



# JOURNEY

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# God in the Storm

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## Two Oars for the Storm

**A**s a child, I once rowed far out on a large lake with my brother, Jim. We were a good half-hour from the dock, both focusing on one thing only: snagging the largest smallmouth bass. We completely ignored the dark clouds that loomed on the horizon. Suddenly, a strong wind began to howl, churning up the waves and pushing us further from land. We turned the boat into the wind and struggled to move forward, taking turns at the oars until our hands hurt. Fear gripped my heart as it occurred to me that we might not make it.

A similar fear has gripped the heart of society as the tempest of geopolitical tensions and spiritual warfare loom on the skyline. At times like this, we take heart in the fact that our Lord is still in the business of calming squalls that arise in our hearts. This truth became more real to me recently while studying the book of Revelation. This closing book of the Bible contains insights on how to face hard times, even in the end-times. Again and again, John's Revelation states through imagery and instruction what the entire Bible affirms: the Lord is in control.

Fear and anxiety need not dominate our lives; they are mere reactions to life's situations. When we allow God's promises to govern our minds, a path-

way opens before us into the peaceful haven of God's promised rest. In David's words, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4, KJV).

As a child, I slept in an expansive, dark basement. Once the lights went out, I would shudder in my bed, alone in the black of night. Then I would pull the blankets over my head and repeat the words, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

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**I knew His rod and staff to be like two oars that I could grasp in my mind, propelling me through my stormy fears. Over time, the Lord's rod would drive away my fears and His staff would gently press against my side, guiding me into a deep and restful slumber. It worked when I was young and it has worked ever since.**

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Now back to the boat. As my brother and I took turns at the oars, I finally thought of God's promises and

remembered to pray. I found a confidence arising in me that God really is bigger than the waves. This made the journey much easier to handle as we slowly forged our way through the waves to the safety of the dock. It is my prayer that as you face overwhelming circumstances in your life, God will also guide you safely through, with His peace.

Consider joining our upcoming read through the Bible, beginning on February 14, 2021. You can sign up anytime to do the B90+ readings. If you decide to join us on the 14th, you may also choose to participate in our optional live Zoom sessions every week to talk about questions and insights arising in your readings. As always, you will have the option of reading just 12 minutes a day, using the B90+ overview track, or of reading a full 12 pages a day. Either way, you will find the Lord's protection and peace, like two oars in your hands, to daily guide you to a safe haven.



**WILLIAM P. CAMPBELL**  
Author, Founder and President  
of Scripture Awakening. Host of  
Beyond Words Radio.





# The Secret Place

*Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day. Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday. Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you.* Psalm 91:5-7 NLT (take a moment to read Psalm 91.)

Let's face it there's a storm brewing and we live in unprecedented times. As I write, a global pandemic that began more than a year ago is still raging. Many have lost loved ones who have died alone without family near. We wear masks. We "shelter at home". Many businesses have closed or are just barely hanging on, and most of us "dread the disease that stalks in the darkness" (Psalm 91:6 NLT). I personally have had friends who have had Covid-19. Some have had light symptoms while others were very close to death's door. They all agree on one thing—you don't want this!

Psalm 91 has been a place of refuge for me during this time. These words I have read out loud and listened

to them read on my YouVersion Bible app—they have built faith and brought comfort in times of fear and uncertainty—vs. 3, "For He will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease" (Psalm 91:3 NLT).

All last summer there were riots in our streets. Property was destroyed. People were killed. This year, in early January, a small group of "protesters" entered our Capitol building causing mayhem and destruction. The political unrest is shocking for America. It's as if our enemy, the devil, has set the world on fire. (Read Psalm 91 again)

**So how should we respond? What do we do when the world burns? There is a "clue" in Psalm 91:1 (NKJV), when we "dwell in the secret place of the Most High", we "abide under the shadow of the Almighty." And when we do, He rescues. He protects. He covers us.**

Sometimes the Holy Spirit taps me on the shoulder when I'm yelling at my favorite cable news show. He reminds me to turn down the news and turn my face to Him. Moses composed Psalm 91 on the day he completed the Tabernacle in the desert. As he wraps up his new song, he leaves us with these words from God Himself:

*The LORD says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation." Psalm 91:14-16 NLT*

Let's turn off the news and meditate here instead, and let's pray for peace and mercy for this nation.



