



Trying to Reason With Hurricane Season *Coping with Bad Experiences*

June 1 is the beginning of Atlantic Hurricane Season each year. It ends all too mercifully November 30. Living on the East Coast of the United States, I am affected by this where those in the Heartland or West deal with storms of a different nature--Mudslides, Tornado Alley, and Spring thaw/flood season, etc. My friends in North Dakota talked to me last year about the difficulties of the Blizzard Season, and the concept still applies. Hawaii seems like paradise, but residents there are constantly under the threat of not only hurricanes and volcanoes, but earthquakes that result in tsunamis. In the past year we have become all too aware of their impact and unpredictability. No matter where you live, storms will come in your life - physically, emotionally and spiritually and you have to deal with them accordingly.

When I speak on this subject before audiences, I talk about seven people whose lives were upset for over 14 years by a single storm. Of course I'm referring to the passengers of the S.S. Minnow on the hit show, *Gilligan's Island*. Although we laughed at their problems every week it reminded us that everyone regardless of their station in life is affected by storms. Hurricanes, earthquakes and tornados are categorized to label their intensity. For the sake of our discussion we'll categorize storms that come in our lives, then we'll explore some tips on how to cope when bad things happen.

Category 1 - Storms that you create. These are troubles of our own making. We can't blame them on anyone else, because the culprit is in the mirror. I forgot to fill the gas tank; I invested everything in .com stocks in 2000; I got caught speeding; I started smoking and quit exercising; or I took on more than I knew I could handle at work.

Category 2 - Storms that someone else creates. These are storms that are the fault or others. I once had a '66 Mustang that I was restoring. It was about 85% restored when I went out one morning to find it was gone. Dealing with the police and insurance company was a bigger hassle than losing the car at times (see my talk on Customer Service). I didn't leave the keys where someone could take them, and I left the car locked, but a classic 'Stang is tempting bait for an auto thief. Later that year our house was broken into and all of my wife's jewelry was

stolen. We were renting an apartment, so we got the message and moved. Sometimes it's good to get out of the natural path of storms.

Category 3 - Storms that come in the natural order. Tornados, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes. Insurance companies call these "acts of God," but when you come down to it, it's our choice to live in certain areas that are prone to some natural disasters (If you don't want to get shark bitten don't leave Kansas City). Many people hate their jobs, but what they hate just comes with the territory. If you can't cope with it, leave. That's right, leave. Life is too short to be miserable doing what you don't enjoy. If you can cope with it, grow up and find ways to make it pleasurable.

Category 4 - Storms that are most severe. They occur because there is evil in this world. There is evil in terrorism, in illegal drugs, in disease, etc. Ask any police officer, nurse, paramedic or emergency room doctor and they will tell you they have looked into the eyes of evil on an almost daily basis. Look at the people suffering in Asia not just due to the recent tsunami; but disease, child trafficking, and theft/looting.

We don't often choose when bad things happen, but we can choose how we react to them. Your reactions to misfortune are keys to overcoming bad occurrences in life. In the '60s there was a baseball pitcher, named Clem Labine, who had a broken finger set wrong. He was told he would never pitch again, but he was determined to prove the critics wrong. Through discipline a practice, Clem developed one of the best curve balls in the major leagues. Only he could throw it due to his physical defect-turned asset.

So what are some hints that will make you face "Hurricane Season" with confidence and a positive outlook?

1. *Guard your time.* Learn to say "no" to interruptions. Do positive things in your spare time. Read and listen to things that will build you up rather than bring you down. If it is negative or harmful, ruthlessly delete it from your life and routine. The two most precious commodities in life today are money and time. You can make more money, but you can't create more time. You can only change your priorities so that more time is available to you to get things done. Live a life prepared for the times when you will need your faculties to face difficulties.

2. *Read more than you watch TV.* This single action will turn your "influencing" factors in a positive direction. I watch educational things on TV and entertainment, but reading will never be replaced as the best way to improve your outlook on life and build you up when the storms hit. Did you know that less than 60% of Americans read at least one book in 2004? No wonder we see people caught up in bad circumstances. They don't do what it takes to be overcomers.

3. *Save money.* Start or improve your savings account. I know several individuals that when times were prosperous, they spent all they had. When the storms hit their lives, they had nothing to fall back on. I pay 10% of what I make to God. I pay the next 10% to myself for saving and retirement. If you can't live on the remaining 80% you need to cut back on your spending. When I was 12 years old, the Boy Scouts taught me how to face storms in life with the motto: Be prepared.

4. *Learn from the storms.* When life knocks you down find out why. Use bad experiences as warning lights on your life's dash board. What can you learn so that when it happens again you will be better able to face it. If problems don't make you better they will make you bitter. Which one will you become? Only a fool will repeat their mistakes knowing the outcome will never change. Who do you know that went through a disaster and never got over it? Do you envy them or see where if the same thing happened to you, you could improve yourself.

5. *Remember that you are more in control of your life than others.* This simple thought will keep you from playing the "blame game." Quit blaming God for your lack of success. Odds are you've been able to move ahead, but were too busy blaming God, nature or society for your problems. The world's most successful people weren't defensive or insecure. They rose above their circumstances to succeed. Only you can control your schedule and your reactions to others. Start exercising your authority over your own life.

6. *Ignore people that try to discourage you.* These are miserable people who are jealous of your dedication to a positive, fulfilling life. Jim Stovall, founder of the Narrative Television Network tells how he started the idea when he became blind as a teenager and lost his life-long desire to become a football player. When he came up with the idea of a TV network that narrated scenes for the blind, he got more negative criticism than he had imagined he would. He simply ignored the critics and went ahead with his plan. He says, "If you ignore the critics they will go away eventually and bother someone else." Try Jim's method and see if it works for you.

7. *Make it a habit to help others.* Get in the habit of helping out when storms come into their lives. Give blood to the Red Cross. Volunteer your spare time to help with a local group like the United Way. See what community mission project you can get involved with through your church. This will first help you in knowing how to cope with storms through your efforts. Second, it will build a support group around you who will come to your aid when storms hit your life. Remember, everybody at some point becomes victim of storms in their lives. You are not alone unless you choose to be.

8. *Make positive selections.* This sounds easy, but in reality, the world is more than half negative. Make it a habit to choose the positive. I wear a piece of jewelry around my neck every day to remind me to see the positive side of every circumstance. It's my own Positive Amulet. I use it to remind me that it can face

inward (negative) or outward--outward to me means a positive outlook.

Earl Nightingale wrote in *The Strangest Secret*, "You become what you think about all day long." These words were the ones that influenced him. They are the words that continue to influence me and will influence you. Remember them. The next time storms come into your life, choose your reaction. It may be the defining moment that turns your life around in the right direction.

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