

HOW TO WEATHER THE STORMS OF LIFE



How to Weather the Storms of Life

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INTRODUCTION

HOW TO WEATHER THE STORMS OF LIFE

In Acts 27, we find the story of Paul, who boards a ship that rides straight into the teeth of a ferocious storm. In John 6, we find the disciples in a boat in the middle of a storm. In Genesis, Noah floats in an ark during a worldwide flood.

These are some of the most gripping stories in the Bible. If you listen, you can hear the booming thunder and see the lightning as its fingers flash across the sky. You can hear the old ships creak and groan and the moaning and the whistling of the wind. The story of a ship in the midst of a storm captivates our imaginations. But reading about storms and living through them are two different things.

So why would God tell us these stories about storms and ships? He tells us because they are more than history lessons. The Holy Spirit takes these stories and illustrates valuable spiritual truths to help us navigate.

Life is like a sea voyage. Sometimes the sea is calm and the wind blows softly. Sometimes the sun is shining, and we thank God for these happy times. Maybe that's where you are right now—just sailing along. If that's you, enjoy it because it's a gift from God. But sometimes the wind rises and the sky darkens. Sometimes we find ourselves in the midst of a terrible storm we never saw coming. And that's the way life is. Every human being is sailing between two eternities. Sometimes things are good, and sometimes things are bad.

In this study, we're going to look at the storms in the Bible so we can learn how to weather the storms of life. We hope that you will be encouraged as you remember a storm you already faced, prepare for the storm on the horizon, or sail through the middle of one. God is with you. Do not be afraid.

Stop telling God
how big your storm is.
Instead, tell the storm
how big your God is.

ADRIAN ROGERS



WEEK 1

RIDE OUT THE STORM

■ INTRODUCTION

Imagine sailing along in the middle of the ocean on a big ship. All of a sudden, the worst storm you have ever seen rolls in. Waves are crashing, the sky becomes dark, and you are thrown about the boat with no way to keep your balance. You do not know what will happen in the coming hours as the angry ocean wrestles with the ship. You wonder if you will ever make it out of this storm.

Paul experienced this kind of storm in Acts 27. In the first century, Paul was imprisoned by Roman officials for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ; He was transported by sea to Rome, Italy. On this voyage, the ship sailed into a ferocious storm. By the end of the journey, Paul went from being a prisoner to being the captain of the ship because he chose to trust the Lord through the storm.

Acts 27 teaches us how to navigate the metaphorical storms of our own lives as believers in Christ. This week, we will read Acts 27 and find out how God can use the challenges we face in life to grow our faith and bless others.

■ PRAY OVER IT

Dear God, life is filled with all kinds of storms. I face challenges in relationships, illness, grief, and other hardships. Help me understand how to rely on You through life's storms. Enable me to be grateful for the opportunity to grow closer to You through hardship. I want to face the storm as someone who knows You and trusts You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

REASONS FOR STORMS

■ PONDER IT

When we are in the middle of one of life's storms, we often ask God why it is happening. Scripture tells us four reasons we can find ourselves in a storm.

We live in a fallen world. Unfortunately, even if we are believers, we will face life challenges until we get to Heaven. Good things and bad things happen to all of us.

He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:45b).

We create storms through our own foolishness and disobedience. Jonah found himself in one of these storms when he tried to flee from the presence of the Lord. He ended up being swallowed by a fish because of his disobedience.

God uses storms to help us mature. Sometimes God allows us to go through storms for our own development, to make us more like Him. In Matthew 14, Jesus commanded His disciples to get into a ship and sail to the other side of the sea, right into a storm. He did this to teach them a lesson about trusting the Lord. Sometimes, God sends us through storms to disciple and teach.

We get dragged into storms by other people. Paul experienced this kind of storm in Acts 27. Paul did not choose to be a prisoner on the ship. In fact, he was an experienced sailor, made many journeys at sea, and even endured a shipwreck. When the ship he was on headed into the storm, he knew everyone aboard was in trouble. He tried to warn people, but they wouldn't listen.

