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—DR. MARK RUTLAND

CULTIVATING RESILIENCE
IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

STANDING
STRONG
IN THE
STORM

GREG DAVIS

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT *STANDING STRONG IN THE STORM*

Every leader experiences storms. Therefore, the question isn't if you'll encounter rough waters but what you'll do in the midst of those trials. Greg Davis has penned an authentic and powerful account of his family's journey—it will inspire, affirm, and challenge you.

—Sam Chand

Leadership Consultant and Author of *Leadership Pain*

Greg Davis's new book is a powerful departure from the flood of smug, saccharine pronouncements that God's people will never endure storms—but it is not gloomy and hopeless. I recommend *Standing Strong in the Storm* because this redemptive mixture of tough reality and triumphant faith is an important read for modern believers.

—Dr. Mark Rutland

Executive Director of the National Institute of Christian Leadership

Greg Davis is well-acquainted with navigating adversity. His new book, *Standing Strong in the Storm*, is an inspiring and encouraging guidebook on how you, too, can face the storms of life and come out victorious on the other side.

—Todd Starnes

Author and Nationally Syndicated Radio Host

Leaders will experience unexpected storms that put their leadership resiliency to the test. The good news is that God does not expect us to go through them alone. He promised to walk with us “through the valley of the shadow of death.” Greg Davis draws from his personal experiences and powerful scriptural principles to help you stand strong in your storm.

—Doug Clay

General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God

I have known Greg Davis for many years. *Standing Strong in the Storm* is a treasure trove of fresh insights from God's Word and a valuable resource to empower people to thrive in times of trouble. This book is written in a manner that will help you *experience* the truths of the Bible instead of just reading them.

—Dr. Ron McManus
Consultant and President, Legacy Transition Group

With all the setbacks we face in the world these days, we need more trusted voices who can speak to the realities of pain and suffering from a perspective of real hope. Greg Davis has been a lifelong friend. I'm overjoyed that you now get to experience for the first time what I have known for years. This is a book everyone should read.

—Reggie Dabbs
International Communicator, Pastor, Public School Speaker

Pastor Greg Davis delivers the straight truth about navigating the inevitable storms of life. That truth comes from a deep well of personal experience and the Scriptures. Everyone will face storms. We will not all face them grounded in faith-filled purpose. But we can. Greg Davis shows the way in *Standing Strong in the Storm*.

—Travis Johnson
Lead Pastor, Pathway Church
Executive Director, People for Care & Learning

It is rare to encounter a story as compelling or a storyteller as real as Greg Davis. Then again, it is rare to meet someone who has faced more adversity than Greg yet has come out on the other side still trusting and still hoping. This book doesn't just describe the darkness of difficulty; it reveals the relentlessness of God's gracious light that never stops pursuing us.

—John Driver
Writer, Minister, Coauthor of
*Not So Black and White: An Invitation to Honest
Conversations About Race and Faith*

Practical but powerful! Personal yet Biblical! While many pastors are experts in exegeting a text, Pastor Greg Davis is also an “expert example” of the text. I’ve been privileged to watch him over the past two decades grow a congregation while navigating an unimaginable number of personal storms in life. Now, on the other side of many of those storms, Pastor Davis shares spiritual insight into overcoming life’s most difficult challenges. After the past couple of years of a worldwide pandemic storm, this book is a must-read for anyone who desires peace and victory. How do you maintain faith when times are so frustrating? Against the backdrop of Jesus walking on water during an intense storm, Pastor Davis’s book offers hope and skills to all.

—Dr. Bartholomew Orr

Senior Pastor, Brown Missionary Baptist Church
Southaven, Mississippi

Epic Bible stories have a tendency to remain just that—“Epic”—without really informing, shaping, or defining our perspective of God and His power in our daily lives. In *Standing Strong in the Storm*, Greg Davis takes some of the most epic stories and encounters with Jesus and brings to light incredibly practical principles that can grow our faith in times of trouble.

It’s one thing to write a book about principles that you’ve learned cognitively or experienced secondhand. However, I’ve known Greg and Nancy Davis for over 25 years, and I’ve watched from a distance the struggles described in this book. I can say without any hesitation that the principles outlined in *Standing Strong in the Storm* have been lived out in front of their congregation, family, and friends. I appreciate the vulnerability of Greg’s personal story as well as the keen Biblical insight into the theology of suffering and perseverance—and I know you will too.

