

Nature Gone Wild

In Living Color, Part 3

Selected Scripture

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Even in hurricane weather, God is in control. He sovereignly ordains each moment of our lives, and He controls each event in the world, including natural disasters. This should be a comfort to us in that nothing is by accident. Everything is under His control. Our life and circumstances may look and feel chaotic, but God is in control of that chaos. As with everything else in life, we can learn from natural disasters. They show us how frail life is. We cannot bring the rain or stop a tornado, but God can. We rely on His power to calm the winds and waves. Natural disasters also remind us to walk closely with the Lord. We don't know what will happen in our lives next, so we must be daily walking in the Spirit. Also, natural disasters teach us to prioritize better. We treasure the things of heaven and not this world. Finally, natural disasters are a reminder of what is coming—the final judgment.

Discussion Points:

Two of the lessons we can learn from natural disasters are the frailty of life and the importance of walking with the Lord. We are not in control of what happens, but God is.

- Does your life ever seem chaotic? What comfort is there in knowing that God is in control?
- We know that God is in control, but how do you live out that truth?
- Daily walking in the Spirit requires denying ourselves and following the Lord. What areas of your life need to be given over to God so you can walk closely with Him?

Along with the frailty of life and walking closely with the Lord, natural disasters teach us to reshape our priorities.

- What are some things that our culture emphasizes and encourages people to pursue?
- How does that message contradict Scripture?
- Scripture is clear that we will suffer as believers, but all things work together for our good and the glory of God. How does suffering keep you spiritually minded?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Ultimately, natural disasters give us a glimpse of the final judgment.

- We talk about the final judgment, but do we really believe it is coming? How does that truth affect the urgency of sharing the Gospel with unbelievers?
- Look up some passages in Revelation that tell us about the final judgment.
- What relief it is to know Christ! Who can you share the Gospel with this week?

Gospel Connection:

Natural disasters are all under the sovereign hand of God. Through natural disasters, we can learn so much. We can have a proper view of who God is and how much we need Him. We can see how important it is to have a growing relationship with Him. We can learn to lay up treasure in heaven instead of this world. All of these truths should encourage us to share the Gospel. The God who created the world also made a way for us to have a relationship with Him. We cannot take that for granted. We cannot walk away from something as massive as a hurricane and not see the bigger picture—the God who loves us also controls the wind and rain. He controls every tree that fell during the storm. He knew who would live and who would pass away. We cannot waste the opportunity to share with others the Gospel, especially in times such as this.

Practical Implications:

Think: How has this perspective of natural disasters changed your view of God? How can you apply these truths to your life?

Pray: Ask God to help you trust Him in all situations. Ask Him to help you have a Biblical perspective in all areas of life – the uncertain and certain times.

Do: Choose joy and to be thankful at all times. Walk with God, daily denying yourself and following Him. Ask God to give you someone you can share the Gospel with this week, and do it.

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This has been quite an interesting week for sure. You never knew the Weather channel would be so riveting. We've never been more interested in things like landfall and wind speed and categories 1-5 – in fact, I never knew so much about wind speed and their categories until this past week.

We were kept up to date, moment by moment, on the wind-speed and what that meant in categorizing the hurricane.

Someone sent me a couple of pictures just in case our power went out and we weren't able to watch the news anymore.

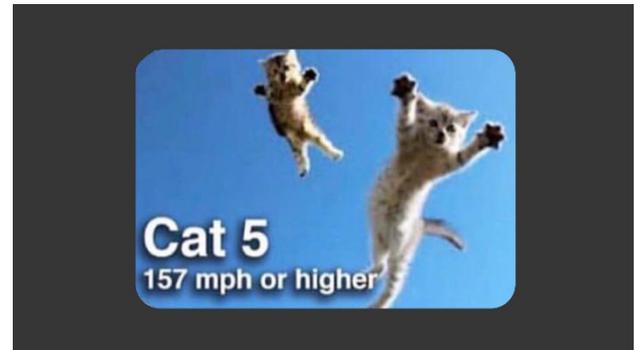
They said you could figure out the wind speed this way. Put your cat out on the front lawn and if it's a category 1 wind speed, this is what your cat will look like.



If it's a category 3, this will be the result.



And if it's a category 5, this is what will happen.



The cats will instantly go to heaven. This is just a win-win for everybody.

In our current series on nature, I thought this might be the perfect opportunity to deliver a message on nature gone wild.

What do we know from scripture regarding the wild side of nature . . . what we commonly refer to as natural disasters. And more importantly, when we consider what we call natural disasters, where'd they come from, why'd they arrive when they did and, for the believer, what can they possibly teach us.