All of us face storms that are not of our own making. Sometimes children have problems because of their parents and vice versa. Sometimes we face challenges because of poor decisions that others make. That was the case for Paul.

Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.” Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul (Acts 27:9-11).

The situation was completely out of Paul’s control. The owner of the ship, likely a businessman, was probably motivated by profit. Paul, a man of God, knew that it was for everyone’s good that the ship waited to sail. Paul found himself in a storm that was the result of the poor decisions of others.

Whether we face the normal storms of life, storms from our sin, storms for our development, or storms we have been dragged into, we will all face storms in our lives. The question for you is: How will you navigate the storms?

■ PUT IT IN WRITING

- What kinds of storms have you faced in your own life? Are you going through a storm right now? Do you see a storm on the horizon?
- Is the storm you are currently facing something you helped create or something out of your control? How does a storm that is out of your control feel different from a storm you help create?

Everything over my head
is under God’s feet.

ADRIAN ROGERS

MISTAKES THAT SINK A SHIP: PART 1

■ PONDER IT

The owner of Paul's ship made a mistake that sailed all aboard into a storm that could ultimately sink the ship. In the same way, we can also make mistakes that derail our lives and put us at risk for greater danger. Here are some mistakes that lead us into storms that could cause us to sink.

We make decisions too quickly. The ship's crew wasted time and then decided quickly to take a major risk.

Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over... (Acts 27:9).

Sometimes we make quick decisions based on emotions or feelings. Many people make quick decisions, knowing what they are doing is wrong. Sometimes people make snap decisions to get married without addressing the red flags. Sometimes people make impulsive business decisions that lead to financial collapse. Sometimes people quit school, leave churches, resign from jobs, make cross-country moves, and make other huge decisions without taking time to seek the leadership of the Lord. We decide in haste and repent in leisure.

When you make decisions, you must wait on God. Bloom where you are planted until God moves you. Do not think that just because time is passing by, you must do something. Do not be impulsive. If you feel pressure to make a decision right away, that is usually not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God does not push. He leads and guides, but He does not shove. Take time to seek the Lord earnestly before making large decisions.

We value earthly wisdom more than godly wisdom. The centurion in charge of Paul decided to listen to the pilot of the ship instead of Paul.

Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul (Acts 27:11).

If you ask people who are not Christians for advice, you will get worldly wisdom. Some people have marriage problems and seek counsel from non-Christian therapists. You should forsake any counsel that is not based on the Word of God. When you face a problem or a decision, it is important to process it with someone who gets wisdom straight from the Bible, not from the world.

We take the easy way out. The crew of this ship made its decision because it was the easy choice.

And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there (Acts 27:12).

You will almost always get into trouble when you make a decision based on the easiest or most comfortable option. Christians are not called to take the easy way out; we are called to take God's way.

■ PUT IT IN WRITING

- Think of a decision you have to make soon. Based on today's reading, what are some things you can do to help you make the right choice?
- Who have you gone to for godly wisdom? Send that person a note or call to say thank you for being a godly influence.

Wisdom is having a mind that is
stayed on God, full of the Word of God,
and led by the Spirit of God.

ADRIAN ROGERS

MISTAKES THAT SINK A SHIP: PART 2

■ PONDER IT

Yesterday we saw how making quick decisions and seeking counsel from the wrong people can sink the ships of our lives. Today, you will learn three more mistakes that Christians should avoid.

We go with the crowd. If you look at verse 12 again, you can see this decision was made by majority vote. The ship's crew polled the crowd and chose to people-please. Paul, the man of God, was outvoted, and the ship sailed into a deathtrap. Do not think that just because most people are doing something that it is right. The majority is almost always wrong.

