

Message Series: **'Surviving the Storms of Life'**

Message Title: **'Surviving Relational Storms'**

Scripture Source: **2 Timothy 4:6-17**

Date: Sunday, October 25, 2015

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Stormy Weather...and so, how do handle emotionally and relationally stormy weather? When you are feeling 'worn and torn' what are your survival 'moves'? illustrate -

The last two years in Niagara have featured some intense and crippling winter storms. Blinding whiteouts, unnerving snow squalls, and 'hard-to-keep-up-with' clearing the seemingly relentless fall of snow. After a while it just gets fatiguing...emotionally and physically. It can become an overwhelming experience. Can you identify? Illustrate: purchase of snow blower...a source of great gratitude!

And then there are the 'storms of life' that each of us experiences...often unexpected 'squalls' of disappointments, fears, and uncertainty. And we feel the 'harsh winds' of turbulent circumstances bearing down on us and we are left holding on to...what anchors you when a patch of rough weather relationally blindsides you? Over these weeks we will explore different kinds of storms that none of us are immune from. Life and death storms, financial storms, spiritual and emotional storms and today's focus...relational storms. We will examine some intriguing and instructive stories from the Bible as well as 21st century real life 'storm' accounts. Each week through music, creative elements, personal stories and teaching we will be introduced to the God of 'stormy weather'...the One who longs to be an anchoring presence in your life and mine, the One who can infuse us with a durable and practical hope.

You may be a long term believer or a spiritual seeker, or maybe a skeptic. I am glad you are here today, learning about how we can 'survive the storms of life.' Refer to 3 Question card...an assignment for a little later today or during this week. (slide up!)

Some of the Hardest Storms are Relational

Family and friends can be sources of great comfort, joy, hope and support and at times, conduits of profound pain, grief, and frustration. How many would agree? Hands up!

How do you survive intense relational storms? Maybe you are immersed in some very stormy and unpredictable relational 'stuff' right now...or you are nursing a broken heart having experienced a brutal time at the hands of someone. How do you keep from becoming bitter, angry and self-absorbed?

One Man's Survival Story: 2 Timothy 4:6-18

As we enter into Paul's world and extract truths and 'tools' for weathering relational storms, ask yourself, 'which truth do I need to take to heart and act upon?'

Background: Paul was a dynamic Christian leader and thinker in the first century. He was involved in launching Christian communities around the Roman Empire and beyond. He was brilliant, courageous, strong minded and at times tender hearted. He yearned to see people experiencing the grace and truth of God in deeply personal ways and gain an understanding of who Jesus is and why he showed up. And, he was thoroughly human and suffered greatly in the relational realm. How did he survive the storm? Especially the ones near the end of his life. He knows that the odds are high that he will be executed for his faith and for the unwavering resolve he displayed in sharing the love of Christ with others. 2 Timothy 4:6: "The time has come for my departure." The clock is ticking.

Hope-Infusing Insights and action steps:

1. Paul SHARES WISELY with trusted people his 'storm' experience and speaks honestly. 2 Timothy 4:9-10, and 16. He uses a strong word twice, "deserted". People that he counted on as friends 'bailed' on him when life was hard and uncertain. One time included a court appearance. Can you imagine...the faces in the room are hostile and there is not a trace of compassion directed towards him.

He looks nervously around the courtroom for his friends...even just one. Not one friendly face and 'thumbs up' for Paul. He shares this honestly with his friend Timothy, the recipient of this letter.

ACTION STEP: We need to talk with and listen to wise and trustworthy people in 'stormy weather.' Now for some us, we shared our 'storm' and confidentiality was violated. We were betrayed...behind our backs and/or on-line. And, we think, 'never again' will I share a 'storm' with anyone. Yet, that kind of relational isolation can be

profoundly painful to live with. Friends, there are trustworthy people out there. Sometimes it is a journey to find them, but I believe God will help us find 'wise and safe' people to help anchor us in harsh weather. Who will you invite into the stormy weather?

Who might that be for you? Some of our folks at RBC have found these kind of people in journey groups and one on one conversations.

2. Paul IDENTIFIES BOLDLY a 'damaging and dangerous' person and sets 'firm boundaries' in place. 2 Timothy 4:14-15 Read and comment. Paul minces no words. He is not vengeful in what he says, but he is direct. He builds a strong and clear boundary and challenges others to do the same with this specific person. Why? Because occasionally we will be impacted by people who are recurringly hurtful to us and have no desire to change their ways. You will not survive relational storms if tolerance of damaging and destructive people is allowed. Some people will mess with your head and heart if you allow them to. Don't. Proverbs 22:24-25

ACTION STEP: Paul speaks frankly and acts purposefully in building the boundary. And, this is huge...he entrusts the person to God and believes that God will take care of business with this person in his timing. Paul refuses to exact vengeance. Romans 12:19; Psalm 62:12

Do you have an 'Alexander' in your life that requires some boundaries? Sometimes this includes family members; that can be tough but still must be done. It takes courage to speak directly to the person about the boundary you are setting, and why. Family members don't get a pass because of 'bloodlines' or family bonds. Is it tough to build boundaries within family circles...yes. But surviving relational storms requires it. Who is it?

3. Paul FORGIVES GRACIOUSLY. 2 Timothy 4:16

To me, this is one of the most moving and instructive phrases in this section. His friends have let him down. Yet, he offers forgiveness. "May it not be held against them." Paul knew that their 'relational defection' was out of character, it was not a regular way of living and relating. And, Paul knew he wasn't perfect. He spoke candidly about the experience, but wasn't immersed in it. He 'built a bridge' called forgiveness. It takes wisdom to know what needs to be built in our relational world...boundaries or bridges?

'Forgiveness is the offer of a 'fresh start', not the absence of accountability.

ACTION STEP: Do you need to offer a warm and genuine word of forgiveness to someone? Will you? Is there a 'bridge building' project you need to engage in? Who is on the other side of the bridge?

4. Paul TRUSTS GOD in real time circumstances. 2 Timothy 4:17 Read and comment.

Paul demonstrated a faith in the existence of the living Christ. He believed in the nearness of Jesus, strengthening him and enabling him to face the hardship and uncertainty swirling around him.

Illustrate:

ACTION STEP: Getting to know the character of God is huge. Read the Psalms or the Gospel of Mark. Check our library for solid material worth reading.

5. Paul SERVES FAITHFULLY in the midst of his relational storm. 2 Timothy 4:17

Read and comment. He didn't become bitter and self-absorbed. He gave his life to purposeful service, even though he was struggling. The importance of God's purpose transcended the 'storm of pain' he felt.

ACTION STEP: Can you see a good purpose in the midst of your relational storm? This may take some time to discern and the insights of trusted people to help you sort this out and keep moving forward.

Survival is Possible

We can endure and come through relational storms with our heads, hearts and souls somewhat intact! Can you put 'a name and face' to your storm this morning? What 'anchor truths' from the Scriptures and action steps require your attention today?

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.

So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

What can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:5b-6, quoting from Deuteronomy 31:6, Psalm 118:6-7