

The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a landscape. The foreground shows rolling hills with dry, reddish-brown grass. In the distance, more hills are visible under a sky filled with heavy, grey clouds. The overall mood is somber and dramatic.

**I N T O**

HOW TO FACE DOWN  
ANY CRISIS

**T H E**

WITH DEEP,  
UNSHAKABLE FAITH

**S T O R M**

**J O S H B . T U R N E R**

FOREWORD BY JOBY MARTIN

“Reading *Into the Storm* by Josh Turner is like sitting down with a friend who has walked through the fire and come out stronger. With raw honesty and a heart for Jesus, Josh masterfully weaves biblical truths with personal insights, showing us how to embrace life’s challenges and emerge more Christlike. His words bring both comfort and a fresh, faith-filled perspective for anyone going through tough times. This is a must-read for anyone seeking to grow spiritually through adversity.”

—**Harrison Conley**, lead pastor of Cottonwood Church  
and founder of the Kingdom Collective

“Only people who have been through the storm can yell back and give directions about how to survive it. That is what this book represents—a fellow beggar telling us where the bread is. What Josh has done here is nothing short of miraculous. His faith is as deep as his story. And they both deserve to be heard. *Into the Storm* will give new hope to those who are feeling blown away by the tumult of pain.”

—**A.J. Swoboda**, PhD, associate professor of Bible and Theology  
at Bushnell University and author of *The Gift of Thorns*

“In John 16, Jesus teaches His disciples that in this world we *will* have trouble, but He encourages them not to lose heart because He has overcome the world. I wonder where so many lost this truth. I am grateful to hear Josh remind and encourage us back toward both our shared reality of suffering and Jesus’s ultimate victory over it. I trust Josh. He loves God’s Word, he loves God’s people, and he has suffered in ways many think they wouldn’t survive. He is not waxing eloquent in a painless tower but has walked through the valley of the shadow of death and learned that Jesus was with him with His rod and staff.”

—**Matt Chandler**, lead pastor, The Village Church;  
author of *The Explicit Gospel*, *Joy in the Sorrow*, and *The Overcomers*;  
and executive chairman of Acts 29 Church Planting Network

“No matter how the next storm in your life rolls in, you’ll want to equip yourself now with the practical, biblical teachings of Josh Turner’s *Into the Storm*. This book guides you straight to the One who will stand with you through every trial. Turner unpacks stories of weathered and resilient figures in the Bible—such as Job and Paul—and creates space for intentional personal reflection with each chapter.”

—**Rob Hoskins**, president, OneHope

"I've known Josh for more than 20 years, and I can attest to the authenticity of his words. I've witnessed him face his own storms with courage and grace, and he has been an unwavering presence in my life during my darkest hours. His guidance and support have been invaluable, and this book feels like an extension of that same steadfast friendship. *Into the Storm* is more than just a self-help book; it's a testament to the faithfulness of God and a roadmap for those seeking to navigate life's most challenging moments. Turner's words carry weight because they come from a place of lived experience and deep empathy. I don't typically endorse books, but I do endorse people. And I can think of no one more qualified to write about these topics than my best friend and brother, Josh Turner. This book is a must-read for anyone seeking guidance, understanding, and hope in the face of life's inevitable storms."

—**Jason Laird**, lead pastor of Citizens Church and founder and CEO of Sidecar Leader

"Josh is a deep and winsome guide—part cowboy, part pastor—wisely leading us through the dark and dangerous toward hope. This is a hard-won handbook calling us all toward a new story that doesn't end in the storm."

—**Katherine and Jay Wolf**, coauthors of *Hope Heals* and *Suffer Strong*

"For more than a decade I have seen up close the life that has produced what is on the pages of *Into the Storm*. I have seen the highs and the lows and watched how Josh has weathered them both with grace and strength that are supernatural. This is a book filled with honesty and conviction while providing an invitation to each reader to embrace the storms of life as opportunities to mature and experience God in a way that seems saved for the darkest of days."

—**Charlie Dawes**, lead pastor of Hill City Church and author of *Simple Prayer*

"Josh is a ride-and-die friend. He's the first-call friend for hundreds of leaders when things go off the rail. He understands headwinds, storms, crises, and challenges. And this book is just a small glimpse of the wisdom for life and leadership Josh brings to the mix. I highly recommend reading *Into the Storm*."

—**Brad Lomenick**, former president, Catalyst; author of *H3 Leadership* and *The Catalyst Leader*