—Patrick Conrad

Lead Pastor, Compel Church
Desoto County, Mississippi

“Strength can only be increased by overcoming resistance!” It is my great joy to recommend *Standing Strong in the Storm*, written by my friend and mentor, Pastor Greg Davis. I pray that you will be stirred as you hear the cry and the passion of his heart to see a generation move from fear to faith. Each

chapter will challenge you and inspire you to embrace every season in your life and to walk in the fullness of God's destiny for you. As Pastor Greg takes you on his journey of overcoming his own personal storms to accepting and fulfilling the purpose of God in his life, I hope that you will take his practical wisdom and insight and apply it to your own storms—allowing a limitless God to transform your limitations into His masterpiece.

—Josh Wilbanks

Pastor, Author, and Evangelist

Greg Davis challenges us to look at the story of Jesus walking on water from a new perspective. This book will give you hope and strength to weather your storms—and to find victory in the midst of them!

—Martijn van Tilborgh

Strategic Marketing Architect and Consultant

Sanford, Florida

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IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

**STANDING
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GREG DAVIS



ARROWS &
STONES

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This book is dedicated to my favorite people on the planet—Nancy, my amazing wife and sweetheart since second grade and our incredible children, Colton and Anna Grace! I am so proud of all of you for how you have persevered through so many life-threatening health issues over the years. Like the apostle Paul, you have fought the good fight and kept the faith in the face of unimaginable adversity. And you have trusted the Lord and allowed Him to create in you a Christ-like character that inspires other people. As you know, words are my “thing,”—but they fall short in expressing how much I love and appreciate you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cornerstone Church—One of the most important principles I have learned is that we are not designed to navigate the storms of life alone. God has created human beings with a genuine need for fellowship, relationships, and mutual encouragement. Roughly 70 percent of the storms our family has faced have occurred while I have been pastoring Cornerstone Church in Southaven, Mississippi.

Cornerstone is an incredible family of believers that have prayed for us, supported us, and encouraged us in the good times and in times of trouble. It would be hard to imagine what it would have been like to endure such seasons of adversity without the collective strength of such a wonderful church. God has used Cornerstone to provide that same love and encouragement for thousands of people through the years.

Ron McManus—We all need mentors, and Ron McManus has been a significant mentor in my life for the past eleven years. He has helped me with church growth strategies but even more in the area of personal growth and development. His encouragement and advice helped to accelerate this book project at a time when it was not moving forward

at an acceptable pace. He introduced me to the incredible team at Four Rivers Media, and that changed everything!

Four Rivers Media—Words fall short of expressing my appreciation to Martijn van Tilborgh and the other amazing people at Four Rivers Media. Within a few short days of my introduction, I was surrounded by an entire team of people who were intent on encouraging and advising me with the most effective strategies to get my first project published far sooner than I expected.

My deep appreciation goes to John Schondelmayer, Caroline Edwards, Matt Green, Debbie Chand, the design team and all the other wonderful people at Four Rivers Media.

CHAPTER 1

WISHING FOR A NIGHTMARE

I was startled and awakened by a clap of thunder that sounded like it was right on top of me! The first sensation I can remember was the huge raindrops pelting my back through the heavy quilt my father had thrown over me as he carried me towards the entrance to the storm cellar in the backyard. My dad flung open the storm cellar door, and my mom, who was carrying my three-year-old brother, made her way down into the shelter. The next sound I heard was my mother's voice crying out for help. She had slipped and fallen down the steps.

The storm shelter had not been properly sealed, and almost two feet of water had seeped in. Fortunately, the water cushioned my mom's fall and prevented any injury to her or my brother. With the shelter flooded, we hurried back into the house to ride out the storm. The memory of this chaotic event was seared into my eight-year-old brain and remains firmly embedded to this day. My childhood was dotted with memories of storms that prompted my family to seek shelter.

Most people have a storm story to tell; some are tragic—others, not so much. Storms have held a certain fascination for people since the beginning. Watching the elements of nature collide in combat over the

landscape produces feelings of awe as we witness such power. Storms also remind us that there is much about life over which we have no control. The word “storm” is defined as “a violent disturbance in [the normal conditions of] the atmosphere.”¹ This is why storm is used in a figurative sense to describe unexpected disturbances in the normal conditions of our lives. These *disturbances* or times of crisis can come in many different forms. And they can cause serious problems in our physical health, our family relationships, our careers, our finances, and—many times—our mental, emotional and spiritual well-being.

