

PAUL

A MAN OF GRACE AND GRIT

STUDY TWENTY

How to Handle a Shipwreck

Selections from Acts 27

Our tendency is to focus on circumstances. God's focus is on the objective. When storms wash over us, He is interested in cultivating our inner being, our souls.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THOSE who enjoy sailing love the feeling of the wind in their face, the sight of the warm sun as it glistens off a calm sea, the tilt of the hull when the sail catches a breeze, and the rush of energy as the bow slips through the water. With one hand on the rudder and another gripping a line, sailors revel in the thrill of riding the wind to the horizon and home again.

Then, when the work week arrives, we sit in gridlock on our morning commute, smiling at the bumper sticker on the car in front of us—"I'd rather be sailing." We wholeheartedly agree. *I'd rather be sailing too!*

Unless . . . a storm strikes while we're at sea.

There's no controlling the wind when gale-force gusts blow like freight trains and threaten to capsize our boat. In a storm, we are at the mercy of the sea. Stow the mainsail! Furl the jib! Our sailboat that once seemed so steady pitches wildly as swells break over the bow. All we can do is strap ourselves down, cinch up our life jacket, and pray.

Paul endured such a terrifying storm during his journey from Caesarea to Rome. Luke recorded the perilous voyage in Acts 27—a passage that reads like an adventure novel. The point of the account, however, is not to excite our senses as much as to stir our soul with Paul's courage and inspire our hearts to trust God during our storms.

In the end, Paul's boat shipwrecks, but Paul's faith doesn't. Neither will our faith shipwreck when we anchor ourselves to the four principles on how to handle a shipwreck that we'll uncover in this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

In such times, the Lord reassures us,

*When you go through deep waters,
I will be with you. (Isaiah 43:2)*

Write a prayer to the One who is with you in your storm, sharing your fears and opening your heart to His message in the Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

“I appeal to Caesar,” Paul had declared to the governor, Festus, who wanted to send Paul back to Jerusalem (Acts 25:11). “You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you will go!” ruled Festus (25:12).

The Lord promised Paul two years earlier that he would one day “preach the Good News” in Rome (23:11). But Paul probably had no idea he would be shipped there by the Romans. The Lord uses even our enemies to accomplish His will!

Luke, the author of Acts, along with a believer named Aristarchus from Thessalonica, accompanied Paul on his voyage (27:1–2). The pronoun “we” in the account identifies Luke as one of the passengers.

As you read Acts 27, imagine yourself joining the threesome. Board the wooden vessel and toss your seabag on your tiny berth next to Luke’s. It’s late August, AD 59. The winds are light and westerly. Pulling out your itinerary, you see on the map, “*Paul’s Journey to Rome*” at insight.org, that the first leg of your journey takes you north from Caesarea along the shore of Syria with a brief stop in Sidon. Then the ship steers west to Myra, where the Roman commander Julius secures a second ship bound for Rome.

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Read Luke’s account of the voyage to Myra. What do you note regarding Luke’s description of the trip and Paul’s relationship with Julius, the centurion, in [Acts 27:1–6](#)?



Observation: Rough Seas Ahead

Observe carefully Luke’s meticulous record of the journey from Myra to Malta, where the shipwreck occurred.¹ The plan was to arrive in the imperial city by the end of October, but almost immediately, unfavorable winds tossed all expectations out the window.

On your [map](#) of Paul’s journey, locate the ports mentioned and follow Luke’s description of the journey to Fair Havens on the island of Crete in [Acts 27:7–12](#). Write down the difficulties the ship encountered along the way. What warning did Paul give? Why did the crew want to sail on to Phoenix, “farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there” (Acts 27:12)? Whom did commander Julius listen to?

On a typical day in the Mediterranean, the trip up the coast would have been an easygoing, Sunday sail. What unforeseen crisis occurred? What drastic measures did the crew take to survive, according to [27:13–20](#)?

After tossing into the sea everything that wasn’t battened down, the final and most precious cargo heaved overboard was hope. In this despairing hour, Paul stood up and cast four spiritual anchors needed to secure the people’s hope in the only sure place: the Lord. Let’s observe these anchors in the remaining verses of Acts 27.

