How to Weather the Storms of Life

I was born in Florida near the Atlantic Ocean and lived there most of my life. My blood is about 95% salt water! That's why I love the wonderful story of the stormy sea in Acts 27. It's so graphic that when you open the Bible to this chapter, you can almost feel the salt water spray into your face.

Use your imagination as you read this eyewitness account of a great shipwreck, and you will feel the swell of the ship as it rises and falls on the billows. You will hear the wind moan, groan, and howl through the courses of the ocean's wake. You'll hear the booming claps of thunder and see the fingers of lightning as they play across the sky.

You'll see the stark terror on the faces of these mariners as they bemoan to themselves, “We're going to perish at sea!” And you'll see how God delivered them – and what this deliverance means for us today.

THE LESSONS OF THE STORM

Have you ever wondered why an entire chapter of the Bible is devoted to a shipwreck? While it is history, it is much more. Through the Holy Spirit, this story can help you weather the storms of your life.

Life is like a voyage. We are sailing on the sea of time between two eternities. And the circumstances of life are like the weather. Sometimes there is smooth sailing. Other times there are storms.

That's the way it was for the Apostle Paul in Acts 27. He was a prisoner on this ship – traveling from Caesarea to Rome to be judged.

Bad weather moved in. And in Acts 7:9-11, a decision was made whether to continue the voyage:

Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

So they set sail.

Verses 12-14 describe a howling hurricane that began to pound the sea with its fist and sweep that little boat to disaster. No wonder Paul did not want to set sail!

You may encounter a storm because you're sailing contrary to God’s will, as these mariners were. Other times, like Paul, you're in a storm that has happened around you and is beyond your control.

Many times we find ourselves caught in disastrous circumstances.

For example, a spouse may walk out of a marriage. And the home is suddenly tossed about by the winds of turmoil and cast upon the rocks of confusion, hopelessness, and stress. The spouse who stays is now the spouse who suffers.
Maybe this isn’t the type of storm you’ve encountered. But in your lifetime, you will face storms. James 1:2-4 says,

*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.* (italics mine)

Notice that this passage says “when ye fall into divers temptations.” It doesn’t say if we fall. The Lord knows that trials and temptations are an inevitable part of living as a child of God.

**FIVE WAYS TO SINK YOUR SHIP IN LIFE’S STORMS**

As we examine Acts 27:9-14, we discover that these seamen sailed contrary to the will of God. And there were five reasons why they were doing this. I call these “Five Ways To Sink Your Ship In Life’s Storms.”

**THE COMPULSIVE WAY**

The first way to sink your ship is found in verse 9. Notice the first phrase: “*Now when much time was spent.*” These men were deciding whether to sail or not so they said, “We’ve stayed here long enough. Let’s do something, even if it’s wrong.” This is called compulsive behavior.

A lot of people act out of compulsion. They drop out of school, get divorced, quit a job, or move from one church to another. They’re in a place of indecision and act without either the peace or the will of God.

We need to stay where God put us until He tells us to move. What was the Lord’s response to a storm he encountered in the boat with the disciples? “*Peace, be still*” (Matthew 4:39).

We are not wasting time when we wait on God. Psalm 27:14 says, “*Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.*”

Sometimes people will ask me to do this or that. I tell them I want to pray about it. They say, “No, I need an answer right now.” So I say, “Okay, the answer is no.” The Holy Spirit leads you, but He never drives you. Don’t make decisions until you soak them in prayer.

**THE CONSULTATION WAY**

Another way to sink your ship is through consultation. In verse 10 of Acts 27, Paul said, “… *Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.*”

The Roman centurion in charge of the prisoners heard the Apostle Paul’s warning not to go. But the master and owner of the ship wanted to go full steam ahead. The centurion had to make up his mind.

Imagine him thinking, “Am I going to listen to this preacher and his so-called revelation from God, or am I going to listen to the shipping expert?” He consulted with an expert and he made a decision contrary to the Word of God: Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.” (Acts 27:11)

There is nothing wrong with experts. Thank God for people who know their business. But we need to go to the Word of God and make sure the advice we receive is in accordance with His Word.
When you consult with other people and get advice that is contrary to His will, you are on the way to sinking your ship!