We all experience storms in life, and the main focus of this book is to encourage and equip people to persevere through seasons of adversity and come out stronger on the other side. The story above alludes to one of my earliest experiences with a weather-related storm. Fast-forward twenty years, and I found myself facing another type of storm that I couldn’t control. This time, it would be the first of many that were to follow.

WHEN THE STORM STRIKES

I woke up on my 29th birthday on a typically uncomfortable hospital room couch. At that moment, I realized that everything I had hoped was just an awful nightmare was, in fact, reality. About twenty-four hours earlier, my wife, Nancy, and I had experienced the most thrilling moment of our lives. After eight years of praying and waiting, our battle with infertility ended with the birth of our son, Colton. The ecstasy of finally being able to hold our firstborn was indescribable. Life was perfect! And it stayed that way—for about two hours.

1 “The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English,” *Encyclopedia*, 21 Jun. 2022, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/earth-and-environment/atmosphere-and-weather/weather-and-climate-terms-and-concepts/storm>.

Colton was taken to the nursery to allow Nancy some time to rest and recover from the labor and C-section. After a couple of hours, I went down the hall to the nursery to bring him back to our room, only to find that he was not there! I kept looking through the window, trying to read the name tags on the little clear bassinets, but none of them had his name attached. Confused, I started tapping on the window to get the attention of one of the nurses. She came out, and when I asked where Colton was, she said, "Hasn't anyone notified you?" I said, "Notified me about what? Where is my son?" That's when she informed me that Colton had been rushed to the neonatal intensive care unit. When I asked why, she said the doctors would have to explain.

As I hurried downstairs, my mind raced with questions, and fear began to fill my heart. My first glimpse of Colton in the NICU is seared into my memory. He was lying in a hospital bassinet connected to life support by a mass of wires and tubes. When I asked his nurse what was wrong, her answer felt like a punch in my stomach. "I'm so sorry, but it is evident that your son has been born with significant heart defects. He will definitely need heart surgery and possibly a heart transplant."

After all the years of praying and waiting, how could this be possible?

I could not believe what I was hearing. After all the years of praying and waiting, how could this be possible? I kept thinking that there must be some mistake. I was informed that an urgent call had been placed to a pediatric cardiologist who was on his way to

examine Colton. Within the next few hours, he would be transported to Le Bonheur Children's Hospital. At this point, my memory becomes a bit hazy, probably because I was in a daze of devastation. I remember shuffling out into the hallway, leaning back against the yellow subway-tiled walls and sliding down onto the floor in a pool of tears, despair, and disbelief.

I don't really remember how long I sat there, but at some point, I gathered myself enough to realize that I had to go drop this bombshell on my wife. I made my way back up to the room and began to try to relay the information. But I couldn't. I'm not exactly sure what was happening to me at that point, but I literally could not speak. I remember trying to form the words, but they wouldn't come out. The words were there in my mind, but when I tried to speak them, what came out was unintelligible. I would try to talk, realize that I wasn't making any sense, shake my head, and then try again.

Nancy was already crying even though she didn't know exactly why. She knew that I had learned something that had devastated me so completely that I had lost the ability to do what I do best—communicate. I don't know if I was on the verge of a mental/emotional breakdown, but it was at least five minutes before I regained enough control of myself to convey what I had been told. Our perfect world had been shattered in less than two hours, and along with it, our vision of the future. We cried and prayed with each other and with our family that had gathered for this momentous day—not knowing just how momentous it would turn out to be.

A SPIRITUAL STORM

This early in the process, we were still in shock and denial that it could even be happening. How could God allow this? Was it not

enough that we had struggled so long to even conceive a child, and now this? It was at that point that the spiritual warfare aspect of our situation intensified. It began with a memory of something that had happened before I even knew there was a problem. It started when I had approached the viewing window of the nursery to bring Colton back to the room.

As I walked up to the window, I noticed a man standing there, smiling wide and beaming with pride as he gazed through the glass at his healthy newborn son. Then I noticed something. The air around this man carried the distinct odor of marijuana—fresh. He had no doubt been smoking pot sometime that morning either before, during, or after his son's birth. The devil began to whisper in my ear, *This is what you get for serving God? You have answered the call to ministry and devoted your life to serving God and others, and your son is going to die! This man doesn't serve your God, and his son is healthy!*

I knew immediately that these thoughts were an attack of the enemy, but in my mind and emotions, the questions seemed valid. Why would God allow this to happen? No doubt, as you are reading this part of our story, you remember times in your own life when you've had similar questions. We all experience things in life that don't make sense to us and tempt us to ask why. As our story unfolds, you will have the opportunity to examine your own unanswered questions and develop a strategy to deal with them in an effective and healthy way.

