

# TAKEAWAY

## Response

Part 5 – Down and Out

May 9, 2010

### Miserably Wet

It seems to be one of the tragic ironies of life for most people. You get to a place where you're comfortable in your current life circumstance. Everything isn't perfect, but overall it seems life is working well. You are praising God for all that He is and all that He has done in your life. You are happy. You are content. Then, without warning, it happens: an unexpected storm; a maelstrom of events, issues, emotions, and drama.

Have you ever experienced something like that? Just about the time you think you have made it to the clearing and can finally sit back, relax, and bask in the awe of your Creator, thunder rumbles, lightning crashes, and you're holding on for dear life as the storm wreaks havoc on all that you have known. Your faith begins to quake. Questions of "Why me?" rush into your mind. Worship becomes a distant thought as you use all of your energy to keep from blowing away in the rushing winds that tear at the foundations of all that you are.

As I think about these things in my own life, I am drawn to the life of Peter. He seems to have known all too well the shock of one of life's storms. Take a look at Matthew 14:13-33. Peter had just watched as Jesus fed five thousand from five loaves of bread and two fish. I am pretty certain Peter was in a place of worship as he stood side by side with Jesus, watching as He performed miracle after miracle. Peter's faith was strong. It seems like he would have been content getting in the boat that evening. After all, before following Christ, he had spent the majority of his time as a fisherman. Night came and everybody went to sleep, even though the wind had started to pick up and a storm seemed to be looming. At some point, someone woke up and jumped out of their skin because they saw what they thought was a ghost walking on the water. Maybe they were ready to start for home in a hurry, but Jesus called out to them, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

I imagine they weren't putting down their paddles quite yet. In a mixture of faith and doubt, Peter yelled, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus didn't hesitate for a second. He looked at Peter and told him to "Come." Peter believed. So he jumped out of the boat and began walking on water toward the King of Kings. Life was at that unbelievable high and then something happened. Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and began to focus on the winds and waves that were crashing around him. Next thing you know, the very guy who was walking on water began to sink. Peter got really scared really fast! "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out His hand and caught Peter. As they made their way back to the boat, Jesus said to Peter, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" They climbed back into the boat, the wind died down, and all the people in the vessel worshiped Christ, knowing that He was truly the Son of God.

How many times are we just like Peter? We worship as we watch God perform miracles in our lives. We worship as Christ extends the offer to walk alongside Him. But then the wind picks up, we look at the storm we are in, and we take our eyes off of Jesus to focus on our circumstances. We see the storm instead of the God who can calm wind and waves. All of a sudden, we begin to drown. We can't keep our head above water. When we reach the end of our human capacity, we cry out to God—often when there is no other way: "God save me." And He does. It may not be in the timing we would like, but the length of the storm often makes the rescue from it all the more meaningful. There are times when we step out in faith and then feel as if we are falling. Peter jumped out of the boat and got miserably wet. Yet, after it was over, he climbed back in the boat, dried himself off, and began worshiping God again.

If worship is the appropriate response to the revelation of God, look at the ways Peter worshiped that evening. Praise for the miracles, trust and obedience as he stepped out of the boat, and even calling out to Jesus was an act that said, *I believe that, in the midst of what I am going through, You are big enough to be my salvation.* Worship is the key. Remember, God deserves our praise despite our human focus on earthly matters. We cannot eliminate those moments of doubt in our lives when it all seems to be falling apart, but we can cry out to our God who can then walk through the waves with us. We may not be able to still the wind, but we can praise God who provides a firm foundation. We cannot control the storm, but we can worship even when we are wet.

