

Riding the Storm

Week 4 | Take Courage

BOTTOM LINE

Trying to do the right thing isn't always easy. In fact, sometimes it's just hard to do. Struggling through failure can be discouraging especially when it happens while trying to do the right thing.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

Contemplate the difference between going through a time of discouragement alone and without hope and going through the same situation but with the presence and hope of Jesus.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 18:5b-6, Acts 22:21-30, Acts 23:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share a time in your life when you felt you failed at something or a situation you felt completely hopeless in. Were you alone at that time or did you have others to encourage you?
2. **Read Acts 18:5b-6.** The Gentiles are not Jewish. They were considered pagan and unclean. How do you think the Jewish leaders (Pharisees) felt about Paul going to the Gentiles? Why would they disapprove?
3. Discover in Acts 22:21-29 what incited the crowds anger. There is that word again: Gentile.
 - a. Have you ever been in a situation where you witnessed people becoming upset because someone is being recognized as their equal?
 - b. What was your response to that situation?
4. **Read Acts 22:30.** Have someone in the group grab their phone and Google the definition of "Sanhedrin". Why did the Roman commander bring Paul to this group?
5. In Acts 23: 1-5 the high priest had Paul struck in the mouth just because he said he had a 'good conscience' about living a life of sharing the gospel and living in close proximity and friendship with the Gentiles.
 - a. Discuss how the world we currently live in resembles the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles of 2,000 years ago.
 - b. Are you currently in a situation like Paul where you feel the odds of impacting and changing a situation are stacked against you? Where do you draw strength from?
6. **Read Acts 23:6-10.** Paul just said the one thing that would divide the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Up until now they were united in by their hatred of their shared enemy, Paul. They literally are trying to kill him! There goes his big moment to try and convince the Sanhedrin that the gospel is for the Gentiles and not just the Jews! Imagine how Paul is feeling right now. He is just trying to do the right thing! He is broken, bruised, discouraged and alone.
 - a. What do you think he might be saying to God in these moments? Have you ever said those same things to God when you felt discouraged?
7. Look what happens to Paul in his lowest moment. Read verse 11. What does the Lord tell Paul to do? Jesus offered Paul what he has lost: courage.
8. (En)courage: the prefix 'en' means to surround, cover with courage. Strength in the face of fear. We need to take courage before fear takes us. There is power in encouragement.
 - a. Look what Paul commands the believers in the church of Thessaloniki: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14.
 - b. If Jesus used encouragement as a response to a difficult, overwhelming situation, how much of a priority should that be in our own lives?

THINK ABOUT

"Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of readiness to die. Alone of all creeds, Christianity has added courage to the virtues of the Creator. For the only courage worth calling courage must necessarily mean the soul passes a breaking point and does not break.

He must seek his life in spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine."

GK Chesterton



TRY THIS

Take time this week to encourage someone in your life. You have no idea how much it might be needed. Cover people in your life with your strength. If you're in a season of discouragement, be transparent with someone you trust and give them the opportunity to encourage you.

Riding the Storm

Week 3 | Stand Tall

BOTTOM LINE

When we stand in the midst of our pain and brokenness, the world is awed and impacted by our strength in Christ.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

Everyone experiences pain and suffering at some point in their lives. If not personally, then through relationships with others who go through tough times. Discuss what our response is to the reason for our pain and suffering. Can any good come from suffering?