Later that afternoon, the pediatric cardiologist came into our room and gave us a report. He informed us that Colton had been born not just with one but with multiple life-threatening heart defects. The combination of defects meant that this would not be a one-time surgical procedure or a simple repair. The worst case scenario was that our

son would not survive. One of the nurses had indicated that she was hopeful that Colton would survive being transported by ambulance to the local children's hospital. I guess she was trying to be encouraging, but the fact that his short-term survival was even in question was the exclamation point on an already devastating day.

According to the doctors, the best-case scenario might possibly allow Colton to grow into adulthood. But at that point, the prognosis for a normal life seemed unlikely. In any case, Colton would have to endure multiple heart surgeries and numerous other heart-related procedures. We were told that he would undergo his first heart surgery just a few days later. It would not correct his issues, but it would hopefully keep him alive long enough to undergo a much more complex surgical correction about a year later.

Our minds were swirling with questions that any parent would have in this circumstance. *If Colton survives, what will be his quality of life? Is it possible for him to have a normal life span? What about being active and having a normal lifestyle?* Of course, the doctors let us know that it was too early to accurately answer these questions, but the general prognosis they gave was less than encouraging. A dark cloud enveloped my mind, and the enemy of my soul began, once again, to whisper in my ear: *The happy future you envisioned is gone. Get used to it because the darkness and despair that you are drowning in right now is your new normal. Your God has failed you!*

Deep down, I wondered if all the joy had just been sucked out of our future.

I knew this was the voice of Satan, and I knew it was spiritual warfare. But deep down, I did wonder if all the joy had just been sucked out of our future. It was hard to imagine ever laughing again, and for those who know me, life without laughter would be like hell on earth. Would there actually be good days ahead for our family? In the emotional darkness of that time, any positive expectation or hope for the future seemed to be slipping away.

A WORD FROM GOD

In those moments, just after I woke up on my birthday and realized that the previous twenty-four hours were not just a nightmare, I did the only thing I knew to do. I poured my heart out to the Lord in prayer quietly, so I wouldn't disturb Nancy who had finally drifted off to sleep after the emotional hurricane of Colton's birth day. As I reached for my Bible, it fell open to Psalm 9:1. I am typically not a "pick and poke" Bible verse person, but this time was definitely God-directed. Study of the ancient Hebrew reveals that Psalm 9 is a psalm of David written to the tune of "The Death of a Son." The first line of the psalm says, "I will praise you, O Lord, with my whole heart" (NKJV). That's when it happened.

The Holy Spirit's voice came piercing through the darkness of that hour like a lightning bolt, and I heard God speaking in my spirit, *Your son will stand in my presence and praise me with a "whole" heart*. At that moment, I knew that Colton's heart would be made whole. The darkness lifted, and somehow, I felt assured that no matter what we had to face in the future, Colton was going to be alright! This was one of many times in our lives that we have experienced the tangible sense of what Philippians 4:7 describes as "peace that surpasses all understanding" (author paraphrase). This basically refers to a supernatural

peace from God that doesn't make any sense—in light of our circumstances. As I look back to those moments of prayer and seeking the Lord, my heart is filled with gratitude for the overwhelming sense of peace that God imparted to me through his Word. I don't know how we would have survived without that word from the Lord in the middle of the worst storm we had ever faced—up to that time.

A CHALLENGING PATH

Colton was transported to the local children's hospital and underwent his first heart surgery when he was seven days old. He spent the first three weeks of his life in the hospital—mostly in the ICU. So, our initiation as parents was spent in a fog of emotion and a flurry of beeps, bells, and alarms from all the machines that were keeping Colton alive and stable until his tiny little body could recover from all the trauma and stress of the surgery. Then, the day finally came when we celebrated the miraculous privilege of bringing our son home for the first time!

It was a day of great celebration mixed with a measure of anxiety. Most new parents experience a bit of apprehension at the realization that this new little life is 100 percent dependent on them for survival. The weight of that realization was heavier for us because of Colton's condition. At first, we were terrified that we might make some kind of a rookie mistake that would harm him in some way. But as the days passed, we settled into our new life as parents and relished every moment with our little miracle boy.