**I N T O**

**T H E**

**S T O R M**

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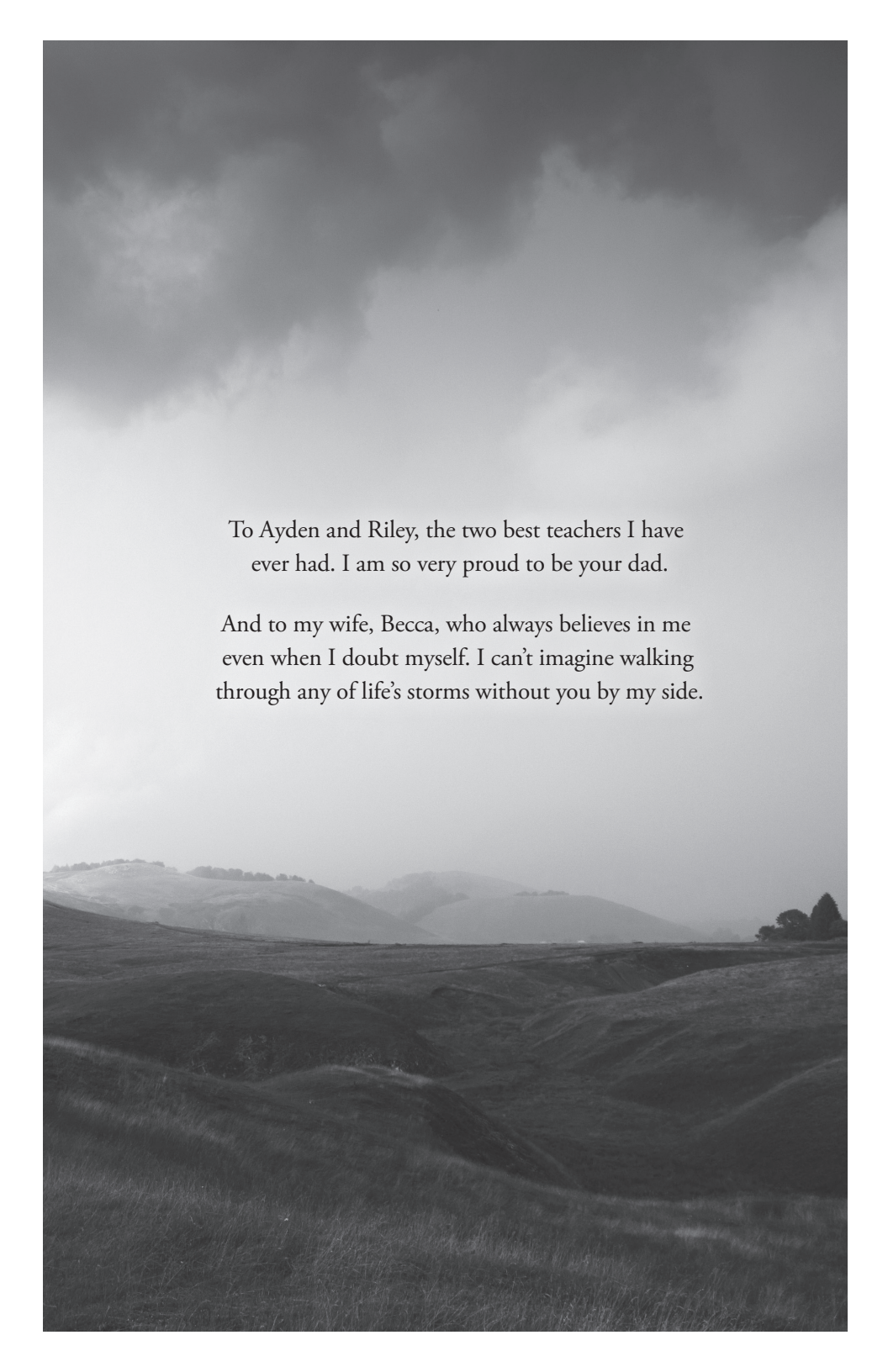
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To Ayden and Riley, the two best teachers I have  
ever had. I am so very proud to be your dad.

And to my wife, Becca, who always believes in me  
even when I doubt myself. I can't imagine walking  
through any of life's storms without you by my side.



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# FOREWORD

*Joby Martin*

I want to start by saying that I love Josh Turner. He's been a good friend of mine for quite a while. I have had the honor of getting to serve as a pastor in Jacksonville, Florida, since 2003, and for most of that time, Josh served as a pastor at another church here in town, and we've gotten to lead through a lot together. Like Josh, I also love a good Western, and since I'm a child of the '80s, the best Western in my opinion is *Young Guns*. Nothing says the Wild West like some great '80s metal guitar riffs. Josh is one of the few people that I'd sneak out at night for and write "Pal" on his tombstone like Doc did for Billy. He's not only been a good friend though; he's also been a good guide amid storms I've had to walk through.

Living in Jacksonville, Florida, means I've had to learn a few things about storms. From June to November every year, most of us in Florida have our eyes on the winds coming off the coasts of Africa. As those winds blow out into the Atlantic Ocean, they hit pockets of warm water and grow into tropical storms. As those tropical storms near the currents in the Caribbean, they pick up speed and move from

Category 1 storms to as high as Category 5. I've experienced a lot of storms in my time in Jacksonville. I've seen the difference between each of those categories and the impact they can have. The experiences have helped me become somewhat of a student of storms, so here are a few things I've learned about them.

First, storms come for all of us. I've never experienced a storm season without a storm. Like clockwork, you can count on the summer storms rolling in. Not all storm seasons are as intense as others, but all storm seasons bring storms. In Jesus's most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, Jesus talks about the reality of storms. Preaching to the crowd, Jesus says:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it (Matthew 7:24-27 *ESV*).

What's interesting about this part of the sermon is that if most of us had written this, we would have said the storms came to those who built their houses on the sand but not to those who built their houses on the rock. We're so hardwired for moralistic outcomes in our culture. That's not what Jesus says though. Jesus is clear that the storms come to both. While some storms are the results of bad

decisions, all storms are designed by God for a purpose. God sends storms to press us closer to Him and His heart. The prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon, once said, “I have learned to kiss the wave that threw me into the Rock of Ages.”<sup>1</sup> No one in life avoids the storms. We all weather the storms, and like Spurgeon said, they will either throw us into the arms of our loving heavenly Father or drown us. You may be in the middle of a downpour right now. Your life may be absolutely upside down and inside out. You can cry out to God. You can call upon Him to save you. You cannot avoid storms in life, but you don’t have to be defined by them.

