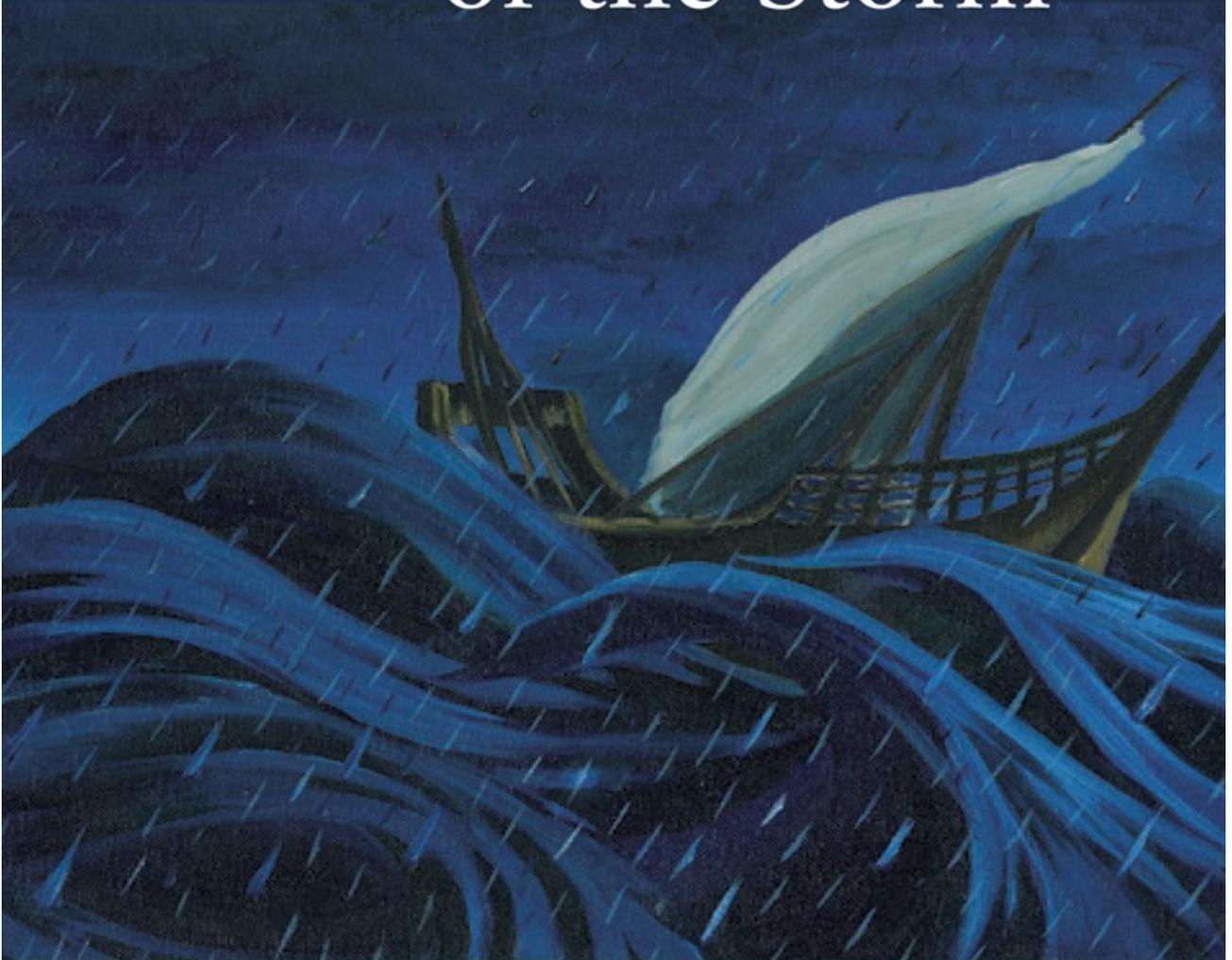


God of the Storm



THERE STOOD BY ME THIS NIGHT

Dr. Burliss E. Parker

The God of the Storm

There Stood by Me this Night...

