

Clinging to the Promises of God

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God calls on His people to trust His promises without wavering and to call on others to trust in them as well.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Acts 27–28

How likely are you to trust people in general?



I Don't Trust People

I Trust People Completely

How likely are you to trust God in the varying circumstances of your life?



I Don't Trust God

I Trust God Completely

Group Time

Point 1: Trust in God and boldly proclaim His truth (Acts 27:21-24).

²¹ Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. ²² Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴ and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’

Paul finally was on his way to Rome after two years in Roman custody. He was put on a ship along with other prisoners and ferried from Caesarea to Crete and then into a storm (27:1-20). Earlier, Paul had shared his spiritual insight and warned the centurion in charge not to sail from Crete, but he was ignored. Now the storm was beating on the ship and the travelers’ hopes for survival. So Paul reminded everyone of his advice, not as an “I told you so” moment but so the people on-board would now listen to him.



Why should we consistently speak the truth, even though people won’t always listen?

Although Paul had shared the message from God, the people on-board still had to make the decision to believe Paul and to act accordingly. Likewise, we all must make the decision to believe God and to act on our faith. Paul was certain of what God had promised through the angel, and he encouraged everyone to take courage with him in the midst of the storm around them. Because he believed in God, he boldly declared God’s truth. Proper actions are dependent upon true beliefs.



How do our beliefs impact our evangelism?

Point 2: Encourage others to trust in God (Acts 27:30-38).

³⁰ And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, ³¹ Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." ³² Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

³³ As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing." ³⁴ Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." ³⁵ And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶ Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷ (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) ³⁸ And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

Some of the crew were about to abandon ship. They had lost all hope. Most likely these men weren't worshipers of the one true God and instead prayed to other gods for rescue (27:29). But in this moment of crisis, their gods and their faith failed them. No rescue came, and they chose to flee. Yet God remained faithful to His promise.

Paul, a prisoner and passenger on his way to Rome, transcended his position on the ship and became a fearless leader and beacon of hope for everyone on-board. He intervened as the sailors looked for a way to escape, and the centurion listened to his warning this time. He also encouraged everyone to keep their strength up by taking some food. Why should the 275 other men on-board the ship listen to Paul, a political prisoner? Because of his confidence in God. Paul's faith was evident to all who encountered Him, and when all the other people had lost their faith, Paul was able to point them to his God.



Voices from Church History

"Little know we what sorrow may be upon the sea at this moment ... God help you, poor, drenched and wearied ones! My prayer goes up to the great Lord of sea and land, that he will make the storm a calm, and bring you to your desired haven! ... This is not our rest, and the restless billows tell us so. There is a land where there is no more sea—our faces are steadfastly set towards it; we are going to the place of which the Lord hath spoken. Till then, we cast our sorrows on the Lord, who trod the sea of old, and who maketh a way for his people through the depths thereof."¹

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834-1892)



What are some ways believers can encourage unbelievers to trust in God?

Point 3: Recognize the fulfillment of what God has promised (Acts 27:39-44).

³⁹ Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. ⁴⁰ So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. ⁴¹ But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. ⁴² The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. ⁴³ But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, ⁴⁴ and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

The ship struck land, but Paul and the people were not out of the waves yet. Should they survive to the shore, the soldiers did not want to lose their lives on account of losing prisoners, so they planned to kill them. Still some distance from the beach, some of the passengers could not swim and would never make it there on their own. God's promise seemed to be coming apart at the seams, but God remained in control of the circumstances and He fulfilled His promise—everyone reached the shore alive.

God's Plan and Human Action: God's sovereignty

over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him, we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

God's promise to Paul and subsequent encouragement to all the people on the boat involved the promise of survival. But this declaration from God did not include all the frightening details everyone would have to endure: the storm, being lost, and a shipwreck. We are not promised ease in this life, but we are promised that God will be with us and will work all these things together for good (Matt. 28:20; Rom. 8:28).



How have you seen God work things together for good in your life?

My Mission

Because God has fulfilled His greatest promise in providing salvation through Jesus, we live on mission without wavering, even when our work seems futile and the future unsure.

- **How would you respond to someone who asked you whether or not we can know if God is trustworthy?**
- **What are some experiences you have had of God fulfilling His promises that could encourage your group members in the faith?**
- **How will you use the sure promises of God to communicate the gospel to unbelievers this week?**



Voices from Church History

“If God be our God, he will do more for us than all the world besides can ... He will give us peace in trouble: when a storm without, he will make music within. The world can create trouble in peace, but God can create peace in trouble.”²

—Thomas Watson
(c. 1620–1686)

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Acts 27:1-26

There's nothing more humbling than being on a boat in the middle of a large body of water. You come to realize the level of faith you have in that boat to keep you safe. It's convicting to grasp how often we can place our trust in something that is made by human hands and yet how hard it is to trust God during our most challenging and difficult times.

