18, 20–21)*

### **When Fear Supersedes Understanding**

When Truman was in the first grade, his mother took him to the doctor for a routine inoculation. In the waiting room, his mother's presence comforted him. When they were ushered into the examination room, his mother's presence still calmed him.

But when the doctor entered the room with a needle in his hand, Truman recoiled in fear. He jumped off the table, dodged the doctor and the nurse, threw open the door, ran through the waiting room, out the door, and into the street.

What caused his fear? His mother was present to comfort him. She even explained that the shot was beneficial. But Truman lacked understanding: he couldn't comprehend how something painful could be "good" for him. So he ran.

Similarly, the disciples had the benefit of Jesus's presence in the storm, but they didn't have the understanding of God that they had later when they went out as apostles to preach the gospel worldwide. Likewise, if our understanding of God is faulty, Jesus's presence might not calm our fears in storms either.

Eventually, of course, Truman was caught and the shot was given. His mother loved him too much to allow his fear to jeopardize his long-term health. Similarly, Christians who continue to walk by sight, feelings, and logic will have a difficult time with storms. They may struggle to see how any good can come from shots of suffering, waiting, testing, refining, silence, and delay. Thank goodness, Jesus loves us too much to allow us to avoid those shots forever, however painful they may be.

**Life Lesson: If our understanding is faulty, even the Lord's presence may not calm our fears in a storm.**



### **Storm Preparation**

#### **Study God's Word**

Read Genesis 16:1–15.

1. How did Sarah allow fear to control her actions in this passage? What did she misunderstand about God's promise to give Abraham an heir?
2. In what way did fear control Abraham's actions? What did he misunderstand about God, Sarah, and Hagar?
3. Hagar gave into fear too. What did God reveal about Himself to her? Why was that such an important revelation for her?

#### **Apply the Word**

1. Can you think of a time in which you—like Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar—yielded to fear because you didn't understand what God was doing? What were the consequences?





**Lesson Two: Day Four**  
**Building Our Understanding**

"I can't understand it," Linda said. She wiped a tear off her cheek. "I was sure God brought Mike into my life. We seemed perfect for each other."

Denise reached across the kitchen table and patted her prayer partner's hand. "Makes no sense to me either. I thought you were well matched too."

"Why would God do this to me? Doesn't He want me to be happy?" Linda picked up her spoon and stirred her tea with a slow, circular motion. "Doesn't He know how much I want to find a good man, get married, and have children?" A tear dropped into her mug.

"He knows." Denise waited until Linda looked up at her. "And you know He knows those things."

Linda sipped her tea. Denise prayed silently. *Lord, help me help my friend. Show me how to comfort her.*

"In my head, I know God is good, but this feels so cruel. So cruel." Linda set down her mug and swiped the tears off her cheeks again.

"If God is truly good," Denise said, "and if Mike were truly the best man for you, do you think God would withhold him from you?"

Linda looked down at the table a few seconds, then lifted her head. "No. You're right. The God I love couldn't possibly be that cruel."

**Worthy of Our Trust?**

At various points in our lives, we are forced to decide whether God is or isn't worthy of our trust. Each time we choose to believe He is trustworthy, our faith grows. And that growing confidence in His person and character provides a sure foundation for life's storms.

We've already noted that everywhere Jesus led the disciples was part of His plan for their lives. They should've realized His presence was an indication of the will of God for them. And the more they understood the person and purpose of the Lord Jesus, the more comfort they could receive from His presence.

**Right Place, Wrong Attitude**

Is it possible to be in the right place but have the wrong attitude? Of course. It'll take more than being in the right place for us to do the will of God. The disciples were in the right place—in a boat in a storm with Jesus. But even though they had the presence of Jesus, they could rise no higher than their understanding and trust of Him. They also needed to move from an emphasis on where Jesus was (presence) to who Jesus is (person).

They could've learned a lot by reflecting on their ancestors' failure to trust God after the Israelites left Egypt. God had more in mind than getting them out of Egypt. He desired to get Egypt out of them.