**THE COMFORTABLE WAY**

The third way to sink your ship in the storms of life is the way of comfort. According to Acts 27:12, comfort was one of the reasons that caused them to want to sail:

*And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.*

The port they were in wasn’t a good place to spend the winter. So they said, “We want to do what will be best for us. Let’s take the easy way.”

The easy way is almost always the wrong way! As Christians, we are called to endure hardness. The devil always says, “Take the easy way. Don’t do anything that will cause you any discipline or require restraint. That’s too hard.”

So many people make their decisions based on animal instincts. An animal eats, drinks, sleeps, and cohabits whenever he feels like it. And too many people in today’s world make their choices this way. When you make your decisions based on comfort, before long you are going to be uncomfortable — very uncomfortable.

**THE CONSENSUS WAY**

The same verse shows still another way to sink your ship. The centurion consulted with the ship master rather than with the soul master.

There was a big debate on the ship, so the centurion said, “Let’s put it to a vote. How many people think we ought to sail?” And “the more part” — the majority — of hands went up.

There’s a lesson here for all of us to learn. Do not make decisions by majority vote! The majority is almost always wrong.

Even in the average church the majority is almost always wrong. It breaks my heart to say this, but the majority of church members don’t come to prayer meeting. The majority are not even soul winners. I’ve heard it said that 20 percent of the church does 80 percent of the work.

Of course, the majority is going to be right sometimes, but you better learn to *not* do what most folks are doing. The fact that “the more part” voted to sail did not mean that it was the will of God. Don’t settle for majority opinion and fail to consult the mind, the Word, and the will of God.

**THE CIRCUMSTANCES WAY**

You can also cause yourself a shipwreck by making your decisions on the basis of circumstances. Look at Acts 27:13: *And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.*
What does that mean? By compulsion, consultation, comfort, and consensus they made up their minds to sail. Then came to the coup de grace. Somebody said, "Would you look at that? I'm certain we ought to sail now. There's the south wind blowing softly. What a wonderful time to sail!" In other words, the circumstances were just right.

But circumstances are the most deceiving way of all to sink life's ship. I've had many people say to me, "I knew what I did was God's will because the opportunity was there. God just gave me that opportunity." But these people didn't check with God. They just checked the wind.

When you take off whichever way the wind is blowing – depending on signs or circumstances instead of God's will – you may find that the soothing south wind turns into a horrible, howling cyclone. That's exactly what happened to the ship carrying the Apostle Paul.

Compulsion, consultation, comfort, consensus, and circumstances. They all lined up, so the centurion decided to set sail. It was not Paul's will, nor was it God's will; but they sailed anyway – right into the teeth of a terrible storm.

**FIVE LESSONS FROM UNBELIEVERS ABOUT THE STORM**

The poor people who were sailing with Paul lost all hope as the storm raged (Acts 27:20). It was a sad scene. Since the sailors didn’t have radar or radio, they steered their ships by the stars at night and by the sun during the day. This terrible tempest blew them off course, and it got so dark they couldn't even see the stars.

What can we learn from their actions?

**WANDERING OUT OF CONTROL**

What do the unsaved do when the stars disappear from their sky? They wander out of control. Look back at Acts 27:15, "And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive." The rudder didn’t mean anything. The set of the sail didn’t mean anything.

As dreams dissolve, many people realize to their dismay that they have no control.

Let's face it. The man without God is going to get blown off course! All the dreams, plans, ideals, and visions simply go down the drain. Then all he can do is "let her drive" – let his life wander out of control.

**TRANSGRESSION IS HARD WORK**

Not only do the unsaved wander without direction when the storms of life hit, they also double their efforts. Acts 27:16-17 says,

And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat. Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

The mariners worked hard. They pulled on the boat. They pushed on the beams. They bailed water. They undergirded the ship. They worked, strived, and strained to keep things together.

Some people think it's hard to be a Christian. Friend, it's hard not to be a Christian! Proverbs 13:15 says, "Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard."
People take more pains to go to hell than the Christian does to go to heaven. Sin is a cruel taskmaster. People strive and work when they're sailing contrary to God.

**SIN IS WASTEFUL**

People without God also waste. Acts 27:18-19 says,

> And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship;  
> And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

First they tossed out all the cargo. When that was not enough, they tossed out the furniture, the tools, and the tackling. Everything was being tossed overboard to lighten the ship and help it stay afloat.