**TIM BRYANT**

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# An Eternal Perspective on the Current Storm in Our Country

One of the most important lessons we can learn through suffering is our need to trust God. He is in control, working out the details of our personal lives and the lives of the billions of others on this planet, past, present, and future, simultaneously (an astonishing thought, if you stop to ponder it). This divine coordination is for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

But when does genuine trust cross the boundary into fatalism? To the outside observer, fatalism—the idea that all events are predetermined, and thus our actions don't ultimately matter—can appear very similar to trust. "It's all part of God's perfect plan," we might say, or, "I'm going to just keep calm and carry on."

Trust and fatalism differ in a significant way, however. As I write in my book, *Shaped by Suffering*, "While fatalism (or determinism) generally views God as all-powerful but not all-good, the Christian view is that God is both all-powerful and all-good." I go on to explain, "God always acts and allows circumstances and events for a purpose. His purposes, though they may seem harsh and even cruel from our finite perspective, are always generous and good *in the end*...His will is done from the perspective of eternity."

Our nation is in spiritual turmoil. Many people are suffering, their hardships caused or made more difficult by the lock-downs and other effects of the COVID-19 situation. Depression and anxiety are on the rise. At a time like this, words like "God is in control" can come across as a shallow assurance. But what if we add to that statement the crucial reminder that not only is God all-powerful, but *He is all-good*? All His ways are good (Psalm 145:17), and He has promised never to forsake us (Matthew 28:20), never to leave us unprotected against the whims of the evil one.

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**Both His power to carry out His promises and the goodness of those promises make the Lord worthy of our trust—no matter how bad our situation.**

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It's for this reason that I don't wring my hands in despair. I don't stay calm out of a fatalistic attitude that tells me to "let go and let God." Rather, God's perfect power and love cause me to tremble in holy fear at the transcendent majesty of the Creator of the universe, and they lead me to go on joyfully worshiping Him with my lips

and my life regardless of the chaos and evil proliferating around me (indeed, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn famously said, that evil cuts through every human heart—and yet, thanks be to God that He gives us victory over this evil through Christ; 1 Corinthians 15:57).

So rather than figuring there's "nothing I can do" to change the trajectory of my own life, much less my country's, I choose to trust the anchor of my soul (Hebrews 6:19). With His perspective and strength, I will persevere in "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16 KJV). I invite you to do the same. Rather than waiting for the current storm to pass, let us respond *now* to God's call to love others fervently, show hospitality, serve the body of Christ with our gifts, and glorify God through our words (1 Peter 4:7-11). If the "end of all things [was] near" (1 Peter 4:7) in the first century, it's even nearer today. Let us, then, be sober and alert, knowing He is bringing all of history to a grand close—one that is guaranteed to turn out well for those who know Him.



**KEN BOA**

Dr. Boa is an author, speaker, and president of Reflections Ministries. [www.KenBoa.org](http://www.KenBoa.org)





# To the...

# Other Side

I was reading a passage recently that encapsulated recent world events; events that have washed over us as stirring uncertainty, turmoil, tensions, financial upheaval, employment difficulties, and relational isolation. Months have moved along, yet movement to *the other side* of world events has not occurred. As daily difficulties and relational realities continue to prevail, many have grown weary, worn, and even spiritually disillusioned with no end in sight to the earthly eye.