The second thing I know about storms is that they reveal what’s beneath the surface. In the book of Jonah, we read about a storm the Lord caused:

The LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish” (Jonah 1:4-6 ESV).

Hebrew commentaries on this text tell us this storm was unique because it was a localized storm only affecting that ship. Every other ship on the Mediterranean Sea that day could tell something was special about this ship. Keep in mind that the mariners on this ship were

professionals, and this localized storm had to be turbulent enough to compel them to throw their cargo overboard. They would have lightened their load *only* as a final measure to save their lives. If you keep reading in Jonah 1, you will see how the mariners cast lots to see who on the ship was the cause of the storm—and the lot fell to Jonah. He then realized what was going on and asked the mariners to throw him overboard. As soon as they did, we read in verse 15 that “the sea ceased from its raging” (ESV).

Why did God send this storm? He was after Jonah. The storm revealed to the mariners and to Jonah that something was off in Jonah’s life. Quite often, we’re in the middle of a storm for a reason. Suffering always has a source. Your storm could be the result of your sin; it could be the result of someone else’s sin, and you’re just collateral damage; it could be the result of spiritual attack; it could be the result of living in a fallen world; or it could be the process God uses in your life for your good and His glory. It’s worth pausing in the storm to ask what is being revealed. Jonah’s storm was revealing his disobedience. He knew what God had told him to do, but he’d chosen to run from God.

What about you? I already told you that storms are a part of life, but storms also have a purpose. You can endure, or you can lean in. There could be unrepentant sin you need to confess. There could be wounds that need to be healed. There could be spiritual attacks that need to be prayed through. There could be fallen world realities that need to be brought to God and lamented over. There could also be a real chance that our sovereign God is at work revealing, removing, and restoring you through the storm. You can lean in, or you can try to check out. Our culture is filled with things to distract us from the storms. You can ignore the storms by binge-watching Netflix, buying

more things you don't need, or taking a pill to numb the pain. Jonah chose death—or so he thought. You can avoid the storm, or you can open your eyes and see what the storm might reveal and produce.

The third thing I know about storms is that they refine priorities. Twice in the Gospels we read about Jesus calming storms for the disciples. The first time is in Mark 4:35-41, where we find Jesus asleep in a boat. The disciples wake Him up, and Jesus seems upset about not getting to finish His nap. I get that. Notice the response of the disciples in verse 41: “They were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’” (Mark 4:41 ESV). Just seconds before, the disciples were absolutely overwhelmed with fear of the storm, but upon encountering the God who controls the wind and the sea, they find something that consumes their hearts and minds even more than the raging waters.

Storms help us redefine our priorities. What's more important: Your job or your family? Your money or your marriage? Your stuff or your health? Storms change the way we see things. Put yourself in the boat with the disciples. Don't read this text like you've read it your whole life. Imagine being in a boat with Jesus, and how with three words—“Peace! Be Still!”—He's able to stop the storm (verse 39 ESV). What do you think you'd be thinking, feeling, or saying in that moment?

Imagine Jesus with you right now in your personal storm. Imagine Him saying, “Stop!”—and then suddenly your storm is gone. Clean bill of health. No debt. Restored marriage. Prodigal child returned home. New job that meets your financial needs. In that moment, the disciples stopped thinking about the storm because they couldn't stop thinking about Jesus. What's more fascinating is not Jesus's ability to remove the storm in a moment, but rather how He was more

concerned that they didn't have faith to begin with. Storms can be all-consuming. They can cover our windshields and make it impossible to see beyond the storm. God loves to use storms to reorient our hearts and minds toward Him. He's bigger than the storm. He's also Lord over the storm, whatever it might be. Abraham Kuyper famously wrote, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"<sup>2</sup>

A few chapters later in Mark 6, the disciples are on a boat again, and they are terrified because they are in the middle of another storm. Jesus walks to them on the water, climbs into the boat, and calms the wind. And the disciples are astounded! A lot has happened between that first storm and this second one. The disciples have seen Jesus perform many miracles. Just in Mark's gospel we see how Jesus healed a man with a demon and a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, resurrected Jairus's daughter, and fed 5,000 men plus women and children. The disciples have seen all these things happen, yet when the storms pop back up, they immediately fear for their lives. Jesus not only walks on the water, but He also calms the storm again—and they are still confused and surprised.

If you read the Bible and you feel confused, let me encourage you by saying you'd make a good disciple. I wish it only took one storm for us all to know the good and powerful heart of our Father, but most of us need storms regularly to keep us focused on Him. Storms force us to pray. Storms force us to cry out. Storms force us to look to God. Storms reprioritize our lives because, just like the old hymn says, we are "prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love."<sup>3</sup> We need storms because they press us back to God.

The last thing I know about storms is that they can be navigated

a lot better with a good guide. The guide can't take away the storms, but the guide can help you weather the storms. Josh has done that for you in this book because, as you will soon read, Josh has been through some storms. In another great Western, *Lonesome Dove*, Larry McMurtry writes about a storm the young cowboys endure. The storm is not only so wild and strong the cowboys can't see through it, but it's also a lightning storm that threatens to take their lives. The storm is very symbolic in *Lonesome Dove* because it demonstrates how the young boys grow up. They survive and come out stronger men on the other side—not the boys they had been before the storm.

I'm sure you've heard it said that strong storms make strong sailors. That's for sure true of Josh. I pray that as you walk through this book, you'll be strengthened to make it through the storm you're in—but even more so, that you'll discover the heart of the Father, that you'll lean in, and that the storm would produce in you a strong heart that knows the God of the storms.

