

## Put Your Face to the Wind

**Author:** Shelley Betts

### You Can't Predict the Weather

On July 13, 1995 most people boating on Lake St. Clair, near Detroit, Michigan, did not anticipate the storm that was about to ravage the area. Even the weather meteorologists were surprised by the turn of events. In just minutes, foreboding black clouds rolled and swirled, spewing huge lightning strikes across the sky.

The temperature dropped suddenly. The abrupt cold wind pierced thin summer clothing as people wrestled to get their boats prepared to face the onslaught.

In desperation, people struggled to get their leisure boats into the wind, but with each passing moment the wind shifted, making it impossible for them to control their vessels. Fear gripped their hearts as adrenalin pumped through their veins.

That day, 26 boats capsized on Lake St. Clair. Fortunately, no lives were lost, but many people suffered severe injury and significant damage to their boats. Isn't this the way most tragic incidents happen?

When you least expect it, some "unknown" element enters the picture, bringing chaos to your life.

In [last month's \*Day Star\*](#), Marty Purvis' article discussed suffering and how it affects us all. This month, I would like to discuss a more personal aspect of this topic. Few people are aware of the fact that last April I had a stroke. Unfortunately, high blood pressure, which is a genetic shortcoming in my father's family, got the best of me.

The stroke was . . . and still is, a significant event in my life.

Unaware of my dangerously high blood pressure, the stroke left me stunned, weak and completely bewildered. Until the moment it happened, I was moving through life, intent on fulfilling all my scheduled "appointments" with effervescence enthusiasm.

Then, in a mere moment in time, my life was turned upside down by a serious health problem that threatened my life. Where did this come from? This was abrupt, without warning and not anticipated!

As I reflect back over the events of that evening, I am not ashamed to admit that in the first moments of this incident, as it began to dawn on me what had happened and what I might be coping with for the rest of my life . . . fear gripped my heart. So, as you can imagine, when I read the account of the incident on Lake St. Clair, my heart raced with familiar emotions as I grasped what those individuals must have experienced.

My stroke had given me a sense of the emotions that must have surged through those individual's minds and hearts. I could relate. Just as they desperately struggled to put their vessel into the wind, I too, realized that God was *expecting* me in my own personal storm, to put my face (faith) into the wind.

Even though four months have passed, many challenges still linger from the results of the stroke. It is difficult for me to write about those initial frustrating days when the right side of my body would not respond to my sluggish mind and my speech was barely intelligible. Much has happened since then and I am happy to report that I am making progress each day. To be sure, any person who goes through this type of experience has a radical change of life, and yes, I am a changed person.

I no longer look at life in quite the same way. Honestly, as great as the struggle has been to regain my bodily functions, it was even a greater challenge to cling to the thought that God is with me, during what I can only describe as a soul ravaging experience.

## **My experience is not unique. (1 Cor 10:13)**

Many, many people have been pressed to the limit of endurance as they struggle with health problems, financial loss, emotional turmoil, death of a loved one, or family problems. Often, individuals are not struggling with simply one issue, but several. In today's society, problems seem pandemic and the accompanying stress severely intense.

Recently, I have asked myself many times "What is going on?" as friends have shared with me their sincerely pathetic plight.

For myself, I have come to terms with this issue using the following rationale. First, it appears that we are the last generation in a long succession of generations who have lived on Earth. Six thousand years of sin have taken a great toll on this planet and human kind.

In some way, each of us has inherited 6,000 years worth of genetic degeneration. Time has been one of our greatest enemies. It has allowed germs to get the upper hand, mutating and fighting the positive effects of some of the strongest medicines. While technology has helped to make the mundane chores of life easier, it has polluted every element of our environment, including our bodies. It should be no surprise then, when our bodies break down, defenseless before the onslaught of powerful diseases.

Second, since we are living at the "end," we can be sure that Satan is moving his forces into a full fledged assault. We are all familiar with the text that goes: **"Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."** (Rev12:12) The devil is doing a "full court press" – using every conceivable means to stress all aspects of our daily lives, hoping we will stumble and lose control of our spiritual walk.

Consider the following text: **"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they**

should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. *However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*" (Luke 18:1-8)

This parable now takes on new meaning from my "wounded-pigeon" perspective. Of course, Jesus (our Creator) foreknew the detestable conditions that would exist on Earth before His incredible rescue mission. He understood, as no other, the "shadow of death," being tempted in every way, just as we are, by the same devil. (Heb 4:15)

Notice how Jesus introduces the theme of this parable by reminding us to pray always and never give up. Jesus concludes the parable, voicing His **greatest concern** in the form of a question: Will He find faith on the Earth when He comes to take us Home?

The devil's goal is not to just make us miserable, although I believe he does get some kind of fiendish delight from seeing us in a helpless, terrified state of mind. Instead, when we find ourselves in a murky pool of misery, the devil hopes to **sap our faith** – faith in the great I AM. In the darkest moments of a senseless tragedy, the devil attempts to make us question God's goodness, justice and power. For instance, "If God is so good, why did He allow my loved one to die.

If He is so powerful, why did He not intervene? Evil people are everywhere, openly disobeying God, yet nothing bad seems to happen to them? Where is the justice in all this? I have given my life to God and what has it got me?" I am sure you get my point.

