

## STORMS

There are a lot of storms in the Bible. Storms that flood the earth, aka Noah, winds that part the sea, aka Exodus, and even God in the whirlwind speaking to a distraught Job. And there are a lot of stormy situations. Scary confrontations, poisonous snakes, dying children, the Terror of the LORD. One of the most comforting verses in the Bible, at least for me, is Psalm 91:15, where the psalmist quotes the LORD saying, "I will be with them in trouble." While it never feels very good to be "in trouble," I can relax knowing that being in trouble doesn't mean I'm in trouble with God. Righteous people, common ordinary people, get into storms.

And second, righteous people have God in the midst of the storms with them. Even though the winds are gusting, the rain is pouring, the storms are tearing us apart, even though we are in the midst of a whirlwind, God is there.

God is there.

It is with a special delight that I present these Rest Stop devotionals to you. This month features writings from Hesston College students from the Faith and Discipleship class. These students bring a fresh creativity and passion for God. May you be blessed by their gifts.

### **REST STOP #1: Shipwrecked with Paul**

By Rachel Albrecht

**Read Acts 27:13-26 before the essay below.**

Storms. Many times they start out as a gentle wind and then, before you know it, they come down with hurricane force. Just like the ship sailing in Acts 27, we can be caught in those storms without the option of fighting them off. So how do we survive these events? It's a question plaguing many people in our world today. It's the reason there are so many self-help books and psychologist-hosted television shows today. People do not want to get caught in a storm with no way out. They want to be prepared to handle the problem and then move on with their seemingly idyllic life. Nobody likes storms. Nobody likes ... being out of control.

But, maybe the storm is just what we need.

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (NIV Study Bible).*

The writer here tells us that the testing of our faith (AKA storms) develops perseverance, which must finish its work in us to make us complete. This means that those storms we try so hard to avoid are really the times when we are being drawn closer to God and becoming more spiritually mature in the meantime. Without those storms we would live pretty boring lives and would probably have a severe lack of knowledge about the things of life.

Look back at the passage in Acts. Notice the stages the sailors went through in fighting off the storm. First they changed their sails so that the storm would drive them along. Then they tried to secure the lifeboat and lowered the sea anchor because they were afraid of running aground on sandbars. Next, after taking a brutal battering, they started throwing the ship's tackle and cargo overboard. When the storm continued to rage on, they finally gave up all sense of being saved. And what happened next? God came through! When they were at their lowest, most desperate state, God rescued them with a second chance. Even when they had not remained true to the advice Paul had given, God remained faithful.

It's the same way in our lives. I believe that it's at that point when we are at our lowest state,

when we've exhausted all our other hopes of rescuing ourselves, that God is at his highest. In the words of Hannah Whitall Smith, "When all else is gone, God is left and nothing changes Him." When God is in the driver's seat, there's no need to worry; He's got a pretty good driving record. Look at Luke 8:24. Who was the only one able to calm the storm? Jesus was! Who is the only one who can sustain us in the midst of trials and temptations? Jesus is! With this mindset, let us conclude this time by making Proverbs 3:5-6 our own personal prayer.

*I will trust in the Lord with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding; in all my ways I will acknowledge him, and he will make my paths straight!* (Adapted from NIV Study Bible).

## **REST STOP #2: Shipwrecked, Take 2**

by Karissa Miller

Read this version of Acts 27:1-25 and imagine yourself as the writer. Take on the writer's feelings and words as your own.

It's been three days of no food and no sleep and now I have to deal with this. This crazy man thinks he knows what's going on in this horrible storm. Just three days ago I got on this boat to go to Phoenix in search of a new life. I just wanted to go and make a new life for myself. And now I'm stuck in this. There happened to be some prisoners onboard this boat—one of them a seeming lunatic—and after we started out, this idiot told us that our voyage was going to be disastrous to the boat, the cargo, and our lives. Of course we all ignored him. I forgot about what he had said until these winds began. It started as a gentle south wind. It eventually grew into this great wind, like the wind of a hurricane.