By

Dr. Burliss E. Parker

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Chapter One

The Journey Begins

- A. Man's Plans – God's Plans
- B. Contrary Winds of Change
- C. Prayer and Fasting
- D. Insights from God
- E. Looking for Direction

Chapter Two

The Storms of Life Come up Suddenly

- A. Two Harbors
- B. Euroclydon
- C. The Storms of Life

Chapter Three

The Winds of the Storm could be God's Direction

- A. If the Storm is too Big, Go along for the Ride
- B. The Ropes of God's Strength
- C. The Ship Graveyard
- D. Storms Get our Attention

Chapter Four

When All Hope is Gone

- A. There Stood by Me this Night

Chapter Five

I Believe God

Chapter Six

Taking Soundings

A. The Seven Knots in the Rope of our Response

Chapter Seven

They Dropped Four Anchors

- A. The Anchor of Prayer
- B. The Anchor of God's Word
- C. The Anchor of Hope
- D. The Anchor of Faith

Chapter Eight

The Desire to Escape

- A. The Five Reasons God Slows us Down
- B. Attitude adjustment and Express Delivery
- C. Let's Make a Run for It
- D. Misplaced Faith

Chapter Nine

They Lightened the Ship

- A. Encouragement 101
- B. Eight Lessons Accomplished in the Storm

Chapter Ten

The Nine Things Given Up in a Storm

- A. Another Plan Fails
- B. The Nine Things Given Up

Chapter Eleven

Coming into the Shore on the Pieces

- A. The Six Lessons Learned in the Storm

Chapter Twelve

Destination Malta

- A. From Murderer to a god
- B. The Miracle at Malta
- C. The Storm of Life Check List

Appendix: These are the personal Life Lessons Learned in the Storm from the stories that were used in this book. My they encourage you.

Chapter One

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The trumpets sound, the court falls silent and all eyes watch as King Agrippa and Bernice enter the auditorium. The commanders and city leaders have gathered to hear the defense of the man known as Paul. But how did Paul come to this point? Let's take a brief look at the events that have taken place. Paul had been preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. He returns to Jerusalem to inform the brethren about his work among the Gentile Christians and his concern with trying to force them to follow the Law of Moses. The decision was made that they would not have to abide by the strict Jewish laws. In Acts 21:25 *"But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality."*

During this time Jews from around the known world had descended on Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. In Acts 21:27b, *"...the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,"*. Those from Asia had spotted Paul in the crowd and began shouting that he was the one teaching the Gentiles against the Law. And worst yet Paul tried to take *"Greeks into the Temple"*, in verse 28. Because of the uproar, the commander of the Roman troop was summoned. Verse 32 reads, *"...when they saw the commander and soldiers, they stopped beating Paul"*. Paul was then placed under arrest.

In Acts 22:1-22, Paul shares how he became a believer in Jesus Christ. This made the crowd of Jews even more angry with him, to the point they sought a way to murder him. Acts 22:24 reads, *"the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him."* The commander's duty was to keep the peace and make sure the Roman laws were enforced. The reason for the riot was the Jews were upset with Paul concerning the violation of the Law of Moses, which was of no concern to the Roman commander. The decision was made to scourge Paul.

Scourging was used because of its effectiveness to get to the truth. The scourge was a whip made of leather with pieces of sharp bones and metal interwoven into the leather. The physical damage done by this weapon was extensive. Some men did not survive the beating.

Before the commander began the scourging, Paul told him it was unlawful to tie up a Roman citizen and beat him without a crime having been committed. If the commander would have scourged Paul and then found that he had beaten a Roman citizen it could have meant the death penalty for the commander. In Acts 23:12, *"And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul."* The news of this vow comes to the attention of Paul's nephew who in turn tells Paul. The nephew is taken to the commander. Enlightened of this news the commander decides to send Paul to Felix, the Governor.

The protection Paul is given is found in Acts 23:23, *"And he called for two centurions saying, 'Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to*

go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night.” (about nine o’clock at night).

Paul arrives safely and is handed over to Felix. Felix takes no action concerning Paul. As a matter of fact, Acts 24:27 tells us that Paul was prisoner in Caesarea for two years and that Porcius Festus succeeded Felix. He was tried before Felix, and then tried before Festus. In Acts 25:7, *“...the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.”*

Like Paul, we can relate to a time in our lives when someone or a group turned against us. And like Paul, they were not serious charges, just complaints. But because they are the ones who had the power or the influence, they get their way.

Festus was the new Governor and did not want to start off on the wrong foot with his Jewish constituency. The idea was to send Paul back to Jerusalem to stand trial by the Jews. Paul knew he would not get a fair trial here, so as a Roman citizen he had the right to appeal his case to Caesar in Rome. Festus is now left with no choice but to follow through with Paul’s request.

He is being held by Festus and before he is sent to stand before Caesar, Agrippa makes a request of Festus that he also may hear what Paul has to say, which brings us to our beginning. Agrippa is the third Roman ruler who examines Paul’s case.