**Joby Martin**

Pastor of The Church of Eleven22

Author of *If the Tomb Is Empty, Anything Is Possible*

and *Run Over by the Grace Train*





# PREFACE

**T**he main character of this book is Jesus Christ. The following pages discuss what I have learned about His goodness, His love, His faithfulness, and His grace. So, if you do not know Him personally, please allow me the incredible honor of introducing you. Knowing Jesus will help you better understand the book you currently hold, but far more importantly, knowing Jesus will help you better understand the life you were created to live.

You were lovingly designed and intentionally created by an all-powerful, all-knowing, almighty God. He created all of us in His image and created all of us to be in a loving relationship with Him. However, love cannot exist without free will, so God gave us the ability to choose Him...or to not choose Him. Sin, sickness, and death came crashing into the picture in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve chose wrongly, and humanity has been a mess ever since. While we were designed to be in perfect relationship with God, our default is now rebellion because of sin. God is good, holy, and perfect. All of us are not. We have all sinned and fallen short of being “good.” No human to ever live, apart from Jesus, has been able to

meet God's standard of good enough or holy enough to be in right standing with Him. We are all in need of rescue from our sin, our guilt, our depravity, and ourselves.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins (Romans 3:23-24).

The penalty for our rebellion and sin is death and separation from God. He is a holy and just God, but thankfully He is also a merciful and gracious God. He refused to leave us in the mess we made. In the craziest plot twist of all time, the Creator stepped into His creation. Divinity put on humanity and met us in our depravity and brokenness. Jesus became one of us. He lived the sinless life we could not live and died the sinner's death we deserved to die in our place. Jesus is perfection personified who willingly placed our imperfection upon Himself.

But [Jesus] was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6).

Jesus is the flawless lamb that was sent to save all of us black sheep. Jesus lived as one of us, died in our place, and conquered the grave on our behalf. He came to show us the Father (John 14:7, 9), and now Jesus shows us *to* the Father (1 John 2:1). He is the bridge. He is

the living example of the Father to us and intercedes on our behalf to the Father. Jesus is our atonement and advocate.

You are intimately understood and known by a God who not only lovingly created you but also has experienced what you experience and has felt what you feel. Jesus faced all the trials, heartbreak, temptation, hurt, and storms that our broken world has to offer. He has proven there is no pain He won't step into with you, no grief He does not get, no moment His grace cannot fill, no sin His sacrifice cannot cover, no hurt He cannot understand, and no limit to His love for you.

If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us?

The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us?

I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us (Romans 8:32, 34, 38-39 MSG).

That is who this book is about. Jesus, who loves you and died for you. Jesus, who wants His death to give you life, and a life more abundant. Jesus, who understands your storms, suffering, and hurts. Jesus, who wants to know you and be known by you.

If you want to come to know this Jesus for yourself, make this simple prayer your own.

*God, I thank You that You love me. I ask You to forgive me for all my sins. Lord Jesus, I confess with my mouth, and I believe in my heart that You are the Son of God. I believe You were crucified, dead, buried, and resurrected for me. Save me, Jesus, and be the Lord of my life. Amen.*



# INTRODUCTION

I currently live in the suburbs of a major metropolitan city, but deep down, I want to be a cowboy. I own more Stetsons than suits and feel more at ease around a campfire than in a conference call. Western movies full of dusty towns, open skies, and gunslingers riding off into the sunset ignited my imagination as a kid. The freedom, grit, and limitless possibilities of the Wild West speak to something in me as a man. There is just something about the spirit of the West that I am completely drawn to. In my mind, no creature represents these feelings or images better than the American buffalo, which I guess is why they have always fascinated me. The buffalo is an iconic American symbol synonymous with the West, and they hold a prominent place in the culture, history, and folklore of North America.

The sheer size of the buffalo is impressive. Standing six feet tall and weighing up to 2,000 pounds, a buffalo is roughly the size of a Honda Civic, making it the largest North American mammal. They are resilient too. It is estimated that up to 75 million buffalo once roamed North America. In their writing, Lewis and Clark referred to them as a “moving multitude” whose great numbers “darkened

the whole plains.”<sup>1</sup> But because of overhunting, commercial slaughter, and mass exterminations, at one point there were less than 300 total. In the late 1800s, they became a protected species, and since then their numbers have increased to upwards of 500,000. The American buffalo faced one of the absolute worst animal genocides in history, but they also have the record for one of the greatest recoveries from near extinction.

Beyond the imagery, size, and resiliency of the buffalo, their behavior in the face of storms is what really fascinates me. Have you ever seen a storm out West? Storms out there can be sudden and often intense with the open landscape offering few opportunities for shelter. The big, blue Montana sky fills with dark rolling clouds so quickly that it can somehow make you feel claustrophobic. Some animals, like goats, will turn and attempt to outrun the storm. If you’ve ever seen a herd of goats on the move, you know they won’t outpace much of anything. They get tired and scattered and inevitably swallowed up by the bad weather. Their attempts to escape can even end up prolonging their exposure to the storm. Other animals, like cows, will just lie down or herd up together tightly to simply endure the storm as best they can until it finally moves on.

The buffalo, however, will walk directly into the storm. By turning into the storm, buffalo square up their shoulders, assuring the strongest footing against the wind and weather. They also limit their exposure to the storm by passing straight through it. Buffalo still have to deal with the raging storms just like the rest of the animals on the plains, but their adapted response helps to minimize the effects and longevity of the storms for them.