A "northeaster" is what they call it. We're trying everything to hold our boat together. We have been running around trying to do whatever we can to keep from being killed in this storm. The winds have been unbelievable; like nothing I've ever seen before. It has been dark day in and day out for the past three days. You can't even see the stars. Not that you can even focus long enough to see anything. The waters are so rough you can barely stand up. Sleep is impossible. Everyone has pretty much given up hope. It's easier that way, easier to just accept what is coming for you.

But just now, this prisoner speaks up again. He tells us that we should have listened to him. But really, it'll be okay, he says. The boat will be destroyed, but we will all be okay. He says an angel of his God told him not to be afraid; we must go through these trials but all of our lives will be spared. Does he actually expect us to believe him? These winds are so great and the waves are enormous. There is no way we can expect to be saved. It just isn't possible.

Or is it? This idiot, this prophet man who talks about Jesus all the time—he was right before. Who is this angel that spoke to him? Is he just crazy or does he really speak the truth? Is it realistic to believe that a God would care enough to save us on this boat?

Or is it really over? Are we really doomed?

*Pause for silent meditation.*

God did save those on the boat. Just like the angel told Paul, only the boat was destroyed. Every single person came away from the storm unharmed. God cares for his children in ways that are unexplainable. When we are in the middle of a storm, it seems impossible. But it's not.

God is in control of every situation and if we are faithful, he will rescue us from the storm... in his time. We must have faith and know that God will do as he promises. What are the storms in your life that you are trying to control? The ones that make you do everything in your power to "fix?" Pray that God will help you to surrender control in these situations. Ask God to help you realize that you cannot make the storm go away, but he can. Believe that the LORD will and accept that his timing may be different than yours. Enjoy the freedom that comes through surrendering these things to your Lord.

### **REST STOP #3: Heart of the Storm**

By Darnell Neff

Read the following slowly, putting yourself into the story.

You are walking along a very long road. You have been walking for a very long time, so long that you cannot quite remember why you are walking. Ahead, dark clouds are forming on the horizon, churning over the sky, coming your direction. They will reach you soon, you realize, and as you look at the storm, you understand what it is.

Very soon it is upon you, stinging cold droplets pelting your body. You have nothing to shield yourself with, so you wrap your arms around your body and continue trudging on. As you go you ask yourself time and time again why you are walking, why you must be so miserable in the rain. Surely if someone driving along the road were to pick you up, everything would be better, but no one does. The occasional car flies on past, sometimes drenching you with spraying water. After a time, you stop even trying to flag down the cars and merely continue walking, shivering in the cold.

Then up ahead, gleaming against the dark sky, you see a window. It is small and unimpressive, and its light is only a soft yellow, yet it is the most glorious thing you have ever seen. Scarcely daring to hope, you stagger forward at a faster rate, moving toward the window. It means something to you, you realize, like a soft memory of a loved one or a special place, yet it is also somehow unfamiliar.

When you reach the door you begin to panic. Is anyone home? Is the door locked? It is heavy and made of a dark wood; there is no knocker or doorbell, and the beating of the storm will drown out any noise that you make. For a long time you stand before the door, the rain soaking through your clothing, as you worry.

Eventually you slowly raise a hand, touching the doorknob. It turns easily in your grip and the door opens soundlessly. You almost fall inside and immediately warmth bathes you. The door shuts quickly, and when it does, the sounds of the storm die away. Inside it is friendly, unlike any home you have seen before and yet strangely like home. Though you have become warm, you are still extremely wet, and the water does not evaporate. Distressed by this, you begin to move about.

It is then that you see the man. He is standing a short distance away, and when you see him, all sound dies on your lips. At once he seems old and young, his face reminding you of someone very dear to you. His eyes are large and understanding, and when you look at him, he smiles warmly. For a while you can forget that you are soaked, but then a flash of lightning from outside brings it all back and you shiver.