Acts chapter 26 is the account of the examination of Paul. King Agrippa was unusual in the fact that he was well aware of the Jewish customs. Paul shares the events that took place that convinced him to become a Christian. How as a young boy was raised up in the Jewish tradition and that he was a member of the Pharisees. How he persecuted the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, to the point of putting them in prison and even to death. He was given authority by the Chief Priest to pursue them and find them. Paul shared his Damascus road experience. How a light had blinded him, and in the Hebrew language said, *‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads’*. Paul’s response to the voice was *“So I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The answer was ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”* Paul was called to be a minister and a witness to Jews and Gentiles, but especially to the Gentiles.

Paul finishes telling the court what had taken place, Festus’ response may have been like the responses that you have received when you have shared the Gospel with someone. Acts 26:24, *“Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’* Then one of the saddest comments on the human nature was King Agrippa’s response in verse 28, *“You almost persuaded me to become a Christian”*. How many have heard the Gospel message and then turned away from it?

The final analysis of the events are found in Acts 26:31-32, *“And when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, ‘This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.’ Then Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.’* Because Paul’s request to appeal before Caesar was irreversible there was nothing that could be done to stop it.

In Acts 27:1-3, *“¹And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. ²So,*

entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. ³ And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care.” Paul is placed on a ship carrying grain. The plan is to take Paul and the other prisoners to Rome.

Man’s Plan – God’s Plan

As with most journeys, we expect clear sailing. We pull out our maps and chart our direction. We plan our stops along the way, the hotels we will stay at and the sights we plan on seeing. Or we develop plans for our future. What our careers will be. What college we will attend, only to have them fall apart. The direction in which we are going may change. Later on in life we may experience a midlife crisis becoming dissatisfied with the choice we made.

There are those who attempt to make plans for their children only to realize at some point they must let their children go and not try to control them. Certainly, we give our advice whether it is asked for or not, but ultimately, they must make their own decisions.

The Bible never tells us *not* to make plans. As a matter of fact it tells us how to make our plans. Proverbs 16:9 says, “*A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.*” Let’s look at the Hebrew meaning to this verse. The word “heart” here is “our human intellect or wisdom.”; our way of thinking, acting or understanding. This is the part of us that makes plans. It is part of our human nature to think and meditate about our lives and our future. We have all set down and tried to think out our lives, for instance, “If I do this, then that will happen”. And sometimes our plans and ideas are successful. The truth for most of us is that it does not happen very often. Think of the people you know that went to college and received their degree but are not working in the field of their education today. This is when the next part of this verse is so important. It is what happens along the way. The word “way” has four meanings, actions of going on a journey; a way or a path one goes; the course one goes; the advantages or disadvantages spring from the course of life.

The next sentence in this verse is difficult for us as humans. “*9b... but the Lord directs his steps.*” We can make plans but God can and does have the right to intervene in our lives to change our direction or path. The word “steps” is Hebrew and means “of the course of life.” God changes the course of our lives. We ask God to bless our plans, but we do not want Him to change them. This can create a problem for us as believers.

First, there are those who teach that we simply have to make our requests known to God and He is obligated to make it happen. The second problem is that we forget we are to submit our will to His. We live our lives as though God exists to serve us. The reality is we must come to a place of obedience to God. And willing to give Him our plans, or lay our plans aside. And if necessary, abandon them completely if that is what we must do to be in His will. The frustration is we do not like anyone changing our plans, not even God. We spend more time asking God to bless our plans, than asking Him to change us to fit into what He plans.

Contrary Winds a Sign of Change

Acts 27:4-6

4“When we had put out to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. 5And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. 6There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.”

The winds were beginning to blow a different direction, signaling a change of the season. Sometimes there are subtle signs or signals that let us know that God is preparing to bring change into our lives. You may be experiencing changes in the direction you are currently going. There are subtle signs around you that things are not the same anymore. This is a stirring in your spirit that change may be coming. The winds of change blow into our ministry, occupation, church and family. The change maybe signaling a difficult time ahead or the breakthrough you have been believing God for is finally on its way. You may be sensing you do not belong where you are now. Yet God has not opened the door for you to move.

There is always a season of waiting before God moves. The doors never open and seasons never seem to change quickly enough when we are ready for the change. Let me give you some examples of those who had to wait.

Moses was 40 years on the backside of the desert before he saw the burning bush. For Abraham, 25 years passed from the time he received God’s promise and before the birth of Isaac. Joseph was in an Egyptian prison for over two years before the butler remembered him. David ran from Saul and lived in caves for 13 years before he became king. The list could go on, the point is there is a time or a season of waiting on God. God has placed within you gifts, visions, dreams, goals and abilities beyond what you are currently doing. And you have no idea how God is going to fulfill what He has laid on your heart. All you can do is wait on Him. Please remember though, each of the men I have mentioned, they all learned to be content where they were while they waited. The change coming may not be in location at all, but changes in you. By this I mean, maturing and growing deeper in your relationship with Him.

