

This is Not in the Plan!
Acts 27
Small Group Guide

Opening question:

- Have you ever experienced a vacation that didn't go according to plan? If you feel comfortable, tell the rest of the group about it.

OPTIONAL BACKGROUND READING: We've come to a point in the book of Acts where a real storm—a hurricane—threatens to stop God's plan and kill the man who God has chosen to carry it out. Remember the big picture of the book of Acts: Luke is showing us how Jesus' prediction in the first chapter of the book comes to fulfillment. Jesus had promised his small group of followers that, empowered by the Holy Spirit, they would tell people about his life, death, and resurrection, and his offer of new life to anyone who trusted in him. This message would take root and make an impact that would spread to the far corners of the earth. Now the Apostle Paul, who has been the primary missionary taking that message to various parts of the Roman Empire, is in chains, being held as a prisoner on a false charge. Because he couldn't get a fair trial in Jerusalem, he asked to have a hearing before the emperor himself in Rome.

Now that you have a grasp of the background, TAKE TURNS READING Acts 27. As we read the passage, keep in mind the following: a) Where does God show up amidst the storm? and b) How does Paul react when God's plans seem to be derailed?

1. So, how does God show up for Paul during the storm? Don't just offer the obvious, but what are some indirect and subtle ways God provides for Paul in this passage?
 - a. In the past few chapters, God has allowed Paul to be beaten, arrested, jailed, and to encounter a life-threatening storm. Why do you think God has allowed these events rather than simply allow Paul to go to Rome on a simple missionary journey?
 - b. Josh's first insight on Sunday was, "**The presence of storms is not the absence of God.**"
 - i. What does this mean?
 - ii. How do we often conclude that God is absent when we face storms?
 - c. Think of a current or recent storm in your life.
 - i. How was God present for you?
 - ii. Was this an encouraging or discouraging experience? Describe.
 - iii. Looking back, is it possible God was present in indirect ways that you didn't see? Explain.
2. Josh's second insight (Part A) from this passage is "**When storms come, God's people are able to rest in faith.**"
 - a. In this passage, where do you see Paul "resting in faith" despite his plan seeming to be derailed?
 - b. What do you think enabled Paul to respond in faith?

- c. What practices can we exercise that would help us develop a similar type of faith?
3. Josh's second insight (Part B) from this passage is **“When storms come, God's people rest in faith AND take practical action.”**
- a. Do you see any inherent conflict or tension in these two parts, resting in faith and taking practical action?
 - b. What practical actions did Paul take in this passage (for example in vv33-36)?
 - c. Choose one of these passages, examine it, and discuss how it balances this “beautiful tension” between resting in God's sovereign action and taking action ourselves.
 - i. Psalm 23
 - ii. Philippians 2:12-13
 - iii. Ephesians 2:8-10
 - d. Are you more of an actor or a “rester” by nature? How can you be better balanced?

4. Pastor Josh stated in his sermon:

There's an interesting result of this combination of faith and action... It has to do with seeing the big picture and the little picture... The big picture of our lives is that God is going to carry out his plan to redeem people, through Jesus Christ, from every people group on this planet and he's happy to have us join him in the process. But the little picture of our lives is wonderful, because along the way God will graciously use you to influence and encourage the people around you, and even help them to flourish, just the way Paul did. In fact, God might have you right where you are, even in a storm, for that very reason.

- a. If God uses all his people in his mission to redeem the world, how might he want to be using you?
 - b. Do you ever find that your circumstances and the circumstances of those closest to you get in the way of your focus on God's big picture of redeeming the world? What spiritual practices might help us to stay focused on God's mission, as well as on his sovereignty and love, which equip us for this mission?
 - c. In what ways do you see opportunities to be part of the “little picture,” as Josh described it—taking action in ways that help the people around you to flourish?
 - d. Is there a big storm in your life right now in which we can support you and for which we can be praying?
5. **Share and Pray:** Among our other prayer requests, let's pray for specific people that we want to know the Lord and pray for how we can be better involved in God's unstoppable mission to share the gospel on Long Island and in the world.