This is not about a storm in the Mediterranean. This is about life and how to endure it when it impacts us and our ship is coming apart and there’s a reef straight ahead and we’re not going to make it without a wreck. How do you keep it together? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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The Anchor of Stability—Acts 27:21–26

To what stabilizing anchor of truth did Paul first secure the people's hope in [Acts 27:21–26](#)? Write down the key points Paul made in his speech.

Your tendency will be to turn to every other source but the Word of God when you come to the end. I'm telling you: it is the first and only source you really need. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Anchor of Unity—Acts 27:27–32

God didn't promise Paul that the storm would end, only that His stabilizing presence would see the people through it. But they needed to stay together. When the storm raged on, what did the panicked sailors attempt, according to [Acts 27:27–32](#)? How did Paul stop them?

The great tendency is to get all alone, lock your door, pull the blind, get away from everybody. That's the worst thing you can do. If at any time you need the support of other brothers and sisters, it's in the storm. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Anchor of Renewal—Acts 27:33–37

How did Paul's words lift the people from hopeless to hopeful in [Acts 27:33–37](#)? What renewed their spirits?

Your personal nourishment is important during times of storm. You'll cut a corner on your meals, you'll cut a corner on your rest, you'll cut a corner on the things that are essential for good physical survival, and you'll miss something very important. You need nourishment. I also add, you need prayer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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The Anchor of Reality—Acts 27:38–44

The passengers believed God’s promise—“not a hair of your heads will perish” (Acts 27:34). But the reality of the situation still required them to jump off the sinking ship! To put their faith into action! What happened to the ship, and how did everyone make it to shore in [Acts 27:38–44](#)?

No one has some magic answer for you. You may have to go through hard work, even some therapy, even some redirection of your life, even the admission of wrong, the confession of your part in the problem. You will have to get engaged in the process. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Questions Worth Considering

For centuries to come, Rome would be a strategic hub for the growth of the church. If it was so vital for Paul to get to Rome, why didn’t God take him straight there? What was the purpose of the storm? The life-or-death struggles? The shipwreck? What reasons do you think God allowed Paul and the others to suffer this perilous journey? If you’d like, consult your Bible-study resources like [Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Acts](#) available for purchase at [insight.org](#), [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#), or the [IVP New Testament Commentary on Acts](#) at [biblegateway.com](#).

We may never understand why God allows storms, even causes some. But the lessons in faith that we learn through the journey, we’ll never forget. Based on Paul’s experience, what lessons have you learned only in your storms?

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Correlation: Our Stability in the Storm

After days of relentless battering of the wind and waves against the wooden ship, in the darkest hour when all hope seemed lost, perhaps Paul recalled [Psalm 107:23–32](#). What does this psalm say to you in your storm?

How does this psalm anticipate our Lord's actions in [Mark 4:35–41](#)? What is He teaching you?



Application: Setting Your Anchors

We can see the debris from shipwrecked lives all around us. Splintered marriages, ruined relationships, battered hearts, sunken dreams. In times of storm—before your ship founders on the rocks—an anchor can be lifesaving. Let's review Paul's anchors:

1. *The anchor of stability.* When seas rage, the Lord's presence stabilizes. Cling to His promises and truths found in His Word.
2. *The anchor of unity.* We don't have to manage rough seas alone. We don't have to abandon ship! Stay with your brothers and ride out the storm together.
3. *The anchor of renewal.* Refresh yourself and strengthen your spirit with the Bread of Life—the spiritual nourishment of Christ you need to keep hope alive.
4. *The anchor of reality.* Don't be passive. The time will come to step out in faith. The Lord will let you know when it's time to act, and when He does, don't hesitate.

What strength can you draw from these anchors today?

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Which of the statements in Acts 27 lingers in your mind as a truth to which you can cling?

Has one of life's storms blown you into uncharted waters? Perhaps you've never experienced a trial so severe, and you feel rudderless against the wind. What would you like to say to the Lord as a prayer of faith?

God has given us promises to read and to claim, and God is trustworthy. Listen to the wind howling. Feel the sting on your face. Hear the cracks and the groans in the ship. See the swells in the waves around you, and then observe Paul's words, "I believe God." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, thank You for taking me through this journey with Paul. I find encouragement and strength in Your Word, even amid the threat of a shipwreck. Give me Your peace in the person of Christ, knowing that in Him there is hope even when all seems bleak and barren and when there seems no reason to go on. Life begins and ends with Christ, and I pray in His great name and for His sake. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2001, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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