Mankind has frankly attempted to answer the question of hurricanes and storms for several thousand years.

In Greek mythology, the god Aeolus was considered the divine keeper of the winds; he was the king of a floating island called Aiolia. Aeolus was in charge of keeping the violent storm-winds locked away on his island; and most of the time he did, unless other gods were angry with mankind and convinced Aeolus to let the winds loose to wreak havoc on the human race. So when hurricanes arrived, the Greek world assumed that Aeolus was in on it and the gods were upset so people would offer a few extra sacrifices to appease them.

I found it interesting that just a few weeks ago, the first satellite of its kind was launched with special equipment capable of transmitting precise wind-profile observations from around the globe. It's the first satellite ever designed with this capability and it has been named – ironically – Aeolus – after the god-keeper of the wind.ⁱ Surely the gods need to be recognized.

The Vikings had a storm god they named, Odin – and he was often pictured along with wolves and dogs – which became animal symbols of the wind.

Witches, they also believed, supposedly rode their brooms high in the air stirring up the rain clouds, and they were often pictured with black cats, which in ancient times became the animal symbol for heavy rain and ominous storms.

The expression “it's raining cats and dogs” emerged from the superstition that high winds and torrential rain was the work of gods and witches conspiring together.

If you've lived long enough – here in the Western world – you've probably heard God blamed for the latest natural disaster or terrorist bomb or suffering in general.

I remember reading one journalist who wrote, following a hurricane, that if this world is a product of intelligent design, then the designer has some explaining to do.

If you live long enough you'll see or read about one natural disaster after another – from landslides to blizzards to tsunamis to hurricanes.

I remember the aftermath of Hurricane Fran ripping through Raleigh a number of years ago; the winds reached gusts of 115 miles an hour and 30 people died in that storm. Damages ranged right around 3 billion dollars.

Nine years later, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast – one of our pastors lost their home in that storm; winds reached 173 miles an hour and more than 1,700 people died. Damages exceeded 125 billion dollars.

What exactly would you say to someone who suffered loss in a hurricane? What would you say to someone like Job and his wife who lost all 10 of their children after a seemingly random hurricane came out of nowhere and leveled the

house where all the grown children were celebrating a birthday party.

Job Chapter 1 and verse 4 informs us that his children had a tradition of getting together and celebrating their day – that is, their birthday. Talk about timing . . . talk about the timing of such a tragedy.

Forty times in your Bible you'll find the word *storm* (35 time in the Old Testament and 5 times in the New Testament). And nowhere does the Bible ever even suggest that somehow the storm slipped out of His control.

Throughout scripture, the description of God's sovereign direction and control over nature – even when in our view nature has gone wild – is without hesitation.

In fact, the Book of Job reveals it more than any other text: In chapter 37, the text reads: Out of the south comes the storm, and out of the north the cold. From the breath of God ice is made, and the expanse of the waters is frozen. Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; the clouds scatter His lightning. They turn around and around by His guidance, to accomplish all that He commands them on the face of the inhabited earth.

Job 37:9-12

Now I realize there are Christians even who would say that God has nothing to do with hurricanes – it's just the forces of nature gone wild and He just let's nature take its course and then tries to make something good out of it. But that same Christian will probably pray for sunshine on their outdoor wedding day; or for rain during a drought season.

Even the unbeliever will send up a prayer or two if the weather turns against them. Like the unbelieving sailors who began praying to every god they could think of while Jonah slept down below deck. And then, when Jonah told them that this storm which was threatening to sink their boat was the God who sent the storm –

In fact, *Jonah 1:4* says this: ***the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm.*** And when the sailors heard that Jonah's God was the God who sent the storm, they started praying to Him too (Jonah 1:14).

I read some time ago that after an earthquake in California, a group of pastors met at a prayer breakfast and they talked about all that had happened and then came to the conclusion that God had nothing to do with sending the earthquake.

When their prayer breakfast was over, one of the pastors prayed the benediction and thanked God for the timing of the earthquake which had taken place early in the morning before the school busses and commuters were on the highway. And when he finished his prayer, all the other pastors echoed his "Amen." How do you thank God for timing the earthquake if God had no control over it?

And how do you explain the Lord being roused from His sleep in the middle of a hurricane – out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee with His disciples – and He says to that great windstorm and the waves crashing into the boat (*Mark 4 records*) "**Peace be still**" . . . *literally "Hush . . . be quiet."*

And the wind ceased and there was great calm. And His disciples said to one another, "Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

We are just as surprised . . . and the Biblical revelation of God's mastery and design and purpose, which might include sorrow and suffering and pain and death through secondary means like natural disasters, has behind it all the primary means of the purposes of God at work, in even these unexplainable ways.

