



## DEVOTIONAL

A passenger on an ocean liner was enduring a rough Atlantic crossing. As he leaned over the rail, his face a shade of green, a steward came along and tried to encourage him: “Don’t be discouraged, sir! No one’s ever died of seasickness yet!” The nauseous passenger looked up at the steward with horror and said, “Don’t say that! It’s only the hope of dying that’s kept me alive this long!”

That’s probably how Paul’s fellow-passengers felt after two weeks of enduring the storm at sea. Not only were they sick; after not being able to see the sun or stars for many days, they had lost all hope of being saved (27:20). In the same way, when people go through severe storms in life, often they lose all hope.

Into this bleak picture, the encouraging words of the apostle Paul brought a ray of light. In verse 22, he urges everyone to keep up their courage, promising that there would be no loss of life among them. Again in verse 25 he says, “Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.” Yet again in verse 33 we read that “Paul was encouraging them to take some food.” The result was (27:36), “all of them were encouraged.”

Someone has said, “Be kind. Everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” Those who do not know Christ need encouragement. Paul describes them as having no hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). They need the hope that only Christ can give. The Lord’s people need encouragement. Discouragement is one of Satan’s greatest tools, causing many in Christian service to give up and drop out of the ministry. Our families need encouragement. As husbands and fathers, we need to set an atmosphere of encouragement in our homes. The apostle Paul’s experience here shows us first, how to receive encouragement from the Lord in the storms of life; and, then, how to pass God’s encouragement on to others who desperately need it.

### **Those who have received God’s encouragement in life’s storms should encourage others to look to God.**

Paul wasn’t just an upbeat, positive person who never felt down. Luke’s words in verse 20 imply that Paul, Aristarchus, and Luke felt the same as everyone else on board, that there was no hope of their being saved. This is reinforced by the angel’s words to Paul (27:24), “Do not be afraid.” If Paul had not been discouraged and afraid, he would not have needed this encouraging word. But once he experienced God’s encouragement, he then passed it on to others. Before we can pass God’s encouragement along to others, we must personally experience it ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-70-encouragement-life-s-storms-acts-27-3-21-26-33-36>

## *OPEN IT*

1. Have you ever spent any time on the open waters? Do you enjoy being on boats? Why or why not?

## *READ IT*

Acts 27

## *EXPLORE IT*

2. To where were Paul and his fellow travelers setting sail?
3. How did the Centurion Julius treat Paul, and what did he allow him to do?
4. What was the feeling of the crew and prisoners amidst the storm in verse 20?
5. What confirmation allowed Paul to be filled with hope amidst such difficult times?
6. What was the outcome for the 276 people on board the vessel at the end of the chapter?

# APPLY IT



## WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

The trip to Rome would be made by sailing ship, by far the fastest form of long-distance travel from the eastern to western Mediterranean. If you like a good sea story, you'll be captivated by Luke's masterpiece of descriptive writing in Acts 27. It's a salty yarn in the tradition of sections of Melville's *Moby Dick*. The language of this tale shows the author knew the sea well. Because of this and other clues in Acts, some scholars theorize Luke had spent at least part of his medical career as a ship's surgeon. We know he took several sea voyages with Paul, including this in Acts 27. (Luke tells us he was there by his use of "we" and "us.")<sup>2</sup>

7. Luke had travelled with Paul and endured all kinds of situations and struggles along the way. What do the events of Paul's life tell us about Luke? How does this knowledge of Luke make Acts more meaningful to the reader?
8. Luke was a dependable and dear friend who stood with Paul in the good and bad times. Who is a Luke in your life? In what ways have they exhibited this kind of love to you?

<sup>2</sup> Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5436-5440). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

Luke, as noted, was with Paul on this voyage. Another apostolic coworker, Aristarchus the Macedonian, was also there. It is possible Luke signed on as ship's doctor. Another intriguing possibility mentioned by some scholars is that both Luke and Aristarchus went as Paul's slaves. Roman law permitted prominent Roman citizens under arrest to take with them one or two slaves to care for their personal needs.<sup>3</sup>

**9. What makes Christian friendships so special? What can we learn about Paul and Luke's relationship that can serve as a model for our friendships?**

The possibility that two men might actually volunteer to become slaves in order to stay with Paul on one of his most dangerous trips reveals the surprising depth of their love for the apostle and the Lord they all served! Continuous church growth depends on the willingness of Christians to make personal sacrifices and to go to the ends of the earth to tell the Jesus story.<sup>4</sup>

**10. Luke and Aristarchus sacrificed greatly for their friend by serving as his servants and remaining faithful even though Paul was a social outcast. How good of a friend are you to those closest to you?**

## **STRANGER THAN FICTION**

There is something almost parabolic about the description of Paul's journey by boat to Rome. Having been delayed in Caesarea for two years, putting his apostolic commission to preach to the Gentiles seemingly on hold, the snail-paced, ill-fated sea voyage only further exacerbates the sense of bad timing in his life. From a divine perspective, of course, everything has a purpose, and everything occurs as it should; but from a human perspective, we cannot help but wonder whether this journey only added to the apostle's sense of frustration by the tortuous journey of the various vessels from the Caesarean harbor to the empire's capital. It looked as though creation itself seemed reluctant to get him there, first by a lack of wind and then by too much. After all, the apostle comes within a hair's breadth of drowning at sea!<sup>5</sup>

**11. Look at the description of Paul's voyage in Acts 27. How do his experiences parallel his life and ministry since his conversion?**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, Derek W. H. *Acts (Reformed Expository Commentaries)* (p. 703). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