Storms in nature can be scary. There is nothing worse than getting caught in a bad lightning storm (except if sharks and heights

are also involved somehow—full-blown nightmare scenario!). However, the various storms of life—whether brought on by a medical diagnosis, trauma, a bad decision, loss, heartache, or a situation we never saw coming—can be straight-up terrifying. If the dumpster fire known as 2020 taught us anything, it is that storms can come out of nowhere and impact everything. Life's storms can be sudden and intense, and just like out on the plains, we find few opportunities for shelter or reprieve. So the question is: How do we respond? Do we run till we tire and break from exhaustion like the goats? Do we just lie down, hoping things will pass quickly like the cows? Or do we adapt our response, square our shoulders, and choose to take storms head-on like the buffalo?

I have faced many storms in my life. I am well acquainted with suffering, pain, disappointment, and heartache. I know what the end of my rope looks like because I have desperately clung to it. I am also well acquainted with mercy, peace, grace, and love. I know what the goodness of God looks like because I have desperately clung to it as well. Despite my best efforts there are very few things in life I can control. I cannot control life's storms, but I can control my response to them. I decided a long time ago that I am done trying to ignore the storms, done trying to hide, and done trying to run away. I will turn toward the storm. I will trust the One the wind and the waves obey. I will run into the storm knowing that even when the rain is hammering down and the wind is at its worst, He is my guide and my shelter.

Don't run from trouble. Take it full-face. The "worst" is never the worst. Why? Because the Master won't ever walk out and fail to return. If he works severely, he also

works tenderly. His stockpiles of loyal love are immense  
(Lamentations 3:30-33 MSG).

Unfortunately, storms in life are more a matter of *when* than *if*. I hate those words even as I write them. I wish I could promise life would be perfect for all of us—nothing but sunshine and roses—but that is simply not reality. We all will face difficulties at one point or another. The question is: In which direction will you run? My prayer is that this book will meet you right where you are, whether that is currently beneath sunny skies or in the worst storm of your life. I pray it will not only help to strengthen your hope and resolve for when life's storms rage all around you, but that it will also serve as a guide of sorts to help you make it through them. The American buffalo, like people, are social animals. There is safety in the herd and strength in numbers. Let's charge the storm together!



## CHAPTER ONE

# STORMS

**S**torms and struggles are simply an inescapable part of life. From the moment people came on the scene, pain and suffering followed quickly after. Sin, sickness, and death showed up in the garden of Eden, and ever since our world has been plagued by their effects. The resiliency of mankind is continually tested by how we face down storms, both those caused by nature and those caused by our sinful nature. Human history is full of trials, triumphs, and tragedy.

I have heard it said that life is hard and anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something. The Bible is not trying to sell anything. Nothing in it is dressed up or sugarcoated. It is full of storms—some literal and some figurative—but page after page and chapter after chapter tell the story of human struggles and the different hardships people face in life. Its words are honest, relevant, and relatable.

A lot of us tend to think of the Bible as a collection of moral fairy tales, or maybe we know it only from watered-down stories told on felt boards in Sunday school class. The truth is, the Bible is gritty, gory, incredibly pain-filled, and at times downright bleak. It is also

uplifting, loving, incredibly hope-filled, and life-giving. The Bible's thin pages of small print are full of big, deep, and far-reaching truths that give us a comprehensive road map for how to navigate life. As President Ronald Reagan once said, "Within the covers of that single Book are all the answers to all the problems that face us today, if we'd only look there."<sup>1</sup>

The Bible was written in palaces, temples, and throne rooms. It was also scribbled out under starlight, in dusty tents, and in prison cells. Among its writers are a war hero, brilliant scholars, fishermen, kings, shepherds, rebels, and priests. Some had dirt under their fingernails and nothing in their pockets; others had crowns on their heads and the weight of the world on their shoulders—but all were inspired by God. The Bible is full of words of wisdom, worship, and heartfelt prayers to God. It also contains heartbroken prayers, defiant rants, big questions, and angry accusations toward God. It gives poetry and prose to the human experience, detailing how we relate with and respond to the Holy God of the universe.

The Bible not only gives us real and raw insight into the human condition and the human heart, but it also gives us insight into the heart of Almighty God. It is the dramatic saga of humanity and divinity, the story of a perfect God stopping at nothing to lovingly pursue imperfect people. The Bible is the enduring, inerrant, Holy Spirit-inspired, living and active Word of God—and yet, most of us just leave our Bible to gather dust somewhere, if we even own a copy at all.

Together we are going to shake off the dust.

We are throwing out all our preconceived ideas about the big old book surrounded by doilies on Grandma's coffee table. We are going to delve into some of the Bible's grittier, darker, and rawer stories of storms and suffering. In each chapter we will discuss different storms

of life and look at men and women in Scripture who have faced them down. Hopefully, we will find comfort by seeing our pain reflected in their stories and realize we are not the only ones with these wounds, these questions, these storms. And perhaps we will gain some wisdom and guidance from them as we discover there is good among the hard, light in the dark, and a faithful, loving God who is our refuge in the storms.

The Bible not only gives us real and raw insight into the human condition and the human heart, but it also gives us insight into the heart of Almighty God.

### THE STORY OF JOB

Ready? Because we are jumping into the deep end. We are starting with one of the most complex, heartbreaking, and difficult-to-digest stories of suffering in the entire Bible: the book of Job. Job was a very wealthy man living in the land of Uz. He had seven sons and three daughters. He had many servants and owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 1,000 oxen, and 500 female donkeys. He was known to be a really good guy, a man of complete integrity who loved God and served Him well.