- In Joshua's day, twelve spies went to scope out the Promised Land. Ten said, "It can't be done." Only two believed it could be done. The ten were wrong, and two were right. (Find this story in Numbers 13 and 14.)
- In Saul's day, the Jews voted in favor of crowning an earthly king instead of keeping God as their King. God gave them what they wanted, and they got Saul. He was a tall, handsome man who was a warrior, and he looked like the perfect king. But when they saw Saul for who he really was, they didn't want what they received. (Find this story in 1 Samuel 10:17-23.)
- In Jesus' day, Pilate asked the people which prisoner they wanted him to release. The majority said, "Release Barabbas and crucify Jesus!" They committed the most heinous crime on Earth, and it was done at the will of the majority. (Find this story in Matthew 27, Mark 15, and Luke 23.)

Sometimes when we want to do something, we ask as many people as we can for advice, hoping to find enough people to tell us "it's okay" to ease our conscience about making the wrong decision. We look for permission

to do what we already wanted to do. You sink your ship by going with the majority.

We make decisions based on temporary circumstances. The crew members on Paul's ship looked for a sign that they had made the right decision. But the south wind didn't tell them they were sailing straight into a storm.

When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete (Acts 27:13).

Animals make decisions based on their circumstances and desires. They eat, drink, and go about their lives guided by their fleshly, temporary desires. In the same way, many people are led by their sensual impulses rather than basing decisions on spiritual wisdom. Be driven by the Spirit, not by the flesh.

Sometimes, Christians pray, "If You don't want me to do it, Lord, don't let it happen." We make bad decisions based on how we feel in a particular moment without stopping to look at the big picture. We look for random signs from the "universe" that we are moving in the right direction. Instead we should pray, seek godly wisdom, and rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us.

■ PUT IT IN WRITING

- What are some things that culture (the majority) says are okay, but God says are sin?
- What are some practical things you can do to make the right decision in the heat of temptation rather than take the easy way out or let circumstances get the best of you?

Decision determines destiny.

ADRIAN ROGERS

DAY 4

REACTING TO THE STORMS OF LIFE

■ PONDER IT

When we face the storms of life, we can react like the godly or the ungodly. This is what happens when the ungodly face difficulty:

Dreams dissolve. In Paul's case, the crew members could not control the ship, so they let the wind take control. Likewise, people who do not cling to God in the storms of life let the wind take them in all different directions. They are out of control.

But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive (Acts 27:15).

Labor becomes difficult. The sailors labored intensely to move to the sheltered side of the island. When they thought the storm was passing, they took matters into their own hands. With aching backs, they tried to get the tackle of the ship back together.

And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty (Acts 27:16).

Discipline and struggle come with being a Christian, but the toil of sin is gruesome. People create hard labor for themselves when they wreck their lives with sin.

Resources are wasted. The ship lost a lot of cargo because of the captain's foolishness and sin. In the end, wealth was worthless.

And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship...Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss" (Acts 27:18-21).

When people cling to their own desires rather than to the Lord in the midst of a storm, resources are wasted.

Hope is lost. The sailors rejected God's light and found themselves in darkness.

Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come (Acts 27:29).

Sailors in Paul's time navigated by the light of the sun, moon, and stars. As they sailed in darkness, they lost their hope. The godless lose hope because they lack God's light in their lives.

Foolishness abounds. The sailors tried to escape on a lifeboat out of selfishness and foolishness. But a lifeboat on a storming sea can't survive the crushing waves.

And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved" (Acts 27:30-31).

When faced with a storm, ungodly people strive to escape the consequences of sin through drugs, alcohol, divorce, and even suicide. But these so-called "solutions" are empty.

■ PUT IT IN WRITING

- What stood out to you about the ungodly response to life's storms? How do you see this in the world today?
- Take time to read Psalm 107. King David wrote about the saving power of Jesus Christ in the midst of difficult times. What part of this Psalm encourages you in the midst of a personal storm?

I cannot walk in darkness and have fellowship with Him who is light.