After God delivered them from the Egyptians, the Israelites were in the right place. They were following Moses, their God-ordained leader. And to prove that Moses was following God and not his own desires, God gave the Israelites a cloud to shade them during the day and a pillar of fire to protect them during the night. All they had to do—anytime, anywhere—was to look upward and see that they were right where they were supposed to be.

But again and again, they failed to trust the God who had delivered them, the God who was guiding them and providing for them. For example:

- They complained about lack of food and water. (Exodus 16:1–13)
- They complained about lack of water again. (Exodus 17:1–7)
- They built an idol and worshiped it. (Exodus 32:1–6)
- They complained about food again. (Numbers 11:1–7, 31–34)
- They refused to enter the Promised Land. (Numbers 14:1–10)

The Israelites didn't grow in their understanding of God. And because they didn't learn to trust His character, His presence no longer comforted them:

*Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." (Exodus 20:18–19)*

Their inability to trust the character of God also fostered a mistrust of the leaders God had chosen for them:

*They gathered together against Moses and Aaron. And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! Why have you brought up the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here?" (Numbers 20:2–3)*

During numerous tests in the wilderness, the Israelites repeatedly failed to move their trust from the presence of God to the person of God. Jesus gave the disciples a similar test of faith.

### **Rely on Who Jesus Is**

In the first storm, Jesus was with the disciples in the boat. He knew exactly what was taking place in the boat and in the disciples' hearts while the storm raged. But they didn't sense His presence, and therefore they yielded to fear.

In a broad sense, God is always with us. We take comfort in the words of Psalm 139:

*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. (vv. 7–10)*

But sometimes we cannot sense His presence. In those times, we must trust His person. We must move from an emphasis on *where* Jesus is to *who* Jesus is. He is God and as God, He says to us:

- “I am with you always even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)
- “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:18)
- “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

As the disciples’ faith in and understanding of Jesus grew, they were better able to believe that Jesus was present with them in a storm whether or not they could see Him, hear Him, or sense Him. In the second storm, Jesus purposely sent them alone into the storm, and they were expected to trust Him. (See Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52; John 6:14–21)

This is our journey too. When we face the winds of unwelcome change and our circumstances overwhelm us, we may cry out, “Lord where are You?” What we need to do instead is say, “Lord, no matter how I feel, I know You are with me because You are Immanuel—God with us.”

Be honest. When a storm arises, do you run to people for your reassurance, or do you open the Word of God and wait for the Holy Spirit to both speak to you and grant you the peace Jesus has already promised?

*Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)*

*Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)*

Consider who Jesus declared Himself to be, and ask yourself these questions:

- How can I be thirsty if He is the Living Water? (John 4:10)
- How can I be hungry if He is the Bread of Life? (John 6:35, 48)
- How can I be overwhelmed by darkness if He is the Light of the World? (John 8:12)
- How can I lack direction if He is the Way? (John 14:6)
- How can I lack wisdom if He is the Truth? (John 14:6)

- How can I fear death if He is the Resurrection and the Life? (John 11:25)

A better understanding of His person will help build a deep foundation for both the storms of life and ministry beyond the storm. He loves us. He is able. He won't give us a stone when we need bread. He works all things for our good. Storms can teach us to trust His Word, not our feelings.

**Life Lesson: What we feel changes all the time. Who Jesus is never changes.**



### **Storm Preparation**

#### **Study God's Word**

Read Psalm 139.

1. God is omniscient (knows everything). In verses 1–6, what does God know about David?
2. God is omnipresent (everywhere at all times). According to verses 7–12, can we run so far that God cannot reach us?
3. God is omnipotent (can do anything). According to verses 13–18, what is God powerful enough to do?

#### **Apply God's Word**

1. How do you feel about God's omniscience? Does it comfort you or frighten you? Why?
2. If God is always with you—even when you cannot see, sense, or hear Him—what difference does that make in your life?
3. Verse 16 says that God planned our ways. What does that mean to you?



## **Lesson Two: Day Five**

### **A Growing Faith**

Laura lay on the floor weeping. Her husband, Earl, had just knocked her to the ground in drunken anger. Her seven-year-old son, Truman, held her as they both cried together.

