

HOW TO SURVIVE A SHIPWRECK

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

Many years ago a group of agnostics set out to destroy faith in the Word of God by disproving the historical accuracy of the New Testament. Assigned to study the references in Paul's journeys was a young man named Sir William Ramsay. A careful study of the matter convinced him that the Book of Acts was historically correct and led him to be one of the most powerful writers in defense of the book. This voyage of Paul was one of the contributing factors in Ramsay's conversion.

While we're convinced studying Acts bears historical fruit, our study today centers more on the spiritual truths we glean as we follow the apostle through a violent shipwreck. Paul's boisterous voyage has been used to illustrate the voyages of life. In story and song, life is often compared to a voyage across the stormy sea. "Jesus, Savior, pilot me, over life's tempestuous sea" is a melody many remember. God's Word reveals a pattern of God tossing storms our way to lead us to higher ground in our faith (cp. Jonah 1:4; Matt. 8:24).

As we sail with Paul through this chapter, let's utilize the following outline:

- I. Winds: The Situations of Life (vv. 1-4)**
- II. Anchors: The Securities of Life (vv. 5-29)**
- III. Boards: The Sureties of Life (vv. 30-44)**

I. Winds: The Situations of Life (vv. 1-4)

Winds are the providential movements God uses in overseeing our life. Note Luke's words, "And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary" (v. 4). Reference is made to the winds several times in this chapter (cp. vv.13-14).

Our response to winds blowing in our life indicates whether or not we really believe God is at work in our circumstances. After all, the same God who controls the wind is the God who controls our personal circumstances, is He not?

In addition, the winds of God's providence vary. Sometimes cool, gentle winds blow our way, refreshing our life and encouraging us. At other times, stormy, cold winds beat against us, threatening to capsize everything important to us! A lesson every believer must learn is this: There may be *different circumstances but the same providence of God stands behind them all.*

The first wind we'll consider is the wind of difficulty. As we noted, sometimes the winds of life blow coldly upon us, whipping up storms in our experience. Indeed not only are the storms we face different in intensity, but also in kind. For example, it may be a storm of sickness. Perhaps you go to the doctor but he or she is unable to give a cure. The winds of declining health blow your way; you are in a storm of sickness.

Another wind of difficulty is a storm of *failure*. You have tried numerous times yet you have failed. Consequently, your self-confidence is shaken. Maybe your business is not going the way you had hoped it would go. And fear blows hard upon you. You are not sure how the situation is going to turn out.

Reflection Connection

Do you recall the last time you felt the wind of difficulty blowing into your life? How did you react? Be prepared to share with the entire group the way God sustained you in it.



Sometimes storms take the form of unexpected tragedies. How do you respond when the storms of tragedy come in your life? Anybody can live for the Lord when it is smooth sailing. What do you do when the storms come up? These are difficult questions to be sure. Nevertheless, they represent questions we all must answer.

One specific question we must all face afresh is this: Since it is not a matter of “if” storms are going to come, the question is, how are you going to respond “when” those storms come into your life? How you respond to the storms of life will have a great deal to say about how successful you are in the voyage of life. God is behind the scenes when storm winds blow. *Never judge God’s heart by what you see happening.* Why? Because you and I only have the underside of the picture.

Second, the voyage of life also has its winds of delight. Sometimes delightful winds blow. Life is not all tragedy. Life comes to us in days of delight and days of joy. We are thankful for the delightful things God permits to come.

For example, family is a joy for which we should be thankful. There is nothing as sweet and precious as the hug of a little child. Many men come home at the end of a day just about ready to give up, and a little boy or a little girl comes running to dad, jumps up in his arms, and the little one says, “Hi, Dad!” What happens is the magic of Heaven. All the cares, all the heartaches, and all of the day’s failures evaporate in the words of a little boy or a little girl.

Third, the voyage of life also has its winds of deliverance. The Lord sends winds of deliverance in His providence. His sovereign purpose for your life never fades from His commitment to you. So the voyage of life has its winds of providence. And, God is behind them all. Our faith must rest in His fatherly care.

Anybody can live for the Lord when it is smooth sailing. What do you do when the storms come up?

II. Anchor: The Securities of Life (vv. 5-29)

At first, Paul’s sailing toward Rome was fairly smooth (vv. 5-7). However, when they arrived at a known marker named “the fair havens” (v. 8), the wind dramatically changed and sailing became dangerous, “Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them” (v. 9; cp. vv.14-16). Paul’s first counsel went unheeded. Panic struck and pandemonium broke out (vv. 17-21).

Notice the words, “Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day” (v. 29). What is the purpose of an anchor? An anchor is to keep the ship steady, providing security from drifting away.



Reflection Connection

To what anchor is your life attached? What gives you stability more than all other? Explain.

Reflection Connection

How has your church been an anchor for you in a time of sorrow? Allow time for others to share their experience as well.

