

Stand Strong in the Storm

✖ I love trees! I have always loved trees. So it was only natural that after my husband, John, and I moved into our new house, I developed the habit of sitting in our screened room in my spare moments and staring at the majestic live oak in our backyard.

On one occasion when I was enjoying its beauty, a typical Florida storm began to form. The wind built to a high intensity in moments. As I watched the branches of the mighty oak sway in the strong breezes, I made some observations.

First, I noticed that the trunk never moved, in spite of the force of the wind. Second, I saw that although the branches closest to the trunk swayed slightly, they held fast. Then, as my eyes followed the branches out to the very ends, I noticed that the smaller, more delicate twigs were breaking off and flying in every direction. They seemed to snap off like matchsticks. Some of the larger branches that were already dead fell quickly to the ground.

As I was observing these things, the Lord spoke two verses to my heart: “‘I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned’” (John 15:5-6, NKJV).

I remembered that the closer the branches I had observed in the storm were to the trunk of the tree, the less likely they were to break off. Those branches farthest from the trunk, on the other hand, fell easily to the ground – especially the ones that were already dead.

The Lord pointed out that it is similar in the spiritual realm. The closer we stay to the Vine (the “trunk”), the more likely we are to remain connected to Him and to have His life

in us. As we continue to abide in Him through intimate fellowship, we will be able to withstand the storms of life that threaten to separate us from Him and prevent us from fulfilling our purpose as “branches,” which, as He said, is to bear “much fruit.”

There have been times in my walk with the Lord when I have forgotten this truth – when, instead of investing in our relationship through prayer and study of the Word, I began to take Him for granted. At those times I thought it was faith. But now I realize it was simply laziness. I knew He would always be with me and would never forsake me, so I became haphazard in my fellowship with Him and, in effect, distanced myself from Him.

During these times I was like the small twigs on the tree I described – vulnerable in the face of a storm. One storm that threatened to destroy me blew in when my son Keith announced that his 16-year-old girlfriend was pregnant.

I had made Keith the center of my world, so the news was devastating to me. For days, I felt pain such as I had never known before. I walked around at night hoping a car would run over me and put an end to my torment.

However, the Holy Spirit had a different plan. He wooed me with such love and compassion that I could not stay focused on the storm. I ran back to the Father’s lap, climbed into His arms and felt the peace and rest I longed for. He refreshed me with His healing balm and soothed my soul. He also helped me to love Keith’s girlfriend, who became his wife, as a daughter and to rejoice at the prospect of a new grandchild.

Jesus warned us, “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). He knew the storms would come and the winds would blow. But He also gave us this encouragement: “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (v. 33). As long as we stay closely joined to Him through His Spirit and His Word, we

will draw strength from the Vine just as branches draw their strength from the trunk of the tree.

If you're in a storm right now, don't let the wind knock you down. Learn how to abide in the Vine and stand strong in the storm.