Surely, profit was not the motive here. Survival was the motive. That's what happens to folks when the storms of life come and they are driven by the wind. They are laboring hard, but they are sinking deeper and deeper in the water. Sin begins to cost them everything. They just start throwing it all overboard.

There are people today who refuse to listen to God. They would give everything they own to have their son sober, their wife back, their job restored, or their health back. But sin is costly. It is terribly wasteful.

**WISHING WON'T WORK**

After the sailors poured their cargo into the sea, they did something sad. They began wishing. Acts 27:29 says, “Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.”

Don't you feel sorry for them? They were like scared little children, wishing the sun would come up, wishing they could see the stars.

But Paul knew how to get alone and pray to God.

We have a generation that has nothing to hold onto when the storms come. People are in hospital rooms and divorce courts, and somebody says, “Well, good luck. Hope things work out.”

Hope things work out? Good luck?

There is an old song which says, “Wishing will make it so.” But it won’t! What substance is there in a wish? It is like trying to stand on pudding or holding on to a toothpick while you dangle from a cliff! We need something substantive to survive the storms of life.

**NO WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STORM**

The mariners of Acts 27 wandered, worked, wasted, and wished. Then what did they do? They withdrew. Acts 27:30-31 records,

> And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.
Some of the sailors figured they could get out of the mess by just pretending to let out some anchors while letting down the lifeboat. But we can’t escape the storms of life by withdrawing in a lifeboat. The unsaved will certainly try, though.

When their stars fall out of the sky and they are blown off course by life’s storms, unbelievers withdraw into alcohol, drugs, or divorce. They withdraw by running away from home. They withdraw by dropping out of society. Some even withdraw by suicide. That’s all they know how to do.

But as the storm raged in Acts 27, there was a man of God who didn’t withdraw. Neither did he wander out of control or wish away his troubles. He had a smile on his face and said, “Be of good cheer, for I believe in God.”

Here are three glorious truths that will help you weather the storms of life. God guarded Paul from this storm. God gladdened Paul in this storm. And God guided Paul through this storm.

GUARDED FROM THE STORM

As a child of God, the first thing you need to know is that God guarded Paul from the storm. In Acts 27:22-24 Paul told the terrified crew that no one’s life would be lost despite the fury of the storm. God still had plans for His man.

What God said to Paul was in effect, “I know that you didn’t want to sail and that you wanted to do My will. You were swept up in circumstances beyond your control, and I’m going to take care of you. Furthermore, not only am I going to take care of you, Paul, but I’m also going to give you the lives of these other people on board.”

The passengers and crew didn’t realize it, but Paul actually saved their lives.

My friend, the people of this world don’t realize it, but Christians are the ones who keep God from sending judgment on this earth. Did you know that before the tribulation horrors take place, God will take the Christians out of this world? Before God destroyed Sodom with fire and brimstone, He took Lot out of Sodom.

Some people say, “Christians are troublemakers.” But one of these days, those same people will be rid of Christians, and their ship is going to sink.

When the saints are taken home in the Rapture, you might as well try to dam up Niagara Falls with a moonbeam as to try and keep back the power of evil that will sweep across this world.

God guarded Paul from a storm; and I know that when I get caught in storms beyond my control, God is going to take care of me. You might object, “But what about all of the Christians who are martyred? What about those who are put in prison?”

The answer is that God takes care of them, too.

Luke 21:16-18 is an amazing passage that ought to put some steel in your backbone. Our Lord prophesied that His people will suffer:

And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish.
I believe that some Christians who are living today are going to die for Jesus. You may die for being a Christian. These are the kind of days we are living in.

Where is all the protection I’ve been talking about? It’s in the final phrase of this passage in Luke 21, “But there shall not an hair of your head perish.”

Jesus said that though unbelievers may kill your body and bury you in the ground for a little while, they can’t really hurt you. Why? Because Jesus also said, “And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die …” (John 11:26).

Death isn’t the end because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Just as God took Paul through that storm, He is going to take us through every storm of life.