*It is not a question of God allowing or not allowing things to happen. It is part of living. Some things we do to ourselves, other things we do to each other. Our Father knows about every bird which falls to the ground, but He does not always prevent it from falling. What are we to learn from this? That our response to what happens is more important than what happens. Here is a mystery: one man's experience drives him to curse God, while another man's identical experience drives him to bless God. Your response to what happens is more important than what happens. ~ Chip Brogden*

*You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress,  
a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. Isaiah 25:4a (NIV)*

## **Suffering Season**

I have been learning a few things this week from Peter regarding my response to who God is in the midst of life's storms. These past few weeks have been full of trials for me. I was born with a hyperactive immune system. In times of great stress, it decides that various organs within my body must be the culprit, so it attacks them at random without true provocation. Apart from the physical assault, the resulting financial fallout adds its contribution to the stress, and my primary spiritual pathways are physically hindered. It's one of those seasons. While I am thankful that these seasons pass without lasting eternally, I can honestly say that I find myself drawing closer to God when they come.

Currently my life situation is placing me in a position where I find myself a metaphorical slave to my physical body. Have you ever been there? Financial debt, an employment situation, or a habitual sin? Or maybe that's where you are right now. How do draw close to God in valleys like these? How do you jolt yourself back to the reality of your position in Christ? For me, it starts with remembering who Jesus Christ is.

Look at what our friend said in 1 Peter 2:2-6. Notice the promise Peter stated about those who put their trust in Christ. In verses 18-25, see how Peter described the character of Christ in the midst of suffering. In the first verse of Chapter 4, look at the result for those who have suffered in their body. How should we respond when we find ourselves in a season of suffering—considering Christ as our Shepherd, the guardian of our souls? Take a look at a fuller description of the Good Shepherd in Ezekiel 34. As you meditate on who He is in contrast to the shepherds in verses 1-10, what sort of response could you have in the midst of your troubles knowing that He is your Shepherd? What type of response does this truth evoke? Take some time to read through Psalm 23 and dwell in the knowledge of who Jesus Christ is, even in the midst of a season of suffering. Ask God to help you focus on the promises of what He gives on the other side of suffering, as well as the fact that He is with you as you walk through these things.

*God sometimes permits what he hates to accomplish what he loves. ~ Joni Erickson Tada*

## **Outpouring**

Responding to God by worshiping Him in the midst of tragedy and struggle does not come naturally to us. Instead, when something painful happens in our lives, many of us react with distress and anger. Sometimes, we may direct our anger at God for what He has not prevented. What should we do about that?

Psalm 73 is a perfect example. A worship leader named Asaph wrote it. What was he upset about? How was he viewing his own behavior in light of it? Have you ever felt that way? We don't know the individuals he was talking about, but in our lives we can feel a similar resentment toward others. Notice how his real issue wasn't just with them, but with God. He believed that God should have been handling things differently. He shared what was happening inside of him as he went through this struggle. And yet he wrote this psalm to God, totally honest about his struggle. What happens when we don't do that but, instead, allow the anger to fester? Have you ever not dealt with some issue and found your emotions spilling out and affecting unrelated areas? For example, in times past, when I've had unresolved anger toward my spouse, I have found myself unable to act civilly in other areas of life that had nothing to do with the issue I was angry about. My husband was understandably confused. He had no clue why I was so snippy or chilly in my response to him. We can do the same thing with God. We can deny what we are really feeling and let it spill out into other areas of our relationship with Him and others.

Now look at verses 16-17 where things started to turn around. What did Asaph do? There is a huge lesson in this for us. Left to our own emotions and self-pity where we can sometimes retreat, we often get stuck. We tend to pull away from God and those things connected with Him. Eventually we sink deeper and deeper into the muck. But Asaph moved forward into it and let it all out before God. In that action, he talked about understanding. Look at what he wrote in hindsight about that event in verses 21- 22. He talked about an embittered spirit. But, notice how his perspective changed in verse 25. The answer to how to move through the tough times is not to hunker down and try to slog through them, but to stop and bring them to God. Be completely honest and let Him give you His perspective. Just like we should go to the person we are mad at, those are precisely the times God wants us to turn to Him and pour out our heart as well. Are there any areas in your life where you are feeling yourself becoming embittered? Could you use some airing out? Have you considered taking it to God and pouring it all out? Go ahead. He already knows!

*Worship is an act of obedience of the heart. It is a response that requires the very core of who you are,  
to love the Lord for who He is, not just for what He does. ~ Darlene Zschech*

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