SCRIPTURE

Acts 14:8-28 | 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Read Acts 14:8-13.** The back story: Paul and Barnabas are moving from city to city preaching the gospel wherever they went. They are being pursued by some over-zealous Jewish extremists who want to put them to death.
 - Immediately upon seeing the crippled man healed, the crowd ASSUMED that Paul and Barnabas were Roman gods. Can you think of a time when you've seen something unusual or miraculous happen and you jumped to conclusions about the source of it? How do you feel about giving God credit for this?
 - How do you typically respond in situations where something might be explained by a miracle of God?
- Read Acts 14:14-18.** Paul reminded the crowd that God never leaves himself 'without testimony.' Discuss what the 'testimony' of God looks like in today's world. (Refer to Romans 1:20 for inspiration). Does this look any different today than from the time of Paul and Barnabas?
- Paul points out that God provides the people plenty of food. He meets their physical needs.
 - What else does he say God provides in the verses?
 - Why do you think Paul thought that was important to share? Do you believe God will provide joy for you?
- In verse 18 it says even though they shared God's provision and love, the crowd had difficulty believing they weren't 'gods' and still wanted to sacrifice to them. Put yourself in this situation. Can you see yourself responding in the same way? In what ways do you struggle to believe the simple truth that God loves you and wants the best for you?
- Read Acts 14:19-20.** Days after they were thought to be 'gods' the crowds turned around and stoned Paul and left him for dead.
 - Have you ever suffered at the hands of another person?
 - When evil has been done to us it's hard to process and heal from what we've experienced. What was Paul's response to the stoning? He went back to where he was beaten. Why do you think he did that?
 - His moment of strength in the midst of physical weakness had served to earn the respect of the city. What if Paul had stood up and left Lystra and never returned? What would Paul have missed?
- Look at how Paul would later describe this moment in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Discuss what it means to be strong when you are weak. If this applies, share a time in your life where you were strong in a situation only due to the strength of your relationship with Jesus.

THINK ABOUT

God gave Paul the strength to not only survive a horrible incident, but also the strength to stand and walk back into the city. God has a purpose for Paul's pain. Only God can truly redeem the pain and abuse we have suffered.



TRY THIS

At Kensington we want to be the kind of community that surrounds people when they are knocked down. We want to stand around those who have been hurt and abused. If you or someone you know needs a community to stand beside them consider the options that Kensington offers. Check them out on our website at kensingtonchurch.org/care.

Riding the Storm

Week 2 | Break Free

BOTTOM LINE

We all want to see miracles---what if the biggest miracle is right in front of us?

GOAL OF THE GROUP

Discuss the idea that in our earthly lives we prioritize so many things in our lives. Health and welfare. People and relationships. Possessions. Where does the importance of salvation for ourselves and others fit into the list of what matters to us?

SCRIPTURE

Acts 6

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever found yourself in a place where you needed God to do a miracle?
2. **Read Acts 16: 16-24.** The back story: Paul and Silas are wrongfully accused of causing a disturbance in the marketplace because they delivered a servant girl from a demon. They were severely beaten publicly and thrown into the deepest part of prison. To make matters worse they were put into stocks!
 - a. What is your initial reaction to what happened to Paul and Silas? How would you respond?
 - b. In our culture today can you think of ways that we respond similarly?
3. **Read Acts 16:25.** What do you suppose they were praying and singing for? A miraculous rescue? Or something else?
4. "...and the prisoners were listening to them" Consider this important piece of information.
 - a. Why do you think they listened and didn't just tell them to be quiet?
 - b. The Bible says they were singing hymns. What was different about these songs?
5. They were worshipping in the midst of incredible pain and suffering! The world listens when people who are suffering worship God. There is something powerful that defies logic.
 - a. Have you ever done this? Chosen to worship God in the midst of a trial or season of suffering?
 - b. How did you feel? How did others react?
6. **Read Acts 16:26.** This is an old-fashioned jail break! What an incredible display of God's power.
 - a. Remember the book of Acts is a historical book. These aren't made up stories. Do you believe this happened? Why or why not?
 - b. Who was set free by the earthquake?
7. **Read Acts 16:27-29.** There's a twist in this situation. It involves the cruel jailer. During the Roman empire a jailer faced the same fate as their prisoners if they escaped. The jailer assumed they had left and was ready to take his own life. Can you imagine the emotions of the jailer when he saw they hadn't left? Why do you think they stayed?
8. **Read Acts 16:30-34.** Paul and Silas experienced an incredible miracle that night. To Paul and Silas, the miracle of the jailer's salvation was of the utmost importance.
 - a. What was the impact on the jailer's family? And the community surrounding them?