Nahum the prophet introduces God as the God who is in the hurricane and in the storm (*Nahum 3:1*).

Isaiah records God Himself speaking, I form the light and I create darkness; I bring prosperity and I create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.

Isaiah 45:7

So keep this in mind: well-meaning Christians even will try and get God off the hook in having anything to do with it, while God's standing by taking responsibility for it.

Which is the only explanation, by the way, that gives any of us any kind of hope – it wasn't

random; it wasn't meaningless; it wasn't without purpose – God didn't disappear; God didn't mess things up; God didn't turn His back on you; and God alone knows what that purpose is, and will one day reveal it.

Here's the confidence of the believer: this is God's universe; this is His storm; this is His lightning; this is His flood; just as it is His sunshine and the quiet breeze and beautiful creatures of earth.

- Is God in control of natural disasters? Noah would hope so as he rides out a global flood.
- Is God in control of hungry predators? That's the explanation Daniel gives the King the next morning after surviving a night in the lion's den.
- Is God in control of that huge whale that swallowed Jonah alive? If Jonah didn't believe that he would have never held a prayer meeting in the belly of that whale where he prays, "Lord, you cast me into the deep . . . Your waves and bellows have passed over me . . . You did this . . . You're in control of this!"

Beloved, if God can command the natural world, He is in control of the natural world. And it's in that biblical framework of the character and sovereignty of God, where we find hope and confidence and rest – even when it looks like chaos, God is ultimately in control of the chaos . . . even when nature seems to run wild. And we, as one Puritan wrote, "We can learn to kiss the wave that has cast us upon the Rock of Ages."

What exactly *can* we learn from the physical storms and natural disasters of life? Let me suggest at least 4 lessons.

First of all, natural disasters have a way of:

1. Revealing to us the frailty of life

They reveal how utterly dependent we are for the basic things of life. To this day, even though there's talk of seeding clouds – we can't make it rain.

Several years ago, hundreds of people held hands and prayed downtown Atlanta, just outside the state capitol building. Water levels were at an all-time low; states hit hard by a severe drought in the South meant that farmers were now relying on irrigation . . . and water restrictions put in place months earlier weren't enough to compensate for the dwindling supply.

The Governor risked mockery and anger, yet he called for a public prayer meeting and said, "I'm here today to appeal to you and to all people who believe in the power of prayer to ask God to shower our state, our region, our nation with the blessings of water."

A few years later, the Governor of Texas and a presidential candidates made an even bolder statement by calling for an all-day-prayer event in Houston where he invited his fellow governors to join him at the event to – quote – "call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles facing the country, including a multitude of natural disasters."

Nothing wrong with that . . . every raindrop; every icicle, every tornado, every hurricane is a part of His plan to fulfill ultimately His purpose.

And in the face of that kind of humility we rediscover the frailty of life and the powerlessness of any of us to produce one raindrop or, for that matter, stop one raindrop from falling.

Nature essentially asks us – who do we think we are? It has a way of humbling us – which is a good thing – as we bow before the Creator and acknowledge that:

- something bigger than us is at work and
- Someone greater than us in in control.

These events reveal to us the frailty and smallness of our lives.

A second lesson we can learn is that natural disasters have a way of:

2. Reminding us to remain alert and walk closely with the Lord

Believing that God is in control doesn't eliminate our responsibility to obey Him and walk with Him and stay alert to the spiritual dangers that can come out of nowhere.

Peter, the Apostle, warned the believer *to be on the alert, for your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).*

You never know when a spiritual battle will begin, so stay on high alert. And here's where a hurricane is different than any spiritual battle you face. With a hurricane, you might have several days of warning.

We had plenty of advance warning. People were given ample opportunity to *evacuate the danger zone*. Meteorologists became everybody's favorite people.

This past week, as the storm moved closer and closer to landfall – with all the reporting and assessments and technology behind storm tracking and wind gauging and because we had all that information, none of us had one thought of taking a weekend vacation to the coast. We knew to avoid driving in that direction.

Well in the Christian life – there are no meteorologists. I don't mean that none of them are saved; what I mean is there are no spiritual Doppler radar images tracing that roaring lion; there are no spiritual weather updates with full color images spelling out the spiritual danger in the coming days.

There are no airplanes dropping into the swirling clouds different instruments that measure wind speed and the scope and size of the hurricane winds. There's no heavenly emergency warning system that interrupts your television program to tell you the storm is coming. There's no angelic speaker system in the sky blaring the news, "Tomorrow, trouble is going to land on your doorstep."