God can use events or people to signal that change may be on the horizon. Because of the change in the weather on the original ship, they decided it was too dangerous to continue traveling. So in verse 6, *“There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.”* The centurion is determined to get these prisoners to Rome no matter what. He goes to the extent of switching ships.

There are times in our lives that we are guilty of the same actions. Instead of slowing down and re-evaluating our plans when we have a little resistance or taking the time to pray and see where or who the resistance is from, we charge full speed ahead. We will do or try anything that will aid us in achieving our goals. We believe (sometimes falsely) that our plans are God’s plans and our goals are God’s goals. God may have placed a vision or a goal in your heart. I can assure you that the process or the journey to the fulfillment of the vision will be nothing like what you had in mind. We encounter resistance to our goals; we blame others for standing in our way or not cooperating with us. We even rebuke the devil. There may be some aspect to all of these points that have some element

of truth to them. But it never seems to cross our mind that the resistance could be from God. He may be trying to get our attention. He may be taking you in a different direction, with a completely different outcome. How many times have we made plans, or plotted a course only to have few to none of our plans fulfilled?

Acts 27:7-9

7When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. 8 Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. 9 Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them.”

The centurion is looking for any ship that was sailing for Rome. The resistance they were experiencing was not a one-time event. After they boarded the ship and set sail, the wind was already blowing against them. It took them many days and with great difficulty to reach Cnidus. The wind was not permitting them to continue on the journey. In verse 8, the resistance continues and what little headway they made was with great difficulty. The final thought here before we move on is that God may be working in the realm of the invisible on our behalf. We have no idea what God is up to.

In verse 9, it is noted that the “fast” was over. Paul had been in prayer and fasting during this time, because it was the Jewish high holy day of Yom Kippur, The Day of Atonement, which makes verse 10 even that much more interesting.

Acts 27:10

“10 saying, ‘Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.”

The word, “perceive” means to ascertain, get knowledge of, which in this case was the knowledge of an upcoming event that would affect their journey.

I would like to pause here and examine what is taking place. The Holy Spirit is warning Paul that they should not continue. There are two points that need to be made here:

- 1.) The Holy Spirit dealing with us or prompting us.** How many times have we sensed a check in our spirit and ignored it, later regretting that we did not listen to the warnings. Colossians 3:15a reads, “*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts.*” The word “peace” here means, a peace that is in Christ, not an illusion of peace or a formula for peace or one wishing for peace, but a peace which comes from Christ. Think of times in your life when you made a decision and you did not have peace about it. This verse even goes further. The word “rule” means to umpire, control, direct, to decide or determine. If you do not feel right about something in your heart, spirit or mind, then, STOP!!! The Holy Spirit can check our spirit; warn us when something bad is going to happen or if we start going in the wrong direction.
- 2.) Paul had been praying and fasting.** There is power in prayer and fasting. Without

deviating too far from our purpose, let me share with you the power of prayer and fasting. There are eight areas of prayer and fasting that should be examined.

Prayer and Fasting

- 1.) **Prayer and Fasting is a way of approaching God with focus.** Whether you have been directed by the Spirit to fast or compelled by your circumstances, you are still in the act of approaching God.
- 2.) **Prayer and Fasting draws you closer to God and builds a deeper relationship with Him.** It renews your power and reinforces your strength.
- 3.) **Prayer and Fasting for God's assistance in a situation and for His direction.** Paul had received a warning from the Lord that the voyage would be a disaster. But we know that Paul and his shipmates were never out of God's care.
- 4.) **Prayer and Fasting, Believing God for a spiritual breakthrough.**
- 5.) **Prayer and Fasting when we are faced with making critical decisions and need an answer from heaven.**
- 6.) **Prayer and Fasting removes barriers in our communication with God.** This communication goes two ways.
 - A. God listening to you.
 - B. You listening to God.
- 7.) **Prayer and Fasting releases God's sovereignty and relinquishes our will to His will.** God may not answer your prayer the way you think He should, the point is that you spend time with Him and trust Him no matter the outcome.
- 8.) **Prayer and Fasting is never a way to try and manipulate God to get your way.** I must make a point here. How many times have we met a well-meaning brother or sister in the Lord with the mindset, "If I fast and pray long and hard enough God will give in and give me what I want"? Like a spoiled child throwing a temper tantrum to get what they want. Missing all of the opportunities to grow and mature as listed above. As believers, you and I need to be sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Fasting and prayer heightens that sensitivity.