THINK ABOUT

The jailer was seconds away from suicide, but the love of two followers of Jesus gave him a new life, for both him and his family. After his family gave their lives to Jesus as well, the jailer washed the very wounds that he has made worse through his cruel treatment of Paul and Silas

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TRY THIS

How can you live your life as if the salvation of another person is of the utmost importance? Pray and ask God to show you where to make changes in your thinking and your actions to make this the focal point of your life. Make a list of what you think it would take to re-prioritize your thinking. Focus on one thing this week.

Riding the Storm

Week 1 | Seize the Moment

BOTTOM LINE

Have you ever found yourself in a dark season of pain? Where is God? When will this season pass? The Apostle Paul Experienced more than his fair share of hard times and yet he lived an incredible life for God in spite of much danger and discouragement. We can look at stories about Paul's life in the book of Acts and be encouraged and challenged to trust God even in the hard times.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

To create meaningful conversation that stretches our faith and draws us closer to the heart of God. This guide is a suggestion. Adjust the questions as appropriate for your group.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 27-28

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever found yourself in the middle of a storm in your life that is so severe, so unrelenting, that you have truly lost hope? Where did you turn for help? Where do you think God was when you hit rock bottom?
2. **Read Acts 27:9-12.** The back story: The Apostle Paul found himself in an absolute nightmare in Acts 27. He was arrested, imprisoned, and was about to be transported to Rome to make an appeal before Caesar himself. He was shackled along with the other prisoners and soldiers and put on a grain freighter heading to Rome.
 - a. How would you have responded to Paul's statement of doom?
 - b. Would you have believed Paul in this same situation? Why or why not?
3. **Read Acts 27:13.** Notice that even Paul gives up all hope of rescue. The author of nearly half of the New Testament is discouraged when a big storm hit his life.
 - a. Have you ever felt like you're in a storm and can't find a way out? How did you respond in that situation?
4. **Read Acts 27:21-25.** When all hope was lost, when the ship was being battered and crushed by the storm, God sent an angel to encourage Paul and the other passengers.
 - a. If you were on that ship with Paul, how would you have responded?
 - b. What do you think about the fact that God was going to save ALL of them? Even the unbelievers?
5. **Read Acts 27: 26-44.** Paul and the men are encouraged but their rescue is not going to be easy or pain free. Things had to get much worse before they got better. Their rescue came after a shipwreck! It's probably safe to assume this isn't how they thought it would go down once they were told God was going to intervene.
 - a. Can you think of a time when you thought that God was going to intervene in a situation one way and it didn't happen that way? How did you feel towards God in that moment?
6. **Read Acts 28:3-6.** It gets even worse for Paul. The people of Malta go from thinking he is murder to a god. Why do you think God allowed this to happen in this way?
7. **Read Acts 28:7-10.** God used Paul's painful journey to bring healing to the people of Malta. Can you draw any parallels between your life and Paul's?
8. Read the quote in the box below. If you're doubtful about the God that intervened in this real event in history and think it was good fortune, consider author Ben Witherington's take on this journey. Remember scripture says the journey took 14 days. How does this make you feel about this true story in the Bible and whether you believe the same kind of hope in God is also available to you?

"One of the most convincing portions of Smith's detailed study of Paul's journey is the calculation of how long it would have taken a ship of the sort Paul was on, in the face of a northeaster, to drift from Cauda to near the mouth of Saint Paul's Bay at Malta at the point called Koura. The distance was some 475 miles, and Smith's detailed comparison of nautical accounts from this region showed it was likely to take right at fourteen days to drift this far. This is a rather striking confirmation of the accuracy of Luke's account."

- Ben Witherington in "The Acts of the Apostles"



TRY THIS

Think of something in your life that feels hopeless. Pray and ask God: What do you want me to know about this situation and ask Him to give you a different truth to believe. He is with you. He loves you. You are not alone in your pain.