So what do you do? It's a reminder to walk with God today . . . and you're right where you need to be tomorrow.

Right after Peter warns us of spiritual trials and suffering, he encourages us that the Lord will give us the strength and grace to handle the

suffering which will only last for a little while (*1 Peter 5:10*).

In the meantime, natural disasters have a way, thirdly, of:

3. Reshaping our value system to focus on better things

- Not comfort, but for character
- Not earth's pleasures, but for the pleasure of God
- Not wealth, but wisdom
- Not health, but holiness

Our hands are so loaded down by holding on to stuff . . . our hands are so full, so to speak, I'm afraid that when the rapture occurs, many Christians are going to go up feet first.

Suffering and trouble tend to empty our hands and tutor us back to wise living. The Psalmist wrote that lesson out when he wrote, It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

Psalm 119:71

Catch the implication of his words here. The believer will experience affliction – call it, sickness, trial, natural disaster – not *because* they sinned, but to keep them from sinning even more.

This was the testimony of the Apostle Paul who wrote, "*Because of the amazing greatness of the revelations given to me, for this reason – to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh – a messenger of Satan to torment me – to keep me from exalting myself! (1 Corinthians 12:7-8)*."

In other words, suffering kept Paul spiritually minded. At these times of natural disasters, we're all reminded of what matters most.

Let me give you another lesson. Nature gone wild has a way of:

4. Reminding the world of coming disaster and a final judgment

Every storm you see is nothing compared to the storms reserved for the coming Tribulation.

Following the rapture of the church, the Lord Himself will unleash nature in such horrific ways that to us they are unimaginable.

Whatever disaster you might imagine – the Book of Revelation, beginning at chapter 6, describes the final days of human history as we know, as a world inundated and impacted by:

- drought, flood, hailstorms, wild fires burning up a third of all the trees;
- loss of drinking water, famine, disease and rampant epidemics;
- predatory animal attacks;
- plagues;
- mega earthquakes, meteor and
- asteroid strikes on the earth's surface;
- massive world-wide panic . . . and on and on and on.

So, no matter what you might observe now, it's just a whisper of the coming thunder of His wrath; it is a mere shadow compared to the lightning of His holy judgment which will come upon the earth and then upon every unbeliever.

The evolutionist is scrambling to give mankind an escape clause – as Voltaire the French atheist once wrote that we are insects living for a few seconds on atoms of mud.

Mankind can only wish that were true; but you and I are immortal souls and will live forever – experiencing either the justice of the Lord or the joy of the Lord.

Facing the full effects of the curse forever or, trusting in the Savior who faced the curse and defeated its consequences.

Genesis 3 revealed to Adam some of what his sin would involve: he would **sweat** – first time that word appears in human history – Adam will sweat in his labor; Adam will try to tame the earth to produce food – and the earth will now resist him by proliferating with thistles and **thorns**; and finally, Adam will experience **death** – just as you and I will.

But Jesus – the Second Adam – Paul called Him, entered into this cursed and chaotic world. And in that Garden of Gethsemane He **sweat**; in the labor of redeeming us from the curse, He sweat great drops of blood; and then He was

crucified – wearing on his brow a crown of **thorns** – thorns, then . . . and Jesus **died**.

Nature gone wild is both a warning of a future judgment, but an invitation to believe in Christ, who experienced the effects of a world cursed by sin: sweat . . . thorns . . . death!ⁱⁱ

The chaos and turbulence of cursed universe was entered by Jesus so that He could die for us and rise from the dead to promise us life in Him forever.

In the meantime, nature around us not only reflects God’s gracious attributes, but also His attributes of wrath and justice.

- So let every thunderclap remind you of the awesome power of God yet to be revealed in the thunderclaps John the Apostle heard around the throne of God;
- Let every lightning bolt cause us to reverence Him in His holy purity;
- Let every rainstorm and flood remind us that the justice of God that is rolling onward and forward until it overflows in judgment;

- Let every hurricane remind us of our weakness to save ourselves from the breath of God and that safety is found only in the One who commands the wind and the waves to be still.

Let every trial and every heartache remind us of our confidence and the coming glory in Christ; and bring us back during each storm to what matters most; to that;

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
Let the water and the blood,
From thy wounded side which flowed;
Be for sin, that double cure,
Saved from wrath and make me pure.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy matchless throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 09/16/2018 by Stephen Davey.

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i Wikipedia: ADM-Aeolus

ii Adapted from Henry M. Morris, The Genesis Record (Baker, 1976), p. 127