Gently he speaks to you, leading you to a chair. His words slide through your mind warmly

and gently. He speaks of things that you know, the people you have come from. It is as if he knows your most desperate wishes and dreams, and soon you find yourself responding easily. He also speaks of the storm, and of the reason that you are walking along the road. As he speaks, you remember why you are walking, and some of the strength returns to your limbs. During the conversation he gives you a mug of steaming liquid. It is the best thing you have ever tasted.

But eventually you realize that it is time to go. You love being here more than anything else, yet there is still a long way to go. The storm continues to thunder outside, not entirely muted even by this sturdy house. When you mention this, the stranger only smiles sadly. He has another, larger house, he tells you, one that is a long ways distant. Perhaps, he offers, when you arrive at your destination you can stay with him again.

Now that it is time to go, you find it very difficult to leave. Twice you nearly stop and run back. As you near the door, the storm rumbles even louder, lightning crashing more than even before. Then when you open the door, the cold invades your bones again. Glancing back, you see the man smile and wave; you weakly smile back. Taking a deep breath, you plunge back into the storm.

It is worse than before. Soon you have difficulty even remembering how it feels to be warm. You thought you were wet before, but now you wish you were as dry as that. The storm rages around you, and at times you cannot even see the road. Are you going in the right direction? Are you even moving at all? You cannot tell, yet you keep moving forward.

Perhaps, you think, you should go back. The storm is too violent, and you do not want to continue the journey. It may calm down later, after all. But even then you wonder if the house ever existed. Was it only something you invented, desperate in the storm? Gritting your teeth you struggle on, but the howling wind keeps you from making any progress and you give up, standing still on the road.

As your head hangs, however, you glance back. Twinkling in the distance, the lights of the home are still glowing. They seem so far away. Have you really come this far? It had seemed like you were lost, making no progress, and yet you have put much of the road behind you.

After looking for a long moment, you turn back. Perhaps you can smile, thinking of the kind man and the warm drink. Or perhaps you are too chilled, bitterly traveling onward. But either way, you move toward the heart of the storm.

#### **REST STOP #4: A Reader's Theatre**

The following reader's theatre, written for four readers, can be used in a worship setting to help participants experience both the storm and God's care in the midst of the storm. All the sentences come from scripture. The following scriptures were used:

- Genesis 1:1-3
- Exodus 14:21-22
- Jeremiah 23:19
- Acts 2:1-4
- Job 38:1-2
- Jeremiah 4:11-13
- 2 Kings 2:1-12
- Matthew 14:22-33

*(Wind noise in the background for this — blowing all during this reading — I see the 4 readers all standing scattered up on the stage — not in order of when they speak)*

*(You may want Reader 2 to always say her/his line in a whisper)*

**Reader 1:** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the surface of the waters.

**Reader 2:** The Lord answered from out of the whirlwind...

**Reader 3:** Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided.

**Reader 2:** The Lord answered from out of the whirlwind...

**Reader 4:** At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse—a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them. Look! He comes up like clouds, his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles— woe to us, for we are ruined!

**Reader 2:** The Lord answered from out of the whirlwind...

**Reader 1:** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

**Reader 2:** The Lord answered from out of the whirlwind...

**Reader 3:** As Elijah and Elisha continued walking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.

**Reader 2:** The Lord answered from out of the whirlwind...

**Reader 4:** Behold, the storm of the Lord! God's wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked.

**Reader 2:** The Lord answered from out of the whirlwind...

**Reader 1:** Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

**Reader 2:** The Lord answered from out of the whirlwind...

**Reader 3:** Talk about a whirlwind - I feel like my life is in chaos right now

*Now other participants may call out fears...using only a word or a phrase.*

**Reader 4:** My mind is in a whirlwind. I have so many questions and doubts of my own.

*Now other participants may call out doubts and worries...only a word or a phrase.*

**Reader 1:** Boy what a whirlwind just to be here—in this place.

*Now others may call out prayer requests...only a word or phrase.*

**Reader 2:** Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

**Reader 1:** Lord, save us.

**Reader 3:** Lord, save us.

**Reader 4:** Lord, save us.

**Reader 1:** Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. (*stop wind noise here*) And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

**Reader 2:** The Lord will answer from out of the whirlwind...