Insights from God

How many times has the Spirit spoken to you or warned you? When the red flags go up in situations yet you ignore them, later to regret the decision you made and realize you disobeyed the warning signs. We make excuses when we have those promptings. "Oh, that's just me" or "I just do not like their personality" or "We just don't get along". All of these responses are logical and possible. However, it may be the Holy Spirit of God telling you that a situation is wrong or dangerous and not to follow through with your plan. Remember God sees our entire future. He not only knows where we will be tomorrow, but He knows where we will be ten, twenty and thirty years from now. I know that we live in a day that everyone wants to know the future. But the truth is that there is no one who can tell you what your future holds. No matter how well we plan or how smart we are, we will

never see that far into the future. At best, we take one day at a time and we do not even know what *that* day may hold.

I remember when I received the phone call that my father had died in the night of a heart attack. The news seemed unbelievable. No one planned it. Everyone was stunned. The only one who knew what was happening and not caught off guard was God. Since we will never see into the future like God sees, we must walk closely to the one who knows our future.

God is able to warn us of danger and upcoming problems if we will be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. The warning can mean, “Do not go that direction now, it’s too dangerous” or “It’s not My timing for you now.” God can, will and does protect us from many things if we will let Him. Sometimes we get ourselves into trouble from sheer disobedience to God’s words and warning.

Looking for Direction

Acts 27:11

¹¹ “Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul.”

In verse 11, the centurion is looking for direction. He has two choices with which he is faced. On one hand, there is Paul, who claims he has heard from God. You can imagine the great Apostle saying, “I am telling you, we are not to take this journey and if we do, there will be trouble.” On the other hand, you have the helmsman and the ship owner wanting to push ahead. I find it interesting that the word *helmsman* in the Greek means: *sailing master or shipmaster*. You can imagine the conversation the centurion is having with these men. They are telling him, “What do you mean danger ahead? We are sailors. We have sailed these seas hundreds of times. There is no problem and if something does happen, we will just work around it. Trust us. We know what we are doing and we have the experience to get the job done.” Is that not like our human nature to place our trust in our own ability to work everything out?

The other reason to go forward is they all wanted their money or their pay for the load of grain they were to deliver. Do you listen to the man who has heard from God or to the one motivated by greed? There will always be people around you trying to dissuade you, telling you that you did not hear from God. Stick to what God has told you. Do not let people come along side of you and tell you anything different.

Joshua was disappointed with the bad report that the ten spies gave, saying, “We cannot go over there. We are grasshoppers compared to them. The men are giants and fighters. Let’s just stay where we are at.” Num. 13:31-33, [paraphrase]. However, Joshua’s response was, “Let’s go take the land that God has given us.” The crowd did not want to go with him, but *he heard from God*. Many times the crowd is wrong and you stand alone. As a matter of fact, the crowd is often wrong.

Appendix

Lessons Learned in Life's Storms

Life Lesson learned from p. 21: I learned that God has His own plan for us. We may not like it or EVER understand it. We got our miracle when my husband's cancer was gone from his esophagus the first time, but we didn't get another one when it spread. In the healing school we were taught to not speak about the cancer or to acknowledge it. That to me was a mistake, because we never talked about the "what if's." There was a lot I wished we would have talked about.

Lessons Learned in Life Storm One: As I look back over what happened to my wife and I over that two year period, I can see God's hand in so many places. My wife and I have always been givers to God's work; we tithe and give gifts when we can. Through the time I was off work we only had 80% of my income and when my wife was off we had only 60% of her income and God still provided. It was tight financially but God brought us through. And today we have no debt from this time in our lives.

I could also see God's hand in helping us make the decisions for my wife's hospital care. I told the doctor that they would not be performing any kind of surgery on her and I trusted the care at U.W. hospital in Madison. I clearly knew we were to take her there.

I have always been a very independent and controlling woman. Through the months that I was sick, God taught me to depend more on Him and let Him be in control of my life. He taught me to rely more on Him every day which helped me to trust Him. My "go to" verse was Proverbs 3:5 "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.*" I had to let go and let Him be the one who guides and leads me. Something else that I really felt God was teaching me was to trust Him more. Although I do believe I have always trusted Him, I had a tendency to say it with my mouth, but really believing it with my heart wasn't always true. I had to really trust Him through my sickness, because it brought me to a place where He was the only one I had. Although I did have my loved ones there to help me, only He was going to heal me and make me whole again. I clung to the verse in Isaiah 40:31 "*But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*" I still hold onto this verse. My hope is in the Lord, then and now.