The next sixteen months were relatively normal for our family although we knew that the first surgery was actually a provisional procedure that was intended only to buy him some time so that he could grow and become stronger. Therefore, when I say those months were

relatively normal, I mean the day-to-day routine was fairly normal with the exception that every moment of that time, we knew another more complex and dangerous surgery was in our future. We had been informed that the target time for that surgery would be sometime before Colton reached his second birthday. Even with his issues, he grew and thrived in his first year of life. And we lived each day in the confirmation that all the things that Satan had whispered in my ear the day that Colton was born were lies. Our lives were filled with joy and laughter as we watched our little boy grow.

A RIVER OF QUESTIONS

The time for his next surgery came when he was just seventeen months old. That operation was an extremely complex and relatively new procedure that had been developed to address the unique combination of issues in Colton's heart. Any parent who has ever had to watch their child be wheeled away into surgery knows the torrent of emotions that comes in that moment. You basically stand there feeling totally helpless to alleviate the suffering and pain that you know your child is going to experience. Questions flow like a raging river: *Why? Why does my innocent little child have to endure this pain while other children are spared? Did I do something to cause this? Am I being punished somehow? How could God allow this? What possible purpose could this suffering serve?* The questions are endless, and the answers are often elusive. But deep down, we knew that we didn't do anything to cause Colton's heart defects.

Our faith answered some of the questions, and logic answered others. But the fact is that anyone who goes through times like this will be faced with a choice of how to live with all the questions that remain *unanswered*. At the end of all the emotional turmoil and

mental gymnastics, you basically find yourself with two choices—get stuck in your unanswered questions, or move forward in spite of them. The option to quit can be very tempting when you can't understand why God would allow all of this pain and suffering in your life. Many times, we have found ourselves at that crossroads of temptation to give up and afterwards to deal with feelings of guilt over the doubts that we battled.

Through it all, I have come to believe that the greatest expression of faith in God is to keep moving forward when you can't comprehend the path you're walking. In those days, I made up my mind that when I don't understand—I'll still stand! We can get bitter, or we can get better. Nothing good ever comes from choosing the former. Though we didn't fully understand it back then, we would be forced to choose between those pathways many more times. Colton's second heart surgery was extremely complex, but it was successful and allowed him to grow and develop normally. He was able to be active, play sports, and just enjoy being a little boy.

One of the greatest expressions of faith in God is to keep moving forward when you don't understand the path you're walking.

The day of Colton's birth marked the beginning of a season of storms in our family that we never could have imagined. Every member of my family has faced life-threatening battles with deadly diseases. So many times, we have stood in shock and disbelief as

each new health hurricane roared across the landscape of our lives. During the darkest days and most challenging times, our main focus was to just try to make it through the day. I will elaborate further on the details in later chapters, but for now, let's focus on some universal truths.

No one's life is stormproof! Everyone faces adversity. *The storms of life can either lead to our destruction or to our destiny.* The deciding factor in how a crisis will ultimately impact us lies in how we choose to respond to our storm. Our experiences taught us that *it's all in the WRIST*—What Response I Select Today. There are many valuable lessons that can be gleaned in the darkest days of our lives, but only if we respond correctly to times of testing. We would never have survived without the Word of God. I related earlier how, on the morning after Colton's birth, the Lord pierced through the darkness of those moments with the blinding light of His Word. In an instant—*nothing changed, and everything changed.* Nothing changed in Colton's condition, but everything changed in my expectation.

In an instant—nothing changed,
and everything changed.

As time passed and new attacks on our family's health were launched, God was faithful each time to give us exactly what we needed to encourage us and equip us to persevere. Many times in the New Testament, we witness Jesus using earthly illustrations to help people understand heavenly truth. This book will take us on a journey

through some of the *storm stories* in the Bible. Our goal will be to examine accounts of how God's people experienced actual physical storms so that we can identify kingdom principles to help us navigate times of trouble. The pathway that our family has walked has given us a passion to encourage and equip people with the Word of God and inspire them to never give up—no matter what!

CHAPTER 7

A WORD FROM THE LORD

“But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’”

—Matthew 14:27

This verse represents the first time that the disciples had heard a word from the Lord since His initial instruction that sent them into the storm. It followed right after they had failed to recognize Him and thought that He was a ghost. Immediately, Jesus spoke into their storm a word of instruction and assurance.

