

03

SESSION THREE

The Shipwreck

SESSION SUMMARY

Paul had defended himself before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa with complete confidence in Christ. In this session, we will explore the apostle's confidence in the middle of a storm and shipwreck. Through it all, we will see that Paul's confidence and hope was anchored in the gospel and the promises Christ had made to him. This helped Paul to press on in his mission through the storm.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 27:13-44; 28:11-16

THE POINT

Despite how uncertain or unsure the future may seem, God calls us to continue His mission.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

In March of 1909, construction began on a ship so large—so Titanic—many believed God Himself could not sink it. After three years of construction, the Irish achieved a colossal feat of engineering: an approximately eight-hundred-foot-long, fifty thousand ton monster held together by three million rivets. Twenty-nine steam boilers generated energy in the ship’s belly to propel it from Southampton to New York City in what would be record-breaking time.

But another enormous object was forming in the waters off Greenland at the same time. Around 11:30 p.m. on April 14, 1912, the ship collided with a one-mile-long iceberg (mostly concealed underwater). Two and a half hours later, the RMS Titanic was on the ocean floor.

Isn’t it interesting how quickly our lives can come undone the same way? One minute, our lives are smooth sailing. The next minute, we collide full force with an iceberg of some form, and we find ourselves plunging into the murky depths wondering what happened. While the icebergs of life often bring adversity and pain out of nowhere, they do have the remarkable ability to expose what we really value in life.

- **When have you, or someone you know, experienced life-change in the blink of an eye? How can moments of adversity show us who or what we really trust and value?**

Option 2

Place students in to pairs. Instruct each pair to name five things, pets, or people they truly value. Then, tell students to take turns asking each other the following question:

- **If your house caught on fire or a tornado was headed straight for it, and you only had time to grab one thing, what would it be?**

Allow students five minutes to complete this activity, then bring everyone back to the larger group. Ask the group:

- **What do you think your responses say about your priorities?**

Talk about the fact that, although not everything about our lives is certain—one thing is. And that is the hope of a future with Christ.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Despite how uncertain or unsure the future may seem, God calls us to continue His mission.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

After seeing Paul rescued from prison in Jerusalem and Caesarea, he faced a violent wind, which caused his ship to go off course. Paul found himself in a very different cell—a sinking cell. It's one thing to trust Jesus on dry land, but another when the water levels begin to rise rapidly. Jesus had proven He was the true all-powerful God before, but would Paul remember that and continue to trust in Him?

TIMELINE

SHIPWRECKED

Paul courageously faces the storm.

JOY IN PRISON

The gospel advances in difficult circumstances.

CHRIST IS PREEMINENT

Paul magnifies Christ in prison.

PAUL WAS SHIPWRECKED

When his life appeared to hang in the balance, Paul had exercised his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar to avoid returning to Jerusalem. Agrippa heard Paul's case in Caesarea and determined the apostle could have been released had he not made his appeal, but Agrippa was bound to send the prisoner to Rome. Jesus had promised Paul that he would preach in Rome (Acts 23:11), and this was His creative way to fulfill that promise. Paul would get to Rome to preach the gospel, and he would get there courtesy of the Roman Empire.

However, it wasn't too long into this journey that the cargo vessel that Paul set sail on encountered some problems. There was a gentle tailwind at first, but rough weather sprang up pretty quickly.

13 Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. 14 But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. 15 And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. 16 Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. 17 After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. 18 Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. 19 And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned. 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.' 25 So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. 26 But we must run aground on some island. (Acts 27:13-26)

Reading about Paul being tossed around in a ship in a violent storm may bring the Old Testament prophet, Jonah, to mind. God sent both on a mission. Both boarded ships that set sail from the same coast. And both encountered storms that battered the ships they were on.

But here's the difference: Paul sought to spread the gospel while Jonah fled the gospel. When the storm came, Paul was already in a posture of trusting in Christ and his faithful obedience carried him through the storm. Jonah, on the other hand, was in a posture of rebellion and had to learn to trust God in the storm. That's what storms do. They can drive us to cling to Christ, like Paul, or they can drive us to despair, like Jonah. Unlike the ministry-fleeing prophet, Paul remained on the ship and trusted that God would protect him, and everyone else on board. God promised it! The prisoner, Paul, encouraged the battle-hardened Roman soldier and salty ship's crew.