**12. In which of the following ways would you describe your life since following Christ? (The Love Boat, The SS Minnow from Gilligan's Island, or the Titanic)**

The coastal vessel sailed about seventy nautical miles north to the ancient city of “Sidon” (v. 3). While there, Julius kindly gave Paul permission to go enjoy the fellowship of “his friends”—that is, some Christians in the area (cf. 11:19). Julius, then, didn’t see Paul as dangerous. These friends cared for Paul, providing essentials for his trip. There were no restaurants or vending machines on this vessel.<sup>6</sup>

**13. Paul’s good behavior and honorable living allowed him to garner the trust of those in authority. How can godly living create opportunities among unbelievers around us?**

### **BAD MOON RISING**

Under the best of conditions, and sailing straight to Rome from Caesarea, it would take five weeks to transfer Paul to his intended destination. But when this trip is over, the journey will have taken well over four months (Bock, Acts, 746). Other prisoners were with the group, along with a centurion named Julius, who will display a spirit of generosity and kindness in his leadership throughout the trip. Importantly, these prisoners may have been going to Rome not to stand trial, but to serve in the arena as part of entertainment for the emperor and the citizens.<sup>7</sup>

Paul was not the only prisoner that Julius and his men were taking to Rome, for there were “certain other prisoners” with them. The Greek word means “others of a different kind” and may suggest that, unlike Paul, these men were going to Rome to die and not to stand trial. What mercy that they met Paul who could tell them how to go to heaven when they died!<sup>8</sup>

**14. Throughout the journey we see Paul being a Christian witness to those he was traveling with by giving direction and hope to his fellow travelers instead of worrying about his own circumstances. What personal comforts and focuses do we need to forgo in order to be of value to our fellow travelers in this life?**

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<sup>6</sup> Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 8407-8410). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Daring (Acts 13–28): Put Your Faith Where the Action Is (The BE Series Commentary)* (p. 164). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

**15. All of us have issues and struggles in life. How do we balance worry about ourselves with showing concern for the struggles people around us are having?**

The safe Mediterranean sailing season was summer—May to September. Sailing from east to west after mid-September was considered “iffy,” impossible by November, and suicidal from November to February. For weeks between November and March, cloudy skies hid the sun and stars on which first-century sailors depended for their bearings. Without sextant or compass, staying on course was impossible. Most of Paul’s voyage took place when “the Fast was already over” (Acts 27 9 NKJV), Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, which in that year, AD 59, was late—October 5, well into the scary season!<sup>9</sup>

Paul was a tentmaker not a seaman, but he was an experienced sea traveler who had already been through three shipwrecks! He urged officers of the ship to winter at Fair Havens. Adequate accommodations could be found in the nearby city of Lasea (Acts 27:8). From personal experience he warned of loss of ship and lives. Later, an angel revealed to him that the ship would wreck, but with no loss of life (see Acts 27:24). The centurion, senior military officer on board, would make the final decision. He chose to rely on the wisdom and experience of the ship’s owner (who was probably also ship’s captain) and the pilot who knew these waters like the back of his hand.<sup>10</sup>

**16. When have you been able to bring wisdom to a present situation because of past experience? Was your advice profitable to others?**

Without warning the south wind changed as a violent northwest wind roared down the slopes of the mountain—“a tempestuous head wind.” The New King James Version calls it “Euroclydon,” which is from *Euroquilo*, a hybrid Greek word combining *Euros* (east wind) with *Aquilo* (north wind). It described well the wild, unpredictable, twisting motion of sea and clouds caused by contrary currents of air moving in opposite directions at high speed.<sup>11</sup>

**17. What is one of the worst meteorological storms you have experienced? What is one of the worst personal storms (trials) you have endured? How are storms good pictures of our times of trials?**

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<sup>9</sup> Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5513-5519). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

<sup>10</sup> Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5486-5488). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

<sup>11</sup> Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5528-5531). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

**18. What can we learn from this text about God that can bring peace in times of storms in our own lives?**

### **YOU NEVER WALK ALONE**

As the storm rages on and the ship is tossed to and fro by the rough seas, Paul advises any surplus and unnecessary cargo be thrown overboard. Storms have a way of helping us to determine what is necessary and what is not.

**19. What important possessions or things have you seen become unnecessary when storms have hit your life? What things must you never let go of?**

As the sun appeared on the horizon, the crew could see a place to run the ship ashore. With the storm still blowing, they cast off the anchors, freed up the rudders, and went straight for the beach. That's when the ship struck a sandbar. The bow was hung up on the sandbar, and the stern was exposed to the pounding waves. Soon the ship would be totally shattered, as Paul had warned. At this point Julius's soldiers faced a double threat. To stay alive, they needed to swim to shore. But if they made it to land and some prisoners escaped, the guards would face execution for those losses (cf. 12:19; 16:27). In light of this fear, the soldiers prepared to kill the prisoners before jumping overboard themselves. But Julius intervened because he wanted to save Paul. This move shows that Julius's respect for Paul had grown, and he may have believed Paul's prophecy. Julius ordered everyone to head for the land by swimming or floating to shore. Luke concludes, "In this way, everyone safely reached the shore" (v. 44). All survived! Once again God's word proves true. We can trust Him.<sup>12</sup>

**20. God had cared for Paul and remained close amidst this season of storms, and Paul gave him thanks for it all. In what ways can you thank God for His care and concern for you this week? Take some time in your group's prayer time to give God thanks for His providential care.**

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<sup>12</sup> Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 8536-8544). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

**Note: This study was compiled, and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. [www.villagebible.church/smallgroups](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroups)**