DON'T BE AFRAID

He began with the first phase of a two-part instruction: “Take courage!” Of course, in our modern-day vernacular, we don’t really use the phrase “take courage.” We tend to lean more toward the second phrase of Jesus’ instruction in which He said, “Don’t be afraid.” These two facets of Jesus’ message to His disciples are obviously related in their purpose to deal with the fear that the disciples were experiencing. It is interesting to note that the phrase “do not be afraid” was the

standard greeting in virtually every scriptural account when an angel brought a message from God. It is as if the Lord were emphasizing that message by its repetition. In certain translations of the Bible, the phrase “do not be afraid” appears up to 366 times. That’s one for every day of the year—plus one extra for leap year!

Next, Jesus provided His disciples with the reason that they should not be afraid. He positively identified Himself to His terrified disciples with the phrase “It is I.” Of course, Jesus was assuring the disciples that He was not a water-walking ghost, but there is more beneath the surface waiting to be discovered. The phrase “It is I” is a translation of the original Greek text that reads, *ego eimi*. This is a phrase that is used in some of the most significant passages in the entire New Testament. *Ego eimi* is also translated into English as “I AM.”

You may remember the seven “I AM” statements of Christ.

- I am the bread of life. (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51)
- I am the light of the world. (John 8:12)
- I am the door of the sheep. (John 10:7, 9)
- I am the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25)
- I am the good shepherd. (John 10:11, 14)
- I am the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6)
- I am the true vine. (John 15:1, 5)

THE GREAT I AM

These are some of the most celebrated and beloved verses in the entire New Testament. And in every single case, the phrase “I AM” in English comes from the words *ego eimi* in Greek. Why is that significant? Because every time Jesus used the phrase “I AM,” His Jewish listeners would immediately be reminded of the passage in the Old Testament that details the account of Moses hearing God speak to him from the

middle of a burning bush. In Exodus 3, God spoke to Moses and called him to return to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go free:

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

God said to Moses, “I AM who I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” —Exodus 3:11-14

Every time Jesus used the phrase “I Am,” His Jewish listeners would immediately be reminded of the passage in the Old Testament that details the account of Moses hearing God speak to him from the middle of a burning bush.

Ever since God delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, the phrase “I AM” has been linked to God Himself. One of the reasons that the Pharisees hated Jesus so much was because every time He made one of the “I AM” statements, they realized that He was claiming to be God’s Messiah.

This reveals a whole new dimension of Jesus' message to His disciples. He was not simply identifying Himself. He was simultaneously declaring and demonstrating that He was indeed God's Messiah by invoking the phrase "I AM" while walking on the stormy seas. Only God Himself could override the laws of nature in such a manner as He was displaying at that moment, as well as earlier in the day when He multiplied the loaves and fish to feed thousands of people.

Can you imagine how comforting it was for the disciples to receive a "word" from the Lord in the middle of their storm? Just the confirmation that He was aware and engaged in their situation before they could see Him must have been incredibly encouraging. I can tell you from personal experience that if there's anything you are going to need in a time of storm, it is a word from the Lord.

THE BENEFITS OF THE WORD

The primary method that God uses to speak to us is through His Word. I could not even begin to calculate all the times in my life when I desperately needed guidance, encouragement, or instruction. And in so many of those times, I would feel the Lord's leading to what I thought was a random passage of scripture, only to find out that it was exactly what I needed to hear in that moment. My sense of awe in that fact is punctuated by the number of times I have gone back to review an old devotional journal and seen this testimony in my own handwriting.

This is yet another reason that I am such an advocate of journaling as a part of one's spiritual process. To be able to go back and read my own testimony of what I sensed the Lord speaking to me, both in the good times and in the bad, has been one of the most incredible blessings of my life! So many times, especially as we get older, we can

feel a sense that our life seems to be slipping away quickly. But every word I have written in my devotional journals over the last thirty-plus years has preserved a portion of my life that I can go back and relive, and in some cases, relearn vital lessons from the past.

So many times, those words from the Lord were just what I needed to carry me through the toughest days in my life. Countless volumes have been written dissecting, explaining, and celebrating the Bible. So, it would be impossible to deal with this subject in an exhaustive way, but there are a few nuggets of truth that I would like to highlight in a general sense. The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119. It contains 176 verses. And virtually every one of those verses is a celebration of God's Word. Here are a few of my favorites:

- Psalm 119:11: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."
- Psalm 119:18: "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."
- Psalm 119:37: "Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word."
- Psalm 119:105: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."

