



## Above the Storm!

by Mark Brunner

### *Uplift!* (Isaiah 40:31)

When I was a little boy we used to have an old-fashioned wringer washing machine. This was an early type of washing machine in which you had to hand feed the freshly washed clothes through a pair of moving rolling pins to squeeze the extra water out before drying. I often wondered how those clothes felt going through them. My mom used a wooden handle to pick the clothes up and push them through the wringer. My curiosity was graphically ended one day when I was helping my Mom feed the clothes into the wringer and the wooden handle got caught instead. The wringers separated and the handle and clothes were released. The wringer used its own crushing strength to force it open and release the handle. What was dangerous became benign.

It's often like this in life when the storms of misfortune hit. What seemed like a threat, really becomes a benefit.

Here's a story: Did you know that an eagle knows when the storm is approaching long before it breaks? As the storm clouds approach and pressure changes in the air occur, the eagle lifts its wing and flaps anxiously on its perch. Within moments the eagle launches into flight and flies to some high spot above the storm clouds and waits for the winds and rough weather to come. Actually, the eagle uses the storm and its rage to reach those heights. When the storm hits, it sets its wings so that the wind will pick it up and lift it

high above the storm. While the storm rages below, the eagle is soaring high above it, gliding with ease. The eagle does not escape the storm, it just simply uses the storm to lift it higher. (Author Unknown)

Just as that eagle rises on the winds that bring the storm into its world, so it should be for us when the storms of life squeeze us into anxious wrecks. When the storms of life come upon us, and all of us will experience them, we can rise above them by setting our minds and belief toward God! The storms do not have to overcome us. We can allow God to lift us above them. God enables us to ride the winds of the storm that brings sickness, pain, tragedy, failure and disappointments in our lives, and make something good come from it. We can soar above the storm. Remember, it's not the burdens of life that weigh us down, but it's how we handle them that counts. In Isaiah 40:31 (NIV) it reads: "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings of eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." When life threatens to squeeze you into submission remember the eagle and remember those crushing wringers. Sometimes what seems a threat may prove to be a blessing in disguise.

*"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34)*

## *Eggs-Potatoes-Coffee!* (John 15:51)

Holly and I were pruning some of the shrubbery here at Beech Springs. As we trimmed one bush it seemed dead and useless, dry and brittle looking and void of leaves. As I pulled one down to snap it off, I had a surprise. It wasn't quite as dead as I had thought. I pulled and twisted, but right where the branch met the trunk of the bush, there was life. I was unable to snap the branch as I had intended, and now I would have to get a loppers to finish the job.

It's often surprising that life is like that as well. Life becomes dry and hard and we're convinced that things won't change.

Here's a story: Once upon a time a daughter complained to her father that her life was miserable and that she didn't know how she was going to make it. Her father took her to the kitchen and filled three pots with water, brought each to a boil, and placed potatoes in one pot, eggs in the second pot, and ground coffee beans in the third. The daughter waited impatiently, wondering what he was doing. After twenty minutes he took the potatoes and eggs out of the pot and placed them in a bowl. He then poured the coffee out and placed it in a cup. Turning to her he asked. "Daughter, what do you see?" "Potatoes, eggs, and coffee," she replied. "Look closer", he said. She did and noted that the potatoes were soft and found the egg hard-boiled. Finally, he asked her to sip the coffee. "Father, what does this mean?" she asked. He then explained that the potatoes, the eggs and coffee beans had each faced the same adversity – the boiling water. However, each one reacted differently. The potato went in strong, hard, and unrelenting, but in boiling water, it became soft and weak. The egg was fragile, with the thin outer shell protecting its liquid interior until it was put in the boiling water. Then the inside of the egg became hard. However, the ground coffee beans were unique. After they were exposed to the boiling water, they changed the water and created something new. (Author Unknown)

When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a potato, an egg, or a coffee bean? In life, things happen to us, but the only thing that truly matters is what happens inside our hearts. Which one are you? Sometimes our lives seem so dry and brittle. Sometimes we feel parched for strength, peace, and understanding, and so brittle we could just snap and break! But Jesus is the "Living Water" and if we stay connected to Him we will receive spiritual living water and not wither up. Everybody knows that there will be days when life seems hard and we're about to break. You and I need to stop, take a breath and reflect for a moment. We all have choices; we can choose to become hardened and unloving, soft and vulnerable OR, just choose to become something even better. Which would you choose?

## *Super Squash!* (12.2.09 – Above The Storm! – Philippians 1:6)

The one thing in common with all woodwork is that the rough wood has to be finished. There are nail holes that need to be filled. The roughness has to be smoothed. The procedure to achieve the desired effect is that the wood has to be sanded. It is a big job. I had to do this dozens of times over the years here at Beech Springs. First the sanding and then running my hand over the sanded area to see how it feels. It might still be a little rough, so the sanding starts all over again. I keep repeating this until the wood has the desired smoothness.

Life is kind'a like that. The more we live it, the more we need to put a finishing touch on it. It's a small thing, but to get to the finished product, a life well-lived, there's no other way.