- **When are you like Jonah? When do you think you respond more like Paul?** (*p. 23, PSG*)

PAUL WAS ENCOURAGED BY GOD'S PROMISES

The human body can survive up to about three weeks without food before the immune system drops, hair and fingernails stop growing, and the final stages of starvation set in. Paul and his companions had been battered by the storm for about two weeks. They had not eaten during that time, most likely because of severe seasickness and the need to hold onto something.

The apostle had roughed it before. Paul was no stranger to starvation. He wrote in his letter to the church of Corinth that he had endured “many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food” (2 Cor. 11:27). But as long as Paul's churches were healthy and the gospel was going forward, Paul was content. He could tolerate any difficulty for Christ.

But the opposite was also true. Paul could be swinging in a hammock in Corinth or soaking in a Jacuzzi in Ephesus, but if his churches were sinning or suffering, the apostle couldn't relax. Instead, he would reach for his parchment to write something to encourage and challenge the churches he loved so much. Paul was always thinking of others more than himself. If they were okay, he was okay. If they were sinking in the storm, he was sinking in the storm.

Paul wasn't just a leader; he was a feeder. And look at how he nourished his sinking companions:

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.” (Acts 27:33-34)

Before ever setting foot on the ship, Paul knew he would survive the journey no matter what. Jesus had told the apostle he would preach the gospel in Rome. But then as the storm raged on, God sent an angel to tell Paul that not only would he survive the trip, but so would every other person onboard. Paul did not keep that good news to himself. He cared too much about the others on the ship and did not want them to fear the storm around them and miss out on the hope found in God's sovereign hand of protection. At the same time, Paul never wanted to miss the opportunity to make much of Jesus. What better opportunity than to tell others that God would see them through what seemed to be a hopeless situation?

Paul put his faith in Christ's promise into action and encouraged his fellow travelers to eat. They could join him in casting fear and uncertainty aside and rest in the promises of God.

- **Who have you recently encouraged with the promises of God? Who has encouraged you? Explain.** (p. 23, PSG)

PAUL AND HIS COMPANIONS WERE SPARED

After Paul encouraged the soldiers and sailors to eat, they had a meal and threw the remaining grain overboard to lighten the vessel. The next day, the ship crashed on a sandbar and all 276 people abandoned ship and floated or swam to shore on an island. (They later learned this was Malta.) When winter was over, it was time to continue the voyage to Rome.

¹¹ After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. ¹² Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. ¹³ And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. ¹⁶ And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him. (Acts 28:11-16)

What encouragement Paul must have found in his conversations with those coastal Christians! Imagine the stories Paul must have shared with them—his trial at the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem; his defense against Felix, Festus, and Agrippa in Caesarea; and his miraculous survival of the shipwreck.

Also imagine the countless gospel moments Julius must have experienced. Wouldn't you have loved to have been handcuffed to the apostle Paul? To hear the former Pharisee unpack the Hebrew Scriptures and muse about God, who blessed us spiritually through Christ (Eph. 1:3)? To hear him talk about the mystery of God's will that fused Jews and Gentiles into one faith (Eph. 1:9)?

TIMELINE

GOSPEL RECONCILIATION

The gospel restores broken relationships.

DAY OF THE LORD

The future hope for all Christians

DEFEND THE FAITH

Guarding the truth against false teachers.

When the week was over, Paul set out for his intended destination—where Agrippa had sent him, but more importantly where God wanted to take him: Rome. He must have felt incredible joy and anticipation when he arrived, knowing he was right where God wanted him and was about to do what God wanted him to do: proclaim the gospel in the seat of the Roman Empire. This is the hope that sustained Paul through the perilous trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea and the shipwreck. And in Rome, this hope was fully realized. God had kept His promise and proven to be faithful once again.

Paul