While sitting with God in His Word, in this somewhat familiar passage, a subtle statement caused a significant stirring within my spirit. I invite you to ponder this passage as well, Mark 4:35-41:

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said

to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

What are some of the more obvious things that stand out to you? Some of your observations may include:

- It was evening (things often seem scarier after dark).
- He was with those who had been walking and working closely with Him.
- A significant storm occurred in their lives, even though they were close followers, and even though He was there in their midst.
- Fear gripped them.
- They wondered if Jesus even cared about them, about their well-being.
- He exercised His authority over the wind and the waves, and they obeyed.
- He addressed His followers with two questions: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”
- They were terrified and shifted their focus from the storm to the One who invited them to have faith.

While storms are unwelcome, this storm proved purposeful, powerful, and even profound.

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**Jesus invited them on a journey ‘to the other side.’ This is the statement that stirred me...as He invited them to see beyond their circumstances, beyond their fears and human reasoning, beyond their earthly sight. He invited them to a place of spiritual sight and divine insights.**

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In the midst of our storms, as varied as they may be, Jesus still invites us *to the other side*; where peace exists (Philippians 4:6-7), even though storms may rage, where confidence in Him overshadows uncertainty of outcomes, where He takes us to the other side as we look to and trust in Him—the One who is all knowing, all powerful, and ever present; the One who calms the storm.



**PATTY STUMP**  
Licensed Christian counselor, author, and speaker for women’s events.



# God Hurled a Storm



**M**any folks, even Christian folks, don't like the idea that God may send storms. The thought is that God is gracious, loving, and cares for His people; and therefore, He would never send something that would cause them grief or pain. They acknowledge that God is sovereign. However, they say storms are not sent by God but merely allowed by Him as a part of a fallen world; and if He had His way, they would never happen.

Yet Jonah 1:4 (ESV) says, "But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up." The experienced seamen of the ship feared for their lives; and in the midst of their terror, God made the sea grow "more and more tempestuous." As they trembled and furiously rowed to fight the storm, God made "the sea (grow) more and more tempestuous against them." God frightened them and caused Jonah to take a three-day journey in the belly of a fish.

Some may then think that this is an isolated, unique example, not accurately characterizing our God. However, one should remember the plagues God sent upon Egypt, the earth He opened up to swallow rebels in the

Exodus, the sea He caused to destroy the entire pursuing Egyptian army, all the tormentors He sent upon tribe after tribe in Judges, and the enslaving nations He sent to take both Israel and Judah into captivity.

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**The point is our loving, caring God does send storms. They are not capricious nor purposeless. They are sent for our good. Sometimes it takes a storm to get our attention.**

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Nationally and internationally, we are in a storm. It does not take a genius to recognize that. Al Mohler has recently released a book, *The Gathering Storm*, which accurately describes how this storm is impacting American culture and the Church. My only quibble with his book is the title. It should read, *The Gathered Storm*.

Why is it important to recognize that God hurls storms?

The answer is this: If God does hurl storms and He does so purposefully and lovingly, then it should cause us to pray differently. Instead of praying only for the wherewithal to weather

our storm, we should ask for God's insight into His purpose for our tempest. Here are some questions we should ask ourselves:

- Why has this storm been sent?
- What is it that God wants us to see and know?
- Is there anything God wants us to stop doing and repent of?
- Is there something God wants us to change?
- Is God telling us something about how we ought to live?
- Is there an opportunity for evangelism that we are missing?

Those are critical questions to ask ourselves. I am not saying ask other people, or ask the nation, or ask our politicians, but ask ourselves. Each one of us individually needs to look in the mirror and honestly ask for God's help in this storm. That's an important reason to recognize that God hurls storms!



**BILL NEWTON**

Pastors a start-up church, writes, and serves on 3 boards. US Naval Academy graduate & Harvard MBA.





# God's Treasure

The CRRR-AAA-CC-KK shook the house. The echoing crr-aa-c-ks came like ripples on the water but so much louder. Little did we know that the electrical shock wave had entered our home through the television and into our family room. Rather than cracks and booms, the next sound was that of fire trucks coming to battle an unseen blaze in the walls. An ordinary Saturday was turned upside down in a matter of seconds.