Here's a story: In an interesting experiment at Amherst College (Massachusetts), a band of steel was secured around a young squash. As the squash grew, it exerted pressure on the steel band. Researchers wanted to know just how strong a squash could be, so they measured the force it brought to bear on its constraints. They initially estimated that it might be able to exert as much as 500 pounds of pressure. In one month, the squash was pressing 500 pounds. In two months it was applying 1,500 pounds and, when it reached 2,000 pounds, researchers had to strengthen the steel band. The squash eventually brought 5,000 pounds of pressure to bear on the band - when the rind split open. They opened the squash and found it inedible. It was full of tough, coarse fibers that had grown to push against the constraining obstacle. The plant required great amounts of nutrients to gain the strength needed to break its bonds, and its roots extended out about 80,000 feet in all directions. The squash had single-handedly taken over the garden space! (Steve Goodier)

Sometimes living life under pressure seems the wrong way to go. Shouldn't our ultimate goal be a life free from pressure? How can we be healthy physically or spiritually if we live under the pressure of everyday living? The Scriptures tell us that God "began a good work in you (and I) and will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). So, picture this:

you and I are pieces of unfinished wood and God applies the pressure of daily living on each of us, daily. Then, at the end of the day, He runs his comforting holy hand over us looking for rough spots; and the smoothing continues. But, like that squash, the more he applies the pressure the deeper our roots in faith will grow, taking over our lives completely and preparing us for a planting in eternal life where the sanding will stop and only the soothing, smoothing will continue. I guess the finished product, life in heaven, is worth the pressure after all.

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## *Nourishing Hardship!* (Philippians 1:6)

Do you thrive on stress? I guess the better question is: does stress bring out the best in you or the worst? Unbridled stress, as any doctor will tell you, is bad for you. Nevertheless, since we aren't able to eliminate all stress from our typical lives, what's the answer? The answer may be easier than you think. The clue is in your relationship to the stress. Stress will ride your back if you give it the chance; or you can bridle it and ride it instead. Riding stress can be not only fun, it can be fulfilling; in fact, it may even be life saving. Imagining a life free of stress may be more of a nightmare than a pleasant dream.

Does God use everyday stress to improve us and, well, make us stronger, more alive and able to cope? What if He were to eliminate stress from our lives completely? Sound good? Well, maybe not.

Here's a story: Too much comfort is dangerous; literally! Researchers at the University of California at Berkeley did an experiment sometime ago that involved introducing an amoeba into a perfectly stress-free environment. They made sure that the amoeba had an ideal temperature in which to live, the optimal concentration of moisture, a constant food supply and anything else that an amoeba needed to survive. In fact the researches went to such lengths to cover all their bases they provided the amoeba with an

environment to which it had to make no adjustment whatsoever. So you would guess that that was a happy little amoeba. Whatever it is that gives amoebas ulcers and high blood pressure was gone. A funny thing happened, though. Despite the fact that the researches gave the amoeba everything it needed to survive except the stress of a normal, natural environment, oddly enough, it died. (John Ortberg)

Apparently there is something about all living creatures, even with amoebas, that demands challenge. We require change, adaptation, and challenge the way we require food and air. Comfort alone will kill us. When teachers want students to grow, they don't give them answers—they give them problems! It is only in the process of accepting and solving problems that our ability to think creatively is enhanced, our persistence is strengthened, and our self-confidence is deepened. If someone gives me the answers, I may get a good score on a test, but I will not have grown. Just as our bodies simply will not grow stronger without being challenged to the point of exertion, so it is with our mind and spirit. Comfort is not an adequate excuse for an unopened gift. The next time you're faced with stress in your life, get out the bridle and pull stress in submission. Get on it's back and ride. You may be surprised at what you've been missing all along.

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## *The Trouble Tree!* (Ezekiel 17:23)

I consider myself pretty handy when it comes to carpentry around here at Beech Springs. Holly has called on me over the years to do everything from adding an addition onto the kitchen to designing and building cabinetry for our upstairs bath- room. One thing I discovered though is this: there comes a time in every handyman's career when he reaches that place called "failure." That place for me was the bathroom vanity. I labored on the design, construction and installation for months. Eventually it became apparent that although I could toenail a stud and even design a roof rafter, I couldn't build a

nice, functional bathroom vanity. Although it hurt Holly I'm sure to ask me to tear it out and seek professional help, she was compelled when it became apparent that it just wasn't going to get done. I'll never forget tearing it out and dumping all the pieces into the burning barrel and putting a match to months of work. I felt bad at first, but as the flames consumed my months of effort, I felt a bit relieved. My mistakes were disappearing as well; and that was good.

Failure is inevitable in this life. As Christians we can choose to dwell on the blunders or put them behind us; a simple choice when you weigh the options.

Here's a story: The old carpenter had just finished a rough day on the job. A flat tire made him lose time, his electric saw quit, and now his pickup truck refused to start. He returned home and as he walked toward the front door, he paused at a small tree, touching tips of the branches with both hands. When opening the door, he underwent a transformation. His tanned face was wreathed in smiles and he hugged his children and gave his wife a kiss. This he repeated every time he came home from a job. One day his wife asked him why he did this every day. "That's my trouble tree," he replied. "I know I can't help having troubles, but one thing I know, troubles don't belong in the house. So I just hang them up on the tree every night when I come home. Then in the morning I pick them up again." "Funny thing is," he smiled, "when I come out in the morning to pick 'em up, there ain't nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before." (Unknown)

What a wonderful perspective on things, that seem at first, to be so disastrous; a business failure, divorce, personal dream gone sour, even a bathroom vanity that proves an embarrassment. Whether these things destroy an individual depends largely on the attitude we take toward them. You and I need to sort out why it happened, and learn something from the blunders. Starting over can be an exercise in defeat or an opportunity to put away our mistakes. Seems an easy choice when you think about it.