



MARY SOUTHERLAND

The *Stress-Buster* and Women's Ministry Motivator



Preparing for Storms

As men and women in ministry, we must be careful to recognize and remember the source of power that fuels ministry. It is not found in our talent, ability, position or title. Our only source of power for life and ministry is found in the person of God. "Power" literally means "strength and authority". When we depend upon and minister from the strength and authority of God – instead of our own – we will stand strong when the storms hit. And if there is one thing you can count on in ministry, it is the occurrence of storms. Fortunately, one of the Holy Spirit's most important jobs is to comfort and sustain us in *every* situation and in *every* storm - if we allow Him to do so. I seem to do fairly well when the skies are clear and the seas are calm. However, when the waves hit, I can forget every promise I have ever known, doubt every truth I have ever learned and quickly lose my sense of direction. My focus is altered, my perspective is distorted and my purpose and direction unclear.

While swimming in the ocean, my father-in-law was caught in a school of jelly-fish and stung many times. Panicked and confused, he began swimming furiously for the water's surface, but soon became disoriented and lost his sense of direction. Time was running out when dad suddenly realized there was only one way for him to survive. Forcing himself to relax, he began to float. It was only seconds until the dark water grew lighter and with great relief, he found himself floating upward, toward the light. By swimming toward that light, Dad made it to the surface and safety, just before passing out.

Have you ever felt that way in ministry - caught in an excruciating situation, stung by harsh criticism and painful betrayal? Panic sets in and a paralyzing confusion strips your heart bare. You swim furiously toward unrealistic expectations and unrealized dreams but nothing changes. There is no vision, no power and no passion. Lost and confused, you are forced to do the very thing you should have done first – relax and rest in Him. When the strong waves hit, when we lose our way in the midst of a storm, we must stop, look for the Light and swim toward it!

In scripture, God's truth is often described as a "lamp" or "light". The reason is clear. "Truth" literally means "integrity or deeply rooted righteousness". "Righteousness" simply means "right living". The presence of God's truth dispels spiritual darkness and unleashes the power of God to work, producing His righteousness and integrity in us. Simply put, if we want to experience God's power, we must know and obey God's truth. It is everything we need to weather storms.

"We have faithfully preached the truth. God's power has been working in us. We have righteousness as our weapon, both to attack and to defend ourselves" (2 Corinthians 6:7 NLT).

The roots of truth grow deeply, providing not only stability and direction but every weapon needed for spiritual warfare. Without His truth, active and alive in our lives, we are defenseless and powerless against the ruthless attacks of the enemy. When we step into ministry, we are also stepping into enemy territory.

I am told that the Holy Land is extremely dry because water is precious and hard to find. Trees growing there are amazingly strong because their roots must reach deep into the earth in order to find a water source. However, in South Florida, where we lived for many years, water is everywhere. When Hurricane Andrew viciously attacked Fort Lauderdale, we were fortunate in that we only lost several large palm trees. They looked strong but their roots were shallow, and as a result, were easily toppled by the storm. Ministry is much the same! To withstand the storms of ministry, we must be committed to deepening our roots in God by

allowing His truth to grow freely in our lives.

I had no idea the damage and chaos a storm can generate until I experienced my first hurricane. When hurricane warnings are issued, the grocery stores immediately fill with frantic customers in search of bread, water and canned goods. Batteries and plywood fly off of hardware store shelves. Lines at the ATM machines and gas pumps block traffic and fan tempers. Panic sets in and reason is lost. Why? People have waited until the last minute and are not prepared for the approaching storm. Don't wait! You never know when the next storm will hit.

Side-bar: By the way, the best way to *get ready* for a storm is to *stay ready* for a storm. And the best preparation for tomorrow's storm is to plug the truth of God into our lives today! Right now, you may be thinking, "Is she kidding? I have been in ministry forever and am well-grounded in the Word of God." When did you last submerge yourself in the truths of the bible - not because you had a sermon or lesson to prepare, but simply because you love God and long to hear Him speak?

Storms come in all shapes and sizes. The lab report comes back malignant. The school calls, demanding that you pick up your child who has just been expelled. Your husband informs you that he no longer wants to be married to you. The church advises you that it is time to move on. Financial disaster seems certain while dependable friends seem to vanish. Yes, storms will come and bad things will happen – even to men and women in ministry. Where is God when the winds pick up and the churning waters pummel your rocking boat? God is where He has always been and always will be - in the midst of every stormy circumstance. As a minister, you are certainly no stranger to pain. It doesn't matter if you serve one or one thousand. You may be on the staff of a large church or responsible for unlocking the doors of your small country church. A storm is a storm. The question is, are you ready?

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