Life can do the same to us. Storms come not only from the weather but through sickness, financial hardship, and broken relationships. Even now, nearly one year since it began, we continue amid the storms caused by the pandemic: unemployment, fear, and grief. So many things in our world and personal lives loom heavily in our hearts. These storms of life threaten our peace, comfort, and joy and often bring about doubt and hopelessness.

Like the disciples who encountered a storm on the sea, the waves of life can make us feel as if we are out of control. What can we do? The disciples feared but they turned to the One they knew could do something

about it—God in the flesh. Isaiah 41:10 (MSG) gives us words we need to remember in our times of doubt and fear:

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**Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I'm your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you.**

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Think about how relying on Jesus changed the disciples lives in that very moment. They went from fearful—to celebratory awe. Believing that God is for us can transform our lives. Understanding that amid trials, God is always present and walking the journey with us helps us not to doubt God's care.

Even if we don't feel God's touch, we still know it is there. It is God's promise and God's promises are everlasting. As believers, it is important we do not allow the storms we encounter to become bigger than God's promises.

I have often pondered the lives of Job (who lost his children and wealth), Joseph (who was sold into slavery as a teen), Daniel (who was thrown in among lions for his faith), Noah (who had to live on a boat among a plethora of animals for months), and how the bad they experienced God used for good—to the point we today study them and realize we too must trust and not give up. Each one found greater faith and trust because of their circumstances.

We know bad things happen and hard times come. What makes a difference is choosing to live, not doubting God's loving involvement in our lives. God's wonderful treasure for us is hard times do not hold the final say over our lives. God does. Remember:

God is our strong refuge; He is truly our helper in times of trouble. Psalm 46:1 (NET)



**JANET JOHNSON**

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# When Our Courage Melts Away

Psalm 107:23-32, tells the story of some merchants who went out to sea, only to be swept off course by a perilous storm's vast winds and waves. They were brought to "their wits' end" as they "staggered like drunkards" and their "courage melted away." Storms, both in the literal and figurative sense of the term, are nothing new. However, what is so remarkable in this particular tale isn't the presence of a storm but the response of the merchants. Psalm 107:28 records that: "They cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he (God) brought them out of their distress."

The merchants of this story knew something that many of today's believers do not know. It's not our job to calm the storm, but it is our job to turn to the One who can. Crying out to the Lord requires humility. Crying out to the Lord is an act of surrender. Crying out to the Lord is an unmistakable acknowledgment that man is ultimately not in control and is far too limited to control the elemental wind, water, and temperature. In this world where almost everyone's social media accounts are flooded with flimsy self-help suggestions, it's important for Christians to understand that the

Bible does not instruct mankind to work harder at rowing or at adjusting the sails as the "mighty waters" crush in, but rather Scripture is riddled with teachings that direct mankind to cry out to the Lord in the midst of the perilous storms of life.

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**Sadly, many Christians do not heed this repeated instruction until a storm comes that is so relentless and brings them so low that the very idea of striving in the flesh seems utterly senseless. Why not turn to Christ in prayer today? Acknowledge the storm. Acknowledge your frailty. And, most importantly, acknowledge God's mighty power in prayer.**

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I often wonder if the storms of life primarily come to mankind to prove that God is the only true shelter (Nahum 1:7). Fredrick Douglass, an American abolitionist, statesman, and preach-

er once said, "For it's not light that is needed, but fire; it's not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake." Christians need the storm because we need to know the Christ who calms them. Psalm 34:19 (NKJV) says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all." Prayer brings the quiet understanding that the details of the storm are not as important as knowing the God who delivers His people from them.

The year 2020 came with unprecedented storms. The year 2021 will undoubtedly come with diverse storms, as well. So, at the start of this new year, why don't we, as believers, recommit to "rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying," just as Romans 12:12 (NLT) inspires and instructs us to do.



**JOSHUA GILMORE**

Teacher, leader, and Director of Baptist Collegiate Ministries at North Greenville University, SC.



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