But all of that changed one day. The first chapter of Job introduces a puzzling exchange that takes place in the heavenly court. In a conversation between God and “the Accuser,” some questions are asked: Does Job love God so much only because God has blessed

him so much? Is Job really a devoted servant of God, or is he simply a fair-weather follower? The Accuser asks for Job's many blessings to be taken away to find out if he will still love God, and God agrees. At first, this might sound like some sort of horrible heavenly wager, like an indifferent god agreeing to gamble with a good man's life. The truth is, God is setting the stage for a conversation with Job about whether He is just, good, and sovereign. The book of Job is an incredible and vital part of the Bible, lovingly included by a good God who is well aware of the questions we all struggle with in the face of suffering. Questions like: Why do bad things happen to good people?

Job is a good person. In Job 1:8, while speaking to the Accuser, God says, "Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil." Job is placed in the category of good people by God Himself, but a lot of bad things are about to happen to him. Let's pick up the story in Job 1, starting with verse 13:

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting at the oldest brother's house, a messenger arrived at Job's home with this news: "Your oxen were plowing, with the donkeys feeding beside them, when the Sabeans raided us. They stole all the animals and killed all the farmhands. I am the only one who escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: "The fire of God has fallen from heaven and burned up your sheep and all the shepherds. I am the only one who escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, a third messenger arrived with this news: "Three bands of Chaldean

raiders have stolen your camels and killed your servants. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.” While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: “Your sons and daughters were feasting in their oldest brother’s home. Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the wilderness and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your children are dead. I am the only one who escaped to tell you” (Job 1:13-19).

What in the world? Gut-wrenching news is being interrupted by even more horrific news, as awful thing after awful thing keeps happening. Job lost his children, his livestock, and his servants in multiple disasters, which he found out about in rapid succession. How does he respond to being bombarded with so much sudden and severe suffering?

Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship. He said, “I came naked from my mother’s womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!” In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God (Job 1:20-22).

Job tears his robe and shaves his head—which were cultural signs of grief and mourning—then falls to the ground and worships God. He has just lost his servants, his wealth, his children, and his legacy, and yet he worships God. Praising God when good things happen is easy. It feels like a natural response when we get a big promotion at work or get a good report from the doctor, but to praise God like

Job after being gutted by massive loss? Well, that feels anything but normal.

I imagine Job felt heartbreak, shock, fear, sorrow, worry, and a whole list of other dark emotions. But worshipful? That does not seem like a feeling that would be high on his list in this moment. Praise is not an automated response when we are in pain. Worship is typically not a knee-jerk reaction to sorrow. That is because praising God in the face of terrible heartbreak is not based on feelings at all. Job made the choice to worship God despite his circumstances, despite his heartbreak, despite his feelings. Like Job, we have a choice. We can decide to cling to God and worship Him in the middle of our storms, or we can decide to blame Him, reject Him, and go it alone.

### CHOOSING TO WORSHIP

I faced a choice like this the day our daughter, Riley, was born. We went to the hospital that day with all the nervous, happy excitement of expecting parents, but I can remember the exact moment I felt everything shift. Her delivery was going smoothly, but then suddenly the hospital room was a blur of movement and activity. The medical team burst into action and others rushed in to help. Alarms, beeps, and concerned faces seemed to be everywhere. The next thing I knew, our daughter was being rushed out of the room, and I was being escorted to a much smaller room to be briefed on what was happening.

The small room was actually a broom closet. I remember looking at a mop, trying to force myself to listen to what they were saying because all I kept thinking was: *Why am I in a broom closet? The hospital should really have a better room for difficult conversations.* The doctor explained that something was very wrong with our little girl,

and they were working hard to keep her alive. An emergency response team was on the way to transfer her by ambulance to a different hospital that had a level-four newborn intensive care unit. They let me know there was a good chance she might not live through the ambulance ride and asked if I wanted to see her.

I remember standing there thinking how tiny she looked surrounded by all the medical devices, wires, and cords. I could not do anything to help her; I couldn't even hold her. I felt as though my heart fractured, part of it dropping into the pit of my stomach, and the other part lying there in an incubator, half-hidden behind life-saving devices. It was brutal.

As I walked back down the hospital corridor, I was reeling from everything I had just seen and heard. I could barely wrap my head around what was happening, and now I was on my way to somehow explain all of this to my wife, our four-year-old son, and the rest of our family. As I passed by the nurses' station, a thought stopped me in my tracks: *How am I going to respond to this?* This one question cut through all the chaos of my thoughts and seemed to demand my attention. *How will I respond to this? Should I be angry with God? Do I blame Him? Do I walk away from Him? Or do I choose to trust Him?* I remember I was so caught off guard by the question that I actually answered it out loud to myself. I said, "God, whether she lives or dies, I am with You." Something broke in me as I said that, but something else solidified. It was one of the most defining moments of my life. My response was not easy or instinctive; it was agonizing to say those words and mean them. I did not feel like trusting God; I felt like shouting at Him. But I still made a choice right then and there to stick with Him no matter what happened. It was an intentional decision, not an emotional reaction.

I would love to say the dark clouds parted in that moment, and everything was magically okay—but the whirlwind of hospitals, doctors, and uncertainty has been going on for over seventeen years now. We have had many terrifying medical briefings in hospital corridors and small rooms. We have lost count of the sleepless nights, scary moments, surgeries, intensive care unit visits, and medical appointments. Riley is the twelfth known case in the world of a very rare, very complex genetic disorder. She is in a wheelchair, has a feeding tube, a tracheostomy tube, a ventilator, and a medical history that could fill entire libraries. The storm has not passed yet by any means, but I have learned a lot along the way.