Gladness in the Storm

Not only did God guard Paul from the storm, He gladdened Paul in the storm. Paul was calm on the deck of that ship — he may have even had a smile on his face. Acts 27:21-22 says,

But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.

Had Paul lost his cork? The others must have thought so. The ship was about to sink and Paul said, “Cheer up. I believe God.” Paul had the joy of the Lord down in his heart in the midst of the storm. Friend, that is real Christianity.

If I had seen Paul walking on the deck of that ship, I might have asked, “Paul, who puts that smile on your face in the middle of this storm?”

He would have answered, “The same God Who gave me songs in the night when I was in the dungeon at Philippi and began praising my Lord.”

Thank God for a faith that can praise in the middle of a storm. When the storms of life are over our heads, remember they are under His feet! If you know the Lord, there is no storm that can take the joy out of your life.

Guidance Through the Storm

Then an angel of the Lord came to guide Paul with comforting words, in verses 23-24,

For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

What was God saying to Paul? “Paul, you are in a storm. But I have good things planned for you. My sovereign will is that you testify before Caesar. I want Caesar to hear what you have to say.”

Look back at Acts 23:11 which says,
And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

The Lord wanted Paul to proclaim the salvation message in Rome. But the journey to get to Rome in Acts 27 was not the will of God. Those sailors were out of the will of God, but they did not stop the will of God. Where man rules, God overrules. A sovereign God is going to have His will done.

Let me tell you how that applies to me and to you. As a Christian I may disobey God. I may stumble, falter, and even fail. But one thing is certain: because I am saved, God has predestined me to be like Jesus, and all hell can’t stop that! I am going to be like Jesus because that is the sovereign will of God.

Romans 8:29-30 says,

For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified.

Yes, I have a free will, and sometimes that free will gets me into trouble. I backslide and disobey, and sometimes I get in a storm. But one day, I am going to stand faultless before the throne – and hell can’t prevent it!

The church may falter, flounder, or seem to fail. But one day our Lord will present to Himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle. Jesus said, “I will build My church and all hell can’t stop it” (see Matthew 6:18).

The kings and the rulers of this world can meet and plan in the Pentagon and in the White House. They can plan in the Kremlin and in Red China. The armies of this earth can march. And the oceans and skies can team with all manner of weaponry. But that is only where man rules.

Where God rules, the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ! And all hell can’t stop it.

Psalm 46 is filled with comforting truth when we face the storms of life:

God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge. Selah.

Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations He hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

There’s a three-pronged anchor from which you can hold onto in the storms of your life.
On one prong is the truth that Jesus is there to guard you through the storms of your life. On the second is the joy He can give you to gladden your heart through the courses of the storm’s mighty blasts. And the third prong is the wisdom and power of the Almighty God to guide you every step of the way though the path be darkened by the storm clouds of your life. Psalm 31: 23-24 reminds us,

O love the LORD, all ye His saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.

A CLOSING PLEA

Admit Your Sin
First, you must admit that you are a sinner. The Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). It is our sin that separates us from God and from fulfilling our deepest needs and longings. Sin is an offense against God that carries a serious penalty. According to Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death [eternal separation from the love and mercy of God]."

Abandon Your Efforts
Second, you must abandon any efforts to save yourself. If we could save ourselves, Jesus’ death would have been unnecessary!
Even 'getting religion' cannot get you to heaven. The Bible says it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His [God's] mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). Salvation is by God's grace, "not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Acknowledge Christ's Payment
What you cannot do for yourself, Jesus Christ has done for you! "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He died on the cross for you and then rose from the dead to prove that His payment was acceptable to God. But you must acknowledge and believe this fact. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved' (Acts 16:31).

Accept Christ as Your Savior
Salvation is God's gift to you. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). When someone offers you a priceless gift, the wisest thing you can do is accept it! This very moment, you can receive Christ's gift of salvation by sincerely praying this simple prayer from your heart:

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner. I know that You love me and want to save me. Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God, who died on the cross to pay for my sins. I believe God raised You from the dead. I now turn from my sin and, by faith, receive You as my personal Lord and Savior. Come into my heart, forgive my sins, and save me, Lord Jesus. In Your name I pray, Amen.

Friend, if you have not yet made a decision for Christ, I urge you to receive Him today. You'll be eternally glad to know the love worth finding!