Laura harbored no hate in her heart, only hope that one day Earl would come to Jesus. She knew Jesus could give her a new husband and Truman a new father. She told Truman, "Never dishonor your father. Pray for him."

Earl worked hard to provide for his family during the week, but too often his weekends were filled with drinking. Sunday after Sunday, Laura and her four children walked past Earl as he slept off a hangover, and they went to church. She prayed that one day Earl would be the one to lead his family to church.

Satan tried to discourage her, whispered lies to her: *God doesn't care about you. God's not listening to you.* But Laura didn't give up. She turned her tears into intercession.

### **A Firm Foundation**

Just before the disciples were taught and tested in the storm, Jesus showed them an example of the kind of faith foundation He wanted to build into their lives. Consider the story of the Roman centurion in Matthew 8:5–10:

*Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented."*

*And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."*

*The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

*When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"*

Can you imagine what it would be like to amaze Jesus? And yet that's exactly what happened in this story. Jesus was amazed by the centurion's great faith. What do you think made the centurion's faith so amazing?

### **The Centurion's Steadfast Hope**

First, the centurion had great faith because he had great hope; otherwise, he wouldn't have approached Jesus in the first place.

Hope is essential to faith; in fact, it precedes faith: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1). Hope comes from the Greek word *elpis* and means “a firm expectation of good from God.”

Hope is based on the character of God. Since God is good, I can expect Him to be good before I have specific word from Him. Since God is love, I can expect God to demonstrate His love even though I don't have a specific word about my particular circumstance. Since God is light, I can expect Him to illuminate me—give me understanding.

No matter what our circumstance or need, we can begin our journey to Jesus with hope. Before Jesus gave the centurion a specific answer, “*I will come and heal him,*” the centurion pleaded in hope. Bring your request to God in prayer. Open your Bible and read in hope, expecting God to fulfill His promise, for *faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God* (Romans 10:17).

### **The Centurion's Respect for Authority**

As a leader of 100 soldiers, the centurion understood authority and the power of a command. When he spoke, his soldiers obeyed. Perhaps he'd seen Jesus heal the leper mentioned in Matthew 8:3. Or maybe he'd heard about other healings Jesus had performed.

Through God's grace, the centurion recognized that Jesus's authority was God's authority. Great faith never questions God's ability. With God, nothing is impossible. If Jesus could heal a leper, He could heal a servant. Faith doesn't ask, “Can God?” but “Will God?”

Therefore, the centurion asked Jesus to “only speak a word.” That's all Jesus needed to do. His commands resulted in action. A command could accomplish the healing.

### **The Centurion's Humility**

Many people asked Jesus to show them a sign. The irony is that He showed them many signs, but they still refused to believe He was the Son of God. The centurion, however, didn't ask for a sign. He didn't need Jesus to come to the house and lay His hands on the servant. He simply said, “Speak a word.”

Living in Capernaum, the centurion also knew that Jews didn't enter a gentile home. As a Roman official, he could have ordered his soldiers to seize Jesus and drag him into the house. But he didn't. Instead, he humbly deferred to Jewish customs and to Jesus's authority.

Faith doesn't demand that God do things our way. Faith humbly submits to His ways. Faith grows in the soil of humility because we can't place our trust in God and in ourselves at the same time. The centurion couldn't heal his servant; only Jesus could.

We too must stop putting our faith in what we can do or what others can do for us; we must place our faith in the greatness of God.



The centurion's faith was also based on knowledge. True faith isn't a blind leap based on something we want God to do. Faith is an act of obedience based on a command, promise, or principle from the Word of God. It's based on what we know to be true of Him.

The centurion's faith was based on respect. Sometimes, either in ignorance or pride, we try to usurp the authority that belongs to God. Our prayers sound more like demands than requests. We say, "Do this, God" or "Show yourself faithful here, God." We may add the word *please*, but our tone is impudent.

Sometimes God answers these prayers—because He's merciful and patient, not because we're right. As the psalmist says, God *knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust* (Psalm 103:14).