It is not wrong to question God and there are many biblical examples of men and women doing so. (Isa 1:18; Job 26-34, 38-42; Gen 18:20-33) However, in each example, man is no match for God's wisdom and to linger in that realm of thinking can only lead to rebellion.

In a sense, Jesus' parable is a warning, cautioning us just how slippery the slope toward unbelief really is. Paul states this concept even plainer: "**Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering . . . [Regardless of what happens] do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."** (Heb 10:32-38 insertion and underlining mine)

**Clearly, God is concerned about the depth of our faith**

## **commitment.**

Quoting that the righteous live by faith may sound oversimplified, but "living it" is quite another matter. It is a daunting task to confront fear, pain, rejection, terminal illness, or all manner of formidable enemies – whatever the devil brings against us – and not lose our faith. God did not ask His servants to do an easy thing. His intent is clear. He wants your faith in Almighty God to overshadow the fear that inevitably will swell within your heart.

If you have been fortunate and spared a life-shattering misfortune yet, your time is coming. Do not forget, as bad as some circumstances may seem today, it is only a glimpse of things to come. THE "time of the end" will be like no other time on Earth. (Matt 24:21)

The conditions will be so horrific that humankind will prefer death. (Rev 9:6) So it should not surprise us that Jesus seems to be indicating in the parable that the greatest challenge for you and me today, and in the days ahead, is to hang on to our faith in Jesus Christ and His ability to rescue us from this body of death. (Rom 7:25,25)

Let us get real. When you are bone tired and worn to a nub, or dealing with long periods of constant pain, or completely drained by a terminal illness, or struggling with loneliness after losing a loved one, how do you cope? Unfortunately, I do not have a universal answer that will work for everyone.

Each person has a unique personality, surrounded with different strengths and weakness. However, researchers do tell us that in times of extreme stress, our minds and emotions have a tendency to shut down. This was my experience.

This type of reaction is the body's way of protecting itself when it is the most vulnerable. I believe Jesus created us this way because He foreknew all the devastating effects of sin and the terrible reverberation it would make on human existence.

I also realized that in my time of extreme stress, it was almost impossible to read – in fact, the desire was not even there. I could not keep my mind focused on anything – it was a chaotic mess.

This situation really bothered me. I am an avid reader and prayer warrior. One morning, feeling very sad and particularly agitated, I whispered the name of my Savior – "Jesus." As I did so, the beating of my racing heart began to slow down. I sensed it. So I continued. "Jesus, I know you see every tear.

Forgive me, but I do not feel like reading the Bible or praying right now. I just need to know, will you come and stay here with me?" I cannot begin to describe the sense of peace that came with those words. That was the beginning of a wonderful encounter with my Savior.

The Holy Spirit has never been more intimate in my life. He literally became my "hiding place." I did not spend a lot of time praying, but I did spend a lot of time "resting in Him." At that moment,

it was enough. Eventually, when my mind would allow it, my heart and mind overflowed in gratitude for sparing my life. This I know: **"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted"** [in their suffering]. (Heb 2:18 insertion mine)

In my darkest hour, the Holy Spirit was quick to comfort when I invited Him to do so. When I felt anxious, He was quick to surround me with His peace, but I had to ask. Matthew 14 gives the account of the disciples attempting to cross the lake in a boat, but a threatening wind kept them from accomplishing their goal.

As the waves buffeted the boat, they could see Jesus walking on the water. Immediately, they wanted Him to come into the boat. Instead of complying, He responded: **"Take Courage! Don't be afraid. It is I."** [The great I AM]. We all know about Peter's early morning dip, but notice what Jesus said to him: **"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"** Why do we so readily doubt God's goodwill for us? If you are suffering, let me encourage you. Hold on to your faith in Him and believe He is capable of fulfilling His promise to you – the faith-full will one day live with Him. (Isa 41:10)

Jon Mohr has written a song called *Refiner's Fire*. Jon must have faced some extreme trials in his life to write such words: "There burns a fire with sacred heat, white hot with holy flame. And all who dare pass through its blaze will not emerge the same . . . with great skill all are hammered by their sufferings on the anvil of His will. Each time His purging cleanses deeper, I'm not sure how I'll survive. Yet the strength in growing weaker keeps my hungry soul alive.

The Refiner's fire has now become my soul's desire. Purged, cleansed and purified, that the Lord may be glorified. He is consuming my soul, refining me, making me whole. No matter what I may lose, I chose the Refiner's fire!" No words can describe the sweetness in sensing His Presence within the fire.

We live in this sin-laden world and eventually, everyone will suffer at the hands of the evil one. A season will come when you too, will need to "rest in His Presence." No one is exempt from suffering, so prepare for it. If you have not experienced a soul-ravaging event in your life yet, a gentle admonition.

Please do not criticize the way others deal with their turmoil. Simply put, you are *unqualified* to question or judge a person's response to any devastating event because you lack your own experience. Remaining silent is far better than offering advice by quoting traditional religious cliches.

Instead, be lavish with your compassion, pray fervently and follow the Holy Spirit's lead. The storms of life have a way of draining your energy and beating you against the reef of despair. When it does, God's grace is sufficient – He will help you put your face (faith) into the wind as you battle the storm together.

If you will allow it, the Holy Spirit will use each distressing experience to heighten your sense of His Presence, leaving your life changed forever.