Now in the voyage of life we need anchors, things to hold us down. Anchors give stability and security to life. Unfortunately, many people don't have anything they can claim as an anchor. Instead they are tossed to and fro, drifting along in the wind. Paul wrote elsewhere that we are no longer to be children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). In other words, we are to be anchored to the Word of God.

Some people are like a ship without an anchor; they have no stability, no authority, nothing to anchor down in life. Paul's ship had four anchors that gave them security in their voyage. Let's think of some 'anchors' we need for life's journey.

Anchor number one we may call the *throne of God*. The Psalmist wrote, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Ps. 45:6). God has not abdicated His throne. Even more, the throne of the eternal God is an anchor you can hold on to when the storms of life are raging all around.

Anchor number two is *God's church*. God's church is like an anchor. Jesus said, "upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The church is an anchor upon which you can build your life. One has to feel sorrow for people who do not have a church they can turn to in times of tragedy.

In addition, another anchor which keeps us secure in troublesome storms is *God's Word*. Peter wrote, "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:24-25). Scripture is an anchor for the soul. A visible security is noticeable in the life of a person who reads and obeys the teaching of the Bible. Spiritual strength oozes out of a Bible-driven life.

A fourth anchor to consider in the voyage of life is *God's hope*. Notice what the apostolic author wrote in Hebrews, "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus..." (6:18-20).

In those days, just before the ship reached the harbor there was normally a sandbar. The sandbar kept the ship from getting into the harbor. The only time the ship could get into the harbor was when the tide came in and the water level rose to the point that the ship could navigate over the sandbar.

Sometimes the ship would get to the harbor before the tide came in. When this happened, the crewmen would take the anchor and throw it on into the harbor. Understand: the ship wasn't in the harbor yet but the anchor was there. Thus, they waited for the tide to come in. Sometimes the winds would increase and blow the ship, threatening to capsize it. Yet they knew that they were secure because their anchor was already in the harbor. What a joyous security: Jesus is our anchor, already entering the harbor of Heaven awaiting our arrival!

The Bible says if you are a child of God, you have an anchor for the soul and that anchor is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself! And Jesus, your anchor, has



already gone into the harbor. The Lord Jesus is already at the right hand of the Father. He is the anchor for the soul. Thus, let the storms come, let the winds blow upon the ship of life. Our anchor could not be more secure—the Son of the living God!

III. Boards: The Sureties of Life (vv. 30-44)

Some of the crewmen were ready to jump ship, desiring to face the odds of the sea rather than being sucked under with a sinking ship (v. 30). It is here Paul's words dug deep into the hearts of the sailors (v. 31).

Life's voyage not only has winds of providence, it also has anchors of promise. God's loving providence toward us, coupled with His secure anchor, keeps us and encourages us, even when the storms of life blow our way.

What is more, we also have some boards of protection our Lord gives. The boards are sureties that never give way. Not only are we securely anchored, we are anchored to something secure! Let's examine three secure boards.

The first board is the *promise* of God. Paul stood before the frightened crew and cried, "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" (v. 22). He then shared with them the vision he had the night before and the promise God had given to him for them. We may always rest on the promises our Lord gives.

God's loving providence toward us, coupled with His secure anchor, keeps us and encourages us, even when the storms of life blow our way.

Reflection Connection

Take a moment and consider a favorite promise from God on which you depend. Meditate upon it. Share it with the group and allow time for them to share theirs.

The specific promise God gave was clear, "...for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship." Furthermore, God revealed to Paul part of the reason of His Divine protection, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (v. 24). God was bringing about His purpose by protecting both the crew and Paul. It was a promise of protection. Sometimes in life's voyage it looks like everything is going to pieces.

The second board is His *presence*. Note the words Luke records, "For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (v. 23). God's presence never leaves His faithful servant's side. Regardless of what may happen, Jesus will be there. Isaiah put it like this, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow



thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (43:2).

The third board is His *protection*. God said not one of the crewmen would die. Understandably, the men wanted to jump overboard. The safest place for the crewmen was in the ship. God's promise was, all would be saved if they stayed in the ship. Let the storm come! Let the ship sink! God's board of protection will always be there.

Golden Greek Nugget

In verse 17, Luke uses a word strictly employed in the first century as a technical nautical term, "undergirding the ship." Ropes were wrapped underneath the ship to hold it together during violent storms. That the ship burst apart during the later storm is indicative of the severity of the wind.

Wrap Up

How are you doing in life's voyage? How are you doing on the sea of life? Is Jesus the pilot of your life's vessel? Have you invited Jesus on board your life? You can do so right now. Take the time to bow and pray, "Lord, forgive me of my sin. I turn from it. I place my total faith and trust in you to save me." If you prayed a prayer similar to this one, rejoice! God has received you into His Kingdom! Make sure you share it with your pastor.