Lessons Learned in Life Storm Two: What we learned from this journey was it wasn't a journey of hate or blame or why us. It was a journey of peace, joy, faith and understanding. I never understood death. When I went to a funeral I always said "I know what you are feeling", but I didn't. Now I know the feeling and I can help someone else by faith through their journey. In the words of our daughter's daughter age eleven "Most people say "I am sorry this happened", but there is no need to. My mom may not be here physically or visibly, but we all know that God will call us up one by one, and then we can all live eternally forever." This is the journey that we took after the loss of our daughter, the mother of our only granddaughter. The question was "How do we help our granddaughter understand this journey?" Our daughter knew the Lord and that made our granddaughter's journey one of faith, peace and joy knowing her mother was with the

Father who gave her to us. This gave our granddaughter a strong faith. A quote from our granddaughter “From the passing of my mother, I learned at a very young age that God works in mysterious ways and He always knows what is best for us. I found out how strong I actually was. Life is going to bring us struggles and trials and that it most definitely is not going to be easy. But He is always by our side through whatever the world may bring us.”

Lessons Learned in Life Storm Three: *“In My Distress” Psalm 116:1 I love the Lord, for He heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy V2 Because He turned His ear to me; I will call on Him as long as I live. V3 The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow. V4 Then I called on the name of the Lord: “Lord, save me”! V5 The Lord is gracious and right; our God is full of compassion. V6 The Lord protects the unwary; when I was brought low, He saved me.*

This passage of scripture has become my life passage. Why? Because I am a living testimony of God being God in MY storm. November 12, 1993 is a day that I look back on with both sadness and joy. More so than that, I look at it now as the day the Lord delivered me from fear. But first, allow me to share the events of that day: I was and still am a worship pastor/minister of music. That day, I was working late, awaiting the arrival of a potential new worship musician I would be interviewing. Both Pastor and my husband, along with our 22 month old son had left for the day and I was alone in the building. A stranger off the street came into the building smelling of gasoline and asked to use the phone. I asked if he was having car trouble and he replied “I ran out of gas”. Since many who serve in churches are used to people coming in almost daily for help of some sort, I thought nothing of this....at first. But after a few minutes, I realized he was not there innocently. His intention was to harm me one of the worst ways possible; assault and rape. I screamed out for help but no one was there so as anyone can imagine, I began crying out to God “Lord, help my son again and that if this “it”, I was praying for the Lord to make me ready to see HIM. It was the single most terrifying event I had ever experienced. Paralyzing fear is unlike anything else anyone can go through. It is like time stands still and you are thrown into a pit that no one can rescue you from. I literally thought my life would end that Friday afternoon...but it didn't. Within minutes of the attack, my attacker turned his back to me and I seized the opportunity to run out of my office, down the stairs and out the front door of the church, as is. I was humiliated, but even more, terrified and running to find help. Since a family in our church at the time who lived directly across from the church building was either usually home or would tend to leave their back door open, I ran inside for safety. No one was home so I went in, shut and locked the door, then called my pastor's wife for help. She came, then the ambulance, followed by my husband. The hours that followed were tough. I guess tough is not a strong enough word, but they were. I spent the first few hours doing what they refer to as a “rape kit” at the hospital to get all possible samples of DNA in order to catch the assailant, then the next few hours trying to make sense of everything that just happened to me. For days, I could not be alone. There had to be people-lots of people around me at all times to make me feel safe. I could not sleep, I could barely eat and I literally was afraid to sleep, for fear that I would dream about the horrifying experience I had been through. I did not want to see the guy's face. I wanted to forget what he looked like. I wanted to wake up from this nightmare and find that it had never happened. I felt like something inside me died that day. I knew that

life as I knew it would never be the same. It is amazing though, how God has such a specific plan for each one of us. I can tell you that looking back not only at this experience, but at my entire life to date. I am more convinced than ever that the Lord orders every step we take when we are His. He is faithful.

I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior when I was four years old. Too young to understand? Absolutely not. I was raised in a Christian home with parents whose lives were spent more at church than anywhere else and I treasure that heritage. However, in the early years of my growing up, I struggled with one specific thing...fear. Now, the enemy knows what our weakness is and he does everything he can to capitalize on it. I mean, when you think about it, his main goal is to steal, kill and destroy and not just us, but God's ultimate plan for us. The Lord knew what I would become before He formed me in my mother's womb. He knew what things would drive me, what things I would be passionate about and what kind of personality I would have. Ironically, I was and still am a complete extravert, a very vibrant personality and confident. How crazy it is then that the one thing the enemy always tried to come against me with was fear-the opposite of courage, the opposite of faith, the opposite of confidence.