However, as our faith grows, He expects us to learn to defer to His timing, His will, and His ways. Far better to say "Thy will be done" and release the details to Him than to badger Him with our ideas about how He should fulfill His purpose.

### **The Path to Great Faith**

The disciples should've known that Jesus could calm the storm the minute the sky grew dark and the waves grew high. But instead of following the centurion's example and saying, "Just say the word," the disciples panicked. And their fear prompted them to cry out, "Don't you care that we are perishing?"

Jesus is looking for great faith. That's the point He was making when he said, "*O ye of little faith.*" The disciples didn't place their hope in Jesus. Neither did they rely on His authority. Those errors led to another one: they treated Jesus with disrespect.

The disciples missed the key to great faith Jesus gave them on dry ground before the storm when He said, "*Let us cross over to the other side.*" (Mark 4:35; Luke 8:22). Had they stood by faith on that word from Jesus, one of the disciples could've prayed, "Heavenly Father, I thank You that this storm will not sink us because Jesus said that we're going to the other side of the sea not the bottom of it." Great faith can stand firm in howling winds and breaking waves and say, "I know what I see, but I choose to believe God's Word." God's Word is a firm foundation for the storm.

Do you long to have great faith? When you spend time with someone, you learn his ways. Parents can often anticipate what children will do or say. Spouses can often finish each other's sentences. It's the same way with Jesus. When we walk with Him, we learn His ways. We have a firm expectation of His goodness. We rely on His authority. And we take one step closer to the goal of great faith.

Laura Herring kept praying for Earl's salvation. Year after year, she placed her hope in God's love for her husband and His power to change his life. Then it happened. God got hold of Earl's heart. He became a new man, a new husband, and a new dad. With God's help, he conquered his drinking habit in one day. He led the family in prayer and Bible reading at evening meals. On Saturdays, he and Laura ministered at a local prison. He

became a deacon and later a lay preacher. Her persistent great faith led to a miraculous transformation in her marriage, which eventually led to a transformation in her son Truman's life as well.

Don't be discouraged if your faith seems more like the "little" faith of the disciples than the "great" faith of the centurion. As long as God gives you breath, your faith journey continues. But don't stay where you are. Allow the Holy Spirit to help you *work out your salvation ... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure* (Philippians 2:12). Learn. Grow. Trust. Expect Him to do the miraculous.

Two books that have helped thousands of people develop a bigger, more accurate view of God are A. W. Tozer's *The Knowledge of the Holy* and J. I. Packer's *Knowing God*. They will help you shape your thinking along biblical lines to better know the great God of the universe.

**Life Lesson: Faith isn't a blind leap based on something we want God to do. Faith is an act of obedience based on a command, promise, or principle from the Word of God.**



### **Storm Preparation**

#### **Study God's Word**

Compare Matthew 8:5–13 with Mark 9:14–29, 33–37 and Matthew 11:23–24.

1. What examples of faith did Jesus give the disciples in Matthew 8 and Mark 9?
2. What suggests that the disciples weren't learning from those examples?
3. What does Jesus say about the people of Capernaum in Matthew 11? Do you think He'd say something similar to you? Why or why not?

#### **Apply God's Word**

1. Has God ever led you back to the same places, people, and events to remember or repeat a lesson? If so, describe that experience.

2. In the Scripture passages you read above, what seemed most important to Jesus? What seemed most important to the disciples? Are you more like the disciples or Jesus? Why?

**Prayer**

Lord, I want to grow toward the great faith of the centurion. Cultivate in me a faith that hopes in the power of Your Word, respects Your authority, stands on Your Word, and humbly waits for You to act.

**Optional Study Questions**

1. Read Luke 8:40–56. How do Jairus and the woman who suffered from constant bleeding demonstrate great faith? What could the disciples have learned about Jesus and themselves by witnessing these miracles?
2. Read John 3:1–21 and John 19:38–42. How did Nicodemus demonstrate faith in the first passage? How does the second passage evidence Nicodemus's growth in faith?

**Notes**

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