

Surviving Your Perfect Storm

Intro: In October of 1991 a storm stronger than any in recorded history hit the coast off of Gloucester, Massachusetts. This storm, a meteorological anomaly, was really three storms that had combined into one creating an almost apocalyptic situation in the Atlantic Ocean for the fishermen who worked in the area. The fishing boats and their crews trapped in this storm encountered waves the height of a ten-story building! The dramatic struggle and loss of one of those boats, the Andrea Gail and its fishing crew who were unwittingly trapped in the storm, was described in a nonfiction work by Sebastian Junger. Some time later the book was adapted to the big screen in a popular movie by the same title, “The Perfect Storm.”

There may be times in life when we feel we’ve experienced the emotional equivalent to “the perfect storm”. There are many things in life that may challenge and erode our emotional strength—problems at work (the loss of a job, hostile co-workers, impending lay-offs), problems at home (rebellious children, unfaithful mate, financial problems, sickness and death, loss of loved one, responsibility for the care of sick parents), personal problems (surviving abuse, overcoming addictions, managing temptations). Any one of these is a lot to handle. But sometimes you go through several of them at once, and it may make you feel like Satan has not just gotten you down; he is “piling on.” It’s not just a normal “rainy day,” it is an all-out “perfect storm”.

What do you do when your “perfect storm” comes?

Spend less time asking "why" and more time asking "what?"

Suffering causes us to go through all kinds of agonizing and hard questions about causation.

One of the first questions we ask in difficult times is “why”? Why me? Why this? Why now? These questions betray the belief that somehow we have been singled out by difficulty. So we ask, “What did I do to deserve this?” Or we may say, “God is punishing me for something in my life”. Why didn’t God hear my prayers for protection?

The truth is, there is not one simple answer to why suffering occurs in our lives. There are many possible answers:

We may suffer to some degree because of the divine judgment against sin.

All people suffer to some degree due to the divine judgment on the sin of the first human pair (Gen. 3). The whole creation was subjected to futility (Rom. 8:20-21). We live in a world of death. Does a disease bacterium check out the faith of a person before invading his/her body?

All people may suffer because of divine judgment upon personal or social sins (Ex. 20:5).

We may suffer from the kind of world in which we live. It is an environment of natural law.

Sometimes we suffer because or another person breaks one of those laws through carelessness or accident.

We can be in the wrong place at the right time (Lk. 13:4-5). A tornado doesn't do a religious survey before deciding which houses to demolish!

We may suffer as the result of man's free moral agency, the power to choose good or evil.

We may suffer as a consequence of bad choices we've made (1 Pet. 4:15). God's judgment may be to allow them to suffer the consequences of their sinful behavior (Cf. Rom. 1:26-27).

We may suffer as a consequence of bad choices other people make (abusive parents, drunk driver, criminal)

Christians may also suffer because they are the direct targets of evil people because of their faith.

We may suffer because are targeted by Satan as a test of faith.

Satan brought suffering to Job in various forms (disease, attack by evil men, natural calamity) with God's consent (Job 1).

I see no reason to conclude that Satan cannot still do this.

Any of these can possibly explain the suffering in our lives; and the truth is, we may never know all the causes or the specific causes of our suffering.

So then, it is more important to ask not "why?" but "what?" What should I do? What benefit can come from this? What is the best course for me to pursue in the face of suffering to receive that benefit?

Use your faith in God

When your perfect storm comes, realize that you have been preparing for it all your life...if you have been a Christian. Use that faith which God has been creating within you all these years.

Regrettably suffering has caused many people to turn away from God. In fact, it is one of the leading arguments of unbelievers for the atheistic viewpoint. Atheists commonly seek to destroy believers on the horns of this dilemma.

If God has power to stop suffering and does not do so, He is not good.

If God wants to stop suffering but can't, then He is not all-powerful.

The good and all-powerful God of the Bible cannot exist.

However, denying God's existence or turning away from Him does not remove the problem of suffering; but believing in God in suffering can help. So use that faith!

Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. (1 Peter 4:19)

Pray to God for strength and relief

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray (James 5:13)

Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. (2 Corinthians 12:8)

Remember Jesus' words: "*Let this cup pass from me!*"

Look to God's word for comfort and hope.

Find comfort in the presence of God.

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6)

Find comfort in the love and concern of God.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

Find comfort in the promises of God.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Accept help and support from your spiritual family.

Find physical help in their gifts.

"Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

Find spiritual strength in their words and prayers.

"Therefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

Determine to become better through the experience of suffering.

As has often been said, "Suffering can make bitter, or it can make us better." Can there be value in the experience of suffering? Can God use our pain to some useful purpose?

Suffering can reveal the genuineness of our faith.

"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" (1 Peter 1:6-7)

Suffering can make us spiritually stronger.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Suffering can make us more compassionate and helpful to others.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Some of the greatest comfort in life comes from those who find a way to comfort others not merely after their time of suffering, but during it. What an amazing example many of you are who while going through difficult things are trying to find ways to encourage someone else!

Suffering can awaken in us a longing for a greater hope, a hope which God provides.

Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:13)

And while we wait for that hope, suffering can awaken in us a greater sense of gratitude and joy in life itself.

Conclusion: Perhaps there is a part of us that could wish that the storm would never come. Since we cannot wish suffering away, then there are only two options. We can perish in it or we can survive. Which do you choose?