I have learned that, like Job, we have a choice of what we will worship. Please note that I said *what* and not *if* because worship is not optional. You and I were made to worship. We do not have a choice on that; worship is hardwired into who we are as humans. We worship instinctually, so the only choice we do have is what we will worship. Will we choose to worship our worry, our comfort, our own abilities? Will we worship modern science, stock markets, or success? Or maybe our self-image, our sense of control, or our relationships? Or will we choose to worship God? Worship is not optional, but the object of your worship is up to you.

I have also learned that worship is not based on emotions or circumstances, but on the worthiness of its object. Worship is the acknowledgment of honor; it is reverence and recognition of worth. The almighty, all-knowing, all-powerful God of the universe is worthy of worship. The character of God and His worthiness to be worshipped does not change based on my emotions or my circumstances. If God is worthy of my worship, then He is worthy of it all the time, regardless of how I feel or where I find myself in life.

Just as swimming is much easier to learn in the shallows than in the deep, so is learning to make the right choices. Determining what you will worship and what will hold your trust and admiration is easiest to do before the hardships of life hit. In the chaos of storms and suffering, gut reactions are wildly unpredictable. I don't know if I could have chosen to trust God in that hospital corridor had I not learned to trust Him before.

The longer the storm rages around us and the longer our suffering continues, the harder it can be to keep choosing to trust God. There will be days when the doubts and questions creep back in. Moments when the pain and fear threaten to drown out our faith and hope. Choosing what we will worship is not just a one-time decision. It is a daily, sometimes moment-by-moment choice.

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In Job 1, we see that Job worships God despite the unimaginable happening. But as Job's suffering worsens and wears on, he starts to respond differently. By the end of chapter two, Job is almost unrecognizable because he is so marked by the suffering he has experienced. His heart is broken, his wealth is gone, and now his health is rapidly deteriorating. He is in intense pain in every way possible—emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Job's friends show up and just sit with him for a full week, not saying anything because "his suffering was too great for words" (Job 2:13). Job is understandably overwhelmed and exhausted by all he has endured up to this

point. He begins to wrestle with the question that if God knew all this was going to happen to him, then why would He let him be born? If God knew his life was going to be filled with this much misery, why even give him life? Job says,

Why wasn't I born dead?

Why didn't I die as I came from the womb?

Why was I laid on my mother's lap?

Why did she nurse me at her breasts?

Had I died at birth, I would now be at peace.

I would be asleep and at rest...

Oh, why give light to those in misery,

and life to those who are bitter? (Job 3:11-13, 20).

Job's response has shifted from unquestioning worship to wrestling with some massive questions. But he is not the only one in Scripture who wrestled with what he thought he knew and understood about God. Jonah, Moses, Abraham, David, Elijah, Jacob, and many other people in the Bible had emotional roller coasters of faith filled with back-and-forth moments with God while they worked out what they believed about His character and how they would respond to difficulty. Throughout human history, people have questioned God and struggled with doubts; but through all that wrestling, the sovereignty and divinity of God remains intact and secure. That is because God can handle our questions. His power and authority are not too fragile to withstand some poking and prodding. It is okay to ask questions. It is okay to work out what you believe. It does not mean you are a bad person or a bad Christian if you have questions or doubts; it is what you do with those questions and doubts that matters.

Think about the act of wrestling—you cannot do it from far away. Wrestling requires proximity. Job is hurting and angry, but he doesn't run from God in his anger; he goes to God with it. Job has a lot of questions, but he takes them directly to God instead of looking for answers in other places or walking away because he doesn't understand. Worshipping and wrestling are intimate and personal. God welcomes both. He wants us to seek Him and to seek to know Him better. He is deserving of our worship, and He will patiently engage with our wrestling. He simply wants us to draw near to Him.

The human skeletal system is strengthened by impact. Weight-bearing increases the density, resiliency, and strength of our bones. Muscles grow stronger when we challenge them as well. Muscle mass and strength increase as microtears in the muscle fibers that come from lifting heavy weights are repaired by the body. Our faith is the same. There is a soreness and pain that comes with the stretching and tearing, but then it becomes stronger, tested, and more resilient. There are times God will draw us in to wrestle, to work out what we believe, and to know Him more intimately.

During the roller coaster of the first few years with our daughter, I found myself wrestling with God almost daily. The ups and downs of life with a severely medically complex child left me with fear, worry, and a whole lot of questions. I was a pastor in full-time ministry, and if I am being honest, there were days when I thought, *What the heck, God? I'm on Your team! Shouldn't how much I do for You count for something? Shouldn't my prayers for help and for healing matter?* I still believed in God, but I began to question pretty much everything I thought I knew about Him. If God was both good and sovereign, then why was all this happening? Why does He heal some people but not others? I had so many questions. I spent almost four

years grappling with God, my theology, and my beliefs. Those years of chasing answers, studying Scripture, and praying raw, sometimes angry prayers ended up deepening my relationship with God like nothing else ever has. I wanted rationalization. I demanded answers because I needed to understand how God operated. Instead what God gave me was a deeper relationship with Him because what I needed to understand more than anything was who He is, not what He does or why.