There is so much truth in just this single chapter that one could spend weeks in study and not exhaust the material. We discover powerful truths even if we just condense the previous verses into a single thought. In verse 11, we learn that proactively engaging and interacting with God's Word strengthens us spiritually and helps us avoid sinful behavior. In verse 18, we see that God has buried great treasures of truth in His Word, and we need His help to dig them out. In verse 37, our tendency towards squandering our attention on things of little value is remedied as we focus on the Word, and in doing so,

our life is preserved. And finally, in verse 105 (my personal favorite), God's Word speaks of itself and describes some of its most important functions. His Word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. It shows me where I am, and it shows me where I'm going. It reveals my *position*, and it illuminates my *path*.

This is true on so many levels. How many times has God's Word revealed something in our lives of which we were previously unaware? The Word shines a light on our position and shows us where we stand with God. Beyond that, it also highlights that path that we have chosen to walk and shows us where we will end up if we stay on that path.

The disciples desperately needed a word from the Lord during their storm, and they benefitted greatly when they received it. The same is true with us. One of the most important things any of us can do in seasons of trouble is to spend a significant amount of time in God's presence and remain focused on Him instead of our problems. Receiving a word from the Lord will be vital to your ability to withstand the storms of life!

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THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED FOR THE VOYAGE

The verses we reviewed from Psalm 119 reveal powerful benefits that we receive as we focus on God's Word. There are numerous other places in the Bible that declare the positive impact of scripture on

our lives. One of the most prominent of those texts is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

These are some of the key verses in the New Testament and most Christians have heard sermons based on them.

Most teaching on this passage focuses heavily on verse 16, and there is certainly nothing wrong with that because that verse affirms that the Scriptures are inspired by God and are essential to the process of discipleship. But there is a powerful truth that is often overlooked in the following verse: “So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” This verse reveals the overarching purpose of the individual functions of the Scriptures, and it does so in a way that aligns perfectly with the theme of this book.

The phrase “thoroughly equipped” comes from the Greek word *exartizo* which means to “completely equip, to totally deck out and fully furnish.” Bible scholars indicate that this word was used to describe a ship that had formerly been ill-equipped for a long journey. But then the owner of the ship *decked it out* until it was thoroughly prepared with the equipment and supplies that would be needed for it to sail anywhere on long voyages—even through the occasional turbulence of stormy seas. I believe that Paul is using this image to teach us that we are not prepared to navigate through life until we have been thoroughly equipped with the Word of God.

The word that Jesus spoke to His disciples in that stormy sea had an immediate effect. It corrected their false perception that they were looking at a ghost and showed them that they were not alone in their storm because Jesus was present with them. As we prayed

and sought the Lord, God was faithful to speak a word to us in every storm we faced. Without those words of encouragement, assurance, and guidance, I don't believe we would have made it through all the tough times. But God's Word thoroughly equipped us with everything we needed to withstand the wind and the waves that were crashing against our lives. *To navigate this life, you will need to be thoroughly equipped.* So, I encourage you to invest significant time in the Word of God because that is the process that God has ordained to equip us for the voyage of life.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

- 1) Describe a time when you desperately needed a word from the Lord?

- 2) When have you received a much-needed word from God that impacted your life in a powerful way?

- 3) Typically, a ship is furnished with the equipment and supplies for a long journey before it leaves the harbor. This relates to our lives. It is always a wise choice to be thoroughly equipped by spending time in God's Word before we leave the safety of the harbor. How can you improve your daily devotional life so that you will be ready for whatever you encounter on your journey of life?

SAMPLE PRAYER

Lord, I thank You for the abundant provisions for the voyage of life that are available to me through Your Word. Please help me not to be distracted by the trivial things in life. I want to focus on spending time with You in Your Word so that I can be thoroughly equipped for every good work that You have in store for me. When the winds of adversity blow against my life, help me to look to You for a Word to guide and sustain me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen!

FAITH DECLARATION

Lord, I declare by faith that every provision that I will need for life's journey will be provided by You as I spend time in Your Word. I declare that every benefit of filling my mind with Your Word will come to full fruition. I also declare by faith that as I immerse myself in Your presence and in Your Word, I will receive everything that I need to sustain me through the voyage of life. I will not wait until the storm hits to seek a word from You; I will invest my time and energy in Your Word before I leave the safety of the harbor. I declare these things by faith in the name of Jesus!