Notice how Paul stayed in regular communication with God by praying during his time in the storm. What a great lesson this is for us to know we can remain in regular dialogue with God before, during, and after the storms of life come.

God spoke to Paul in the midst of the storm, and those words filled Paul with hope and courage. Sometimes it takes a storm in life for us to divert our attention off of the things that distract us from God so we can focus on Him and hear Him more clearly.



How has God comforted you with His Word in the midst of the storms in your life?

Day 2: Read Acts 27:27-38

Food is a necessary part of life. God has wired our bodies to be dependent on things outside of ourselves for survival. We need air, water, food, clothing, and shelter. No matter how much money we have, the great equalizer of the entire human race is we cannot keep ourselves alive without being dependent on the items just mentioned. Yet because of our fallen nature, often we stress over these very things to survive.

Jesus actually provided us with the cure for anxiety in Matthew 6:25-34. In this passage, Jesus reminded His followers that God will provide the necessities for life because He is a good God. He cares for all of His creation but takes special care of those who bear His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Sometimes we need to remind people to take time to eat and enjoy life. At the same time, we need to challenge them to give thanks to God, who, out of His benevolent care for His creation, has provided them with what they need to live. This is how we are to redirect our energy away from worrying about things and instead apply our energy toward pursuing God's kingdom.



In what ways can you use your energy to pursue God's kingdom today?

Day 3: Read Acts 27:39-44

It's unusual to consider a shipwreck as evidence of God's being in control. This is a truth we discover in this passage nonetheless. God's promise was kept; no life on the ship was lost. Some might view the shipwreck as an accident, but under closer examination of this passage, it was actually God's way of providing everyone a safe journey.

Perhaps there have been times in your life when you thought an accident, breakup, job termination, or other "shipwrecks" of life were bad, but they actually turned out highlighting God's care and concern for you or someone you love. When my wife, for instance, went to the doctor's office because of what we thought was an allergy infection, the doctor noticed something from her X-ray that prompted him to refer her to a specialist. After running a series of tests, the specialist informed my wife she had multiple sclerosis. In God's grace, we were able to have an early diagnosis so treatment could begin quickly, and at the same time, my wife has been able to minister to so many other people who also have this same disease. Praise God!



As you look over the story of your life, how have "shipwrecks" shown God's goodness in your life?

Day 4: Read Acts 28:1-10

“How can things possibly get worse?” Have you ever asked that question? Just think about Paul’s situation: He was shipwrecked on an island, and after starting a fire to keep everyone in the group warm, he was bitten by a snake. With God being in control, though, this snake bite actually set up a miracle where God protected Paul from the snake’s venom in view of the people of Malta.

We must take notice of how God regularly provided Paul with opportunities to make Jesus known and with evidence that He was involved in Paul’s life. Knowing God is always with us should help us lead lives of contentment. Hebrews 13:5 states, “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” Whereas a double negative in English negates the intent of a statement, this verse contains five negatives in its Greek construction, which conveys the absolute nature of God’s promise never to leave any of His children.



What will you attempt to do for God since you know He will never leave you?

Day 5: Read Acts 28:11-31

God’s promise was fulfilled, and Paul finally arrived in Rome. It’s good for us to take notice that at the end of the Book of Acts, we see that the gospel has moved from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and beyond. Now that Paul has entered Rome, we see the gospel is now in the outermost parts of the earth, the heart of the Gentile world. This is a partial fulfillment of Acts 1:8.

As soon as Paul arrived in Rome, he began his gospel ministry (28:17-20). Paul reached out to his fellow Jews first, as was his normal practice. He then reached out to the Gentiles (28:28-31). While Paul spent two years in Rome, God used him to write what are known as the “Prison Epistles”: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

One practice we can learn from Paul: No matter where he found himself, he was going to make Jesus known. May we too follow this example.



How can you follow the example of Paul in your life?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Trust in God and boldly proclaim His truth (Acts 27:21-24).
- Encourage others to trust in God (Acts 27:30-38).
- Recognize the fulfillment of what God has promised (Acts 27:39-44).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



Does thinking about God's promises incline you more toward action or toward passivity? Why?



What is a specific promise in God's Word that you find yourself recalling often?

Notes