There were countless nights between the ages of 4 and 10 when Satan tormented me with night terrors, appearing to me in physical forms, to the point where my parents were losing sleep because I would scream out for help almost nightly and would remain awake for hours. There were many times they would call for the elders of the church, members of our family who were very in tune with the Holy Spirit and His power over darkness to come and pray over, my room and our entire house. At one point, God had spoken specifically to my Aunt Wanda to physically wash the walls of my bedroom. She said that the Lord spoke to her that if we would obey and do this, the spirits that were tormenting me would leave, much like when Jesus told the man at Bethesda to wash himself repeatedly. It was an act of obedience and faith that we heeded. God honored our faith that day and I was never tormented again in that way.

Now, fear presents itself in many forms. As a people pleaser, one tends to have insecurities; fear of rejection, fear of disappointing others, just to name a couple of examples. It even keeps us from letting the fullness of who God created us to out of "fear" that we will come across as boastful or showy. Since I am a vocalist/musician to the core, a creative soul, these type of insecurities or issues are quite common to my "tribe" if you will. Through my teen years, I struggled with several forms of insecurity, although most people who know me would probably say they never even knew it. This carried over into relationships I would have and even into my marriage. Let me just say, when God calls us, we might as well face it-we are targets. I do not say this with regret, but with confidence and now, with great joy. Since I had given myself to God and knew I was called into ministry, particularly as a musician and worship leader, the enemy knew right where he could TRY and stop me and what strings to pull-all of which had to do with the one thing I struggled with more than any other....fear. I was only 25 years old when I was assaulted and raped. The enemy knew God had plans for my life and he was trying to stop me from fulfilling God's divine destiny for me at as young of an age as possible. God was beginning to blossom my abilities on a higher level. He was beginning to truly define areas that I hadn't completely tapped into. The enemy jumped on that bandwagon as quickly as he could. As a result, when all of this transpired, I began questioning "why and

I searched myself to figure out why this would happen to me. Was I doing something wrong? Did I deserve this? All the crazy things that fly through our mind out of desperation and despair were overwhelming me. But I have come to know that the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous. I have also come to know that out of the most tragic of situations, God can turn things completely around and bring hope to even the most hopeless of experiences. It was important for me to face the situation immediately. I am a very verbal person. As a result, I have to talk things out. I needed to talk to the people who had so quickly surrounded me with support and love and I'm so glad I did. I hear reports of women who are assaulted and raped and never share it with anyone until years later when nothing can be done about the criminal process of it and until they are so buried under the weight of shame and fear that accompanies it that it radically alters the course of many women's lives in a negative way. Since I grew up in a household where I felt free to talk about things, particularly with my mom, this continued into my adult years. I was able to verbalize my pain in a safe circle of people whom I knew loved me. The attack on my life took place on a very busy Friday mid-afternoon. Typically at this point, I was preparing worship music for that Sunday's services. But this particular Sunday would be different-one that would change my life forever. I decided it was imperative that I face going back into the church building as quickly as possible, even though I was terrified to look at my office where the attack had happened. The gave me supernatural strength that Sunday morning to not only walk into the doors of the church, but to address our congregation and assure them that I was not going to "let the devil get the victory in this situation." I wasn't going anywhere. I knew as the words were coming out of my mouth the Holy Spirit had miraculously spoken through me. It couldn't have been me. I was scared to death, weak from lack of sleep and food and my face was black and blue from the beating. The Holy Spirit WAS present with me. That morning, our wonderful pastor, Burliss Parker shared with our church that we would not be having the typical service that day, but that we as a church would go around and pray over every areas and aspect of ministry that took place in our church building. He decreed and declared God's protection over our lives and peace over our minds. The last place we went was up to my office on the third floor. At that point I was extremely afraid, but I went on. I remember every detail of this event. He tore the police tape off the doorway of my office and went in. He stood behind my desk where everything was still lying in disarray. He cast the spirit of fear out of that room. He spoke to the spirit of fear that had come against me. He commanded the enemy to take his hands off my life and never return. He then pointed his finger at me and spoke life back into me, declaring that I belonged to Jesus and His protection was on my life.