### **GOD'S RESPONSE TO JOB**

A couple years ago I was having some issues with my vision. I went to several different optometrists and ophthalmologists and then finally ended up being referred to an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) specialist. It seems a bit weird to go to an ENT for your eyes, but we discovered that the issues with my vision did not stem from my eyes but from my sinuses. I had so much sinus pressure on the back of my eyes that it was distorting my sight. The pressures we experience can distort our vision and perspective.

This is somewhat like what we see happening with Job—he is wrestling with God from his pain-filled point of view and limited perspective. Job's sorrow is all-consuming, and he is feeling crushed by overwhelming grief and pain. He is grappling with what he thought he knew about God and struggling to reconcile his understandings of suffering, sovereignty, and justice. For 37 chapters of the book of Job, God remains silent and allows Job to process all he's endured. But then in chapter 38, God speaks from the storm.

Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind:

“Who is this that questions my wisdom  
with such ignorant words?

Brace yourself like a man,  
because I have some questions for you,  
and you must answer them.

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the  
earth?

Tell me, if you know so much...

Have you explored the springs from which the seas  
come?

Have you explored their depths?

Do you know where the gates of death are located?

Have you seen the gates of utter gloom?

Do you realize the extent of the earth?

Tell me about it if you know!

Where does light come from,  
and where does darkness go?

Can you take each to its home?

Do you know how to get there?

But of course you know all this!

For you were born before it was all created,  
and you are so very experienced!” (Job 38:1-4, 16-21).

God continues to elaborate on His grandeur and sovereignty for four full chapters! God shows up in a whirlwind, gives no direct answers to Job’s questions, and offers zero explanations. In fact, He responds to Job’s challenges and questions with questions of His own.

He asks if Job can direct the movement of the stars, control lightning, or command the oceans. He talks about the cosmos, the foundations of the earth, and the laws of the universe. Then He brings it closer to home and starts talking about things that happen in Job's day-to-day life. He asks if Job feeds the ravens or watches deer be born in the wild. Is Job the one who gives the horse its strength or flight to the hawk and the eagle?

God is making it clear that His power and perspective are larger than Job's wildest imaginations, and His wisdom and intimate knowledge of everyday details are far greater than Job could ever fathom. Job had questioned God's knowledge, involvement, and abilities. God responded by showing how very limited Job's own knowledge, involvement, and abilities are. God is infinite, omniscient, and divine. We are finite, limited, and mortal. God's answer was not a harsh answer or a nonanswer, but simply a "you wouldn't understand even if I told you" kind of answer. Job has been asking big questions, and God's response is that the answers are too big for Job to comprehend. It is like attempting to explain calculus to a bug: no matter how perfect the explanation might be, the bug will never be able to understand because it is a bug. There are things that we will never be able to comprehend because we are the created, not the Creator, and we have a finite understanding and a limited perspective.

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### THE PATH THROUGH THE STORM

When the storms of life feel as though they are breaking you, and you are struggling to put one foot in front of the other, being told “You can’t possibly understand what is going on” does not diminish your problems or pain. It does not explain away the heartbreak, and it does not ease the impact of the storm. It can, however, help us shift our perspective and come to terms with the fact that there are many, many things in life we will not understand. Fortunately, we do not have to understand everything because we have a God who does. Let’s look at Job’s response in Job 42:1-3:

Then Job replied to the LORD:

“I know that you can do anything,

and no one can stop you.

You asked, ‘Who is this that questions my wisdom  
with such ignorance?’

It is I—and I was talking about things

I knew nothing about,

things far too wonderful for me.”

Job realizes how finite his understanding is when he is confronted by an infinite God. Job could not possibly have the right perspective or understanding of what God was doing because he is not God. If our focus is only on our happiness, our ease, or our comfort zones, then when the storms of life take us beyond them, we will be completely disoriented. If we are only concerned with the here and now, then our perspective is far too limited. Once we’re in heaven and look back on our lives, I suspect we will be much more thankful for the valleys than the mountains and for the storms that showed us more

of who God is and brought us closer to Him. The great author and theologian C.S. Lewis once said, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”<sup>2</sup>

The heartbreak, suffering, and wrestling in the book of Job show us it is okay for our faith to be messy at times because life is messy. Our path through the storm may not always be straightforward. At times we will push ahead with resolve and determination only to have fear, doubt, or the longevity of it all knock us back. Keep going. Keep praying, even when the words are hard to say. God responds to our prayers—the ones whispered in the dark of night, the ones shouted in anger, the broken ones muttered in between tears, and the ones that end in a question mark.

Hardships are simply an inevitable part of life, and they are demanding catalysts. They will make you better or they will make you worse, but they will not leave you as you are. Storms and suffering demand change; they demand a response. We can try to run from them, or we can square our shoulders and face them head-on. The only thing we cannot do is try to ignore them or avoid them; opting out is not really an option. We have little control over the different hardships we face in life, but we can control how we respond to them. What will your response be? Will you walk away from God and try to weather the storm alone? Will you wrestle? Will you worship? Take some time to read and study the book of Job for yourself. There are so many relatable moments, challenging thoughts, and words of wisdom in those chapters. Hopefully you will be inspired by them like I have been—to boldly walk into the storm, to draw near to God with real and raw prayers, and to hold more tightly to God than to your questions.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What have your past struggles taught you about God's trustworthiness? In what areas do you still find yourself struggling to trust Him? In what specific ways can you pray to grow in your faith?
2. Spend some time reflecting on the worthiness of God to receive our worship. Maybe spend some time with God in nature (personally this is a big one for me) or take time to think back on all He has done in your life. Read through Job chapters 38–41 and let the grandeur and glory of God described in those verses inspire you to worship Him.