ADRIAN ROGERS

RESULT OF THE STORM

■ PONDER IT

Yesterday we considered how people without faith in God react to the storms in their lives. But consider what Paul told the sailors during the storm:

“And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island” (Acts 27:22-26).

Caesar was the Roman Emperor of Paul’s time. The ship was headed to Italy, where Paul would ultimately die for the sake of his faith. In the midst of despair, Paul had a message of encouragement and deliverance from the Lord. For the faithful, the result of the storm is that God’s plan will be accomplished.

This is a picture of divine sovereignty and human responsibility at the same time. Was it God’s plan that that ship set sail? God told Paul not to sail, which was God’s loving plan. But when the ship set sail, did that stop God’s ultimate plan? Absolutely not. Paul was on that ship with Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were also on that ship. Every bad decision man made could not overrule the sovereign will of God.

When you fly in an airplane, you find your seat and settle in. You decide what you would like to eat or drink, take a nap, select a magazine to read, or do whatever else you want. While you make all those little decisions, the pilot continues flying the plane to arrive at a certain destination.

In the same way, we serve an almighty God who also has a predetermined plan that gets carried out, regardless of our actions. Christians may stumble

and sin, but if they belong to Jesus Christ, God's sovereign power says, "One day My child will be just like My Son, the Lord Jesus, and all Hell can't stop it." We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son.

Christians make mistakes every day. But Jesus said:

"On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18b).

God is shaping His bride, the Church, and Hell cannot prevail against it. The rulers of this world hate God and make laws that try to silence the message of the Gospel. But nothing can stop the ultimate work of Jesus, the true King of all. He cannot fail; He must and will prevail.

Even in the midst of a storm, Paul believed God and did not fear. The centurion believed the owner of the ship and lost all hope. Life comes down to who you believe. Believe God. If you believe the wrong person, you might engineer an unnecessary storm.

■ **PUT IT IN WRITING**

- What was the result of a storm in your life? What did you learn about God through that storm?
- How does it make you feel to know that the will of God will be accomplished? What does it look like to turn toward Him and trust Him in the midst of the storm you are facing?

When you are in a storm, what seems to be a problem to you is not a problem to God.

ADRIAN ROGERS

RIDING OUT THE STORM

■ PRACTICE IT

Everyone faces storms in life. You may be in the midst of difficult circumstances right now or know someone who is. When you are in the middle of a storm, it is important to look to the right Person to navigate the wind and the waves. God must be the One you look to or else you risk sinking your ship.

If you have already put your trust in Jesus, find someone this week who needs to hear the message of the Gospel. Explain that Jesus is sovereign and that He can deliver those who believe in Him from sin and death.

If you have never put your trust in Jesus Christ, you can choose Him today. You can let Him be the captain of your ship and the calm in every storm. He will sustain you in the storms you face in life, and He will save you from Hell. If you would like to be saved, pray something like this:

Dear Jesus, come into my life. Forgive my sins and save me. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sin. I believe You're the Son of God and I believe that God raised You from the dead. I want You to be the anchor I hold fast to in the waves of life. Today, I receive You as my Lord and Savior. Help me never to be ashamed of You because You died for me. In Your name I pray, Amen.

■ PROCLAIM IT

If you are facing a storm, you don't need to face it alone. Reach out to a trusted mentor or spiritual leader and share what you have learned this week. Ask those around you to pray for you.

If you know someone else who is facing a storm, pray for that person. Find a way to encourage as the Holy Spirit prompts you. Share what you have learned this week.

If you prayed to receive Christ, please share your decision with another Christian you know or with your pastor. We would also like to hear about it, so that we can provide you with free resources to help you grow in your

new faith. Please let us know by going to lwf.org/discover-jesus, scrolling down the page and clicking on *I Believe*.

There are three classes in America:
those who are afraid, those who
don't know enough to be afraid, and
those who know their Bibles.

ADRIAN ROGERS