There are so many details surrounding the specifics of this event that it would take hours for me to convey how everything in my life came together that day in that moment. What I will say, is that the Holy Spirit miraculously filled me with confidence-a confidence that the enemy would never rise up against me again; a confidence that what the enemy meant to destroy me with, God would use for His glory for years to come. Through a series of events with the most loving, caring detectives anyone could be assigned to, I was then led through the process of the attacker being caught. God directed every step of the process. The guy who did this horrible criminal act began calling the church on my birthday-almost three months after the initial assault and rape. I answered the phone, ran to my pastor's office to tell him that this guy was actually on the phone. They put a trace on the calls and

were to apprehend him the very next day. Because we had done the rape kit and the Lord had helped me remember details such as exactly what he looked like and what he was wearing the day of the attack, the police were able to locate, arrest and arraign him within a week. Within a few months, the trial was over and he was put in prison for many years and is still incarcerated.

What is even more amazing is that through this experience, I no longer struggle with fear. Something in me broke that day that Pastor Burliss prayed over me. I made a decision that day to not let this tragedy overtake me. I belonged to God I have been His child and I knew He loves me. It was either get bitter or better; be fearful or fearless. I chose the latter. Through this experience, I have stopped holding myself back-or should I say, I have stopped holding back the God inside me. I sing differently. I write/compose differently. I communicate differently. Actually, I am what I originally was born to be as a child-the optimistic, joyful,(sometimes silly) vivacious girl that God put those things in from the beginning. It's all for His glory anyway. Why would I want to hold back God's glory from people? When they see the power of God, they believe. I want all people to believe. I want them to know this God that I know walks with us, and leads and directs us. Paul said it best *"Am I still trying to please men or am I trying to please God? If I were trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."* It is so important that we know that nothing else matters but getting others to Jesus and our destiny in Christ. It is important to be aware that Satan is basically doing his job when he tries to steal, kill and destroy everything God intends for good in our lives. It is important for us to know that when we really think about it. It's almost laughable that the enemy even thinks he has power over us when we belong to Jesus. It is already God-breathed in us to reach the destiny He laid out for us. We are literally the only ones who can halt that. The devil has no power over us. We can be free of the shadows. What the enemy intended to finish me off with, the Lord provided me with a new beginning. I am fear-free and stronger and more aware of God's presence in my life than ever before. I am seeing from the start of my life to this point in my life that each opposition is an opportunity for me to trust Him. Each attack or obstacle is a miracle in waiting. I no longer look over my shoulder for fear that this would ever happen to me again. I am confident that He who began good work in me is faithful to complete it! Remember when the disciples were in the boat and the storm came and they were afraid? Where was Jesus? He was sleeping. He was at peace because He is peace. He truly is God of the storm. He is my peace because He is peace. He can be peace to you-any of you who are going through any kind of storm. There is a line from a current worship song that I am absolutely in love with that says this: *the waves and winds still know His name.*" (From the song "On the Throne" by Kari Jobe.)

The opportunities I have had so far to share how God brought me out of this terrifying experience have been overwhelming. I look for every opportunity to joyfully share what God has done for me as a result of something that could have overtaken me but didn't. Oh yes and ask me some time about the forgiveness part of this. Perhaps that excerpt will be in my own book still to be written. When we can come face to face with the tragedy then learn to literally forgive the cause of it, we begin seeing others as souls, not just humans. God literally has miraculously given me a concern for the person who did this to me. But I'm choosing to look at my life as "I'm up for anything as long as it's in HIS plan." If it took this to fulfill God's plan for me or it took this reach someone for Christ, then I'm

good with that. God created us to handle certain things. He gifted us with the ability to carry certain thing. He knew from February 21, 1968 to November 12, 1993 what it would take for me to be able to go through this experience. He knew from November 12, 1993 to this particular day in June of 2015 what healing would take place and still is taking place in my life as a result. He is still working. His is continually saying “Peace. Be still. I am in control.” And believe me, He is. My life song became and still is: “I love the Lord He heard my cry And pitied every groan ‘Long as I live And troubles rise I’ll hasten to His throne” Richard Smallwood (based upon Psalm 116) I am forever grateful for still being here to share this with all of you. I pray the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus and I pray that you will know this God of the storm so well that next time a storm comes, you will be the one sound asleep in the bottom of the boat.

“So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive” (Acts 27:15). The meaning here is that the storm was so powerful they surrendered control of the ship to the storm. This book has been in the making for over twenty years. I have observed and experienced the storms of life, the unplanned and unexpected changes that blow into our lives and change the direction we were going. Everyone experiences storms in their lives. Storms can be caused by your own conduct or by the actions of others. Storms can be a satanic attack or just the events of life. It is difficult to see God’s plans in the storm. However, if He has a job for us to accomplish for Him, He will bring the circumstances into our lives to take us where He wants us. “For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve” (Acts 27:23). What a wonderful promise! We do not go through the storms of life alone! He is always with us. Remember the storms of life are never bigger than the God we serve!



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