

INTRODUCTION

Storms

Storms come and go in all seasons of the year and in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes you can see them coming for days; sometimes they appear out of nowhere. Monsoons, blizzards, tornados, hurricanes and typhoons are a just a few examples of crazy weather that you can experience.

In mid-October 2012, Superstorm Sandy emerged from the Caribbean Sea. Over the course of a week, it developed into one of the largest storms the Atlantic coast has ever seen. On October 29th, Sandy struck Atlantic City, NJ making its first landfall in the United States. Sandy had significant effects from the Mid-Atlantic all the way up through New England. Over the course of 24 hours, millions were left without power, thousands of homes were destroyed, and over a hundred lost their life. Although extensive preparations were made, the intensity of the storm was such that damage was still severe and unpreventable.

Although they may not have as broad of an impact, storms of life affect you on a more personal level. This does not mean you have a small, dark cloud following you around and literally casting bad weather down on you like you see in cartoons. (If you are experiencing an actual small cloud hovering over you and these symptoms persist, please consult your local meteorologist.) Rather, you probably go through events or stages of life that present you with storm-like turmoil. They can be dark, rough, stressful, dangerous, and often cause more of a problem in your life than meteorological conditions. The first century Church experienced these types of storms from the very beginning.

Paul

Not long after Jesus went up to Heaven, the Church began. People with passionate faith and sincere worship of God marked this era. However, the Church was plagued by pretty harsh treatment. The Roman government despised them because the Church worshipped Jesus more than Caesar. As the Church grew, the Roman Empire feared rebellion. To make matters worse, the Jewish religious leaders opposed the Church because they didn't believe that Jesus was God. The persecution

believers would face was as serious as imprisonment and death. One particular Jewish religious leader named Paul was extremely passionate about silencing the church. He hated everything about them. So much so that he would journey all over the Roman Empire simply to imprison and kill followers of Christ. Paul's reputation preceded him wherever he would go. His peers highly regarded him and the Christians feared him. Such a man seems like a rather unlikely candidate to be used by God to do great things. However, Paul went on to have one of the most influential roles in the expansion of the early church.

Throughout the rest of this book, you will be challenged to think about these storms of life. You will spend time looking at how serious these storms can be, how in the world you will survive them, what your reaction should be, what happens when they have passed, and how others can help in the midst of these storms. In all of this, you will see where Jesus is throughout the course of the storm. You will spend time examining the life of Paul, as he and the early church adjust to the storms that affected them.

Bible Study: *The Powerful Presence of Storms* Sunday

Have you ever been caught outside in the middle of a crazy storm? What was the experience like?

What emotions (fear, excitement, stress, etc.) did you feel?

Have you ever left anything outside that has been damaged beyond repair because of severe weather (rain, snow, wind, lightning, hail, etc.)? What was the item and how was it damaged?

A Divine Interruption...

Just like storms affect you in minor and major ways; there are spiritual storms that arise that affect the course of your life. The apostle Paul experienced many of these spiritual storms in his life as well. In this passage, you will witness the drastic conversion of Paul. This comes years into his persecution of Christians. Paul was still going by his Jewish name, Saul. He had risen to be one of the most important Pharisees of his day. He is on his way to a city called Damascus with the intention of killing and arresting Christians there. However, God had other plans. Jesus meets him where he is... literally... on a road to Damascus. He appears to Saul (Paul) in a bright light and rocks his world.

Read *Acts 9:1-31*

What do you think Saul (Paul) was thinking when he was lying on the ground hearing the voice in the midst of that bright light?

What do you think it would be like to be blind for 3 days?

What kind of emotions did Saul (Paul) experience when he opened his eyes and saw nothing?

God referred to Saul (Paul) as “my chosen instrument” (v. 15). How would you have responded if you were Ananias?

Saul (Paul) had a “reputation” for being a persecutor of Christians. How do you think he felt standing up the first time to preach to those he had been persecuting?

DAILY DEBRIEF

What are your goals for this trip?

What was the best part about today?

What are you most excited about for this week?

In what ways is Jesus calling you to serve your mission team? Be specific!

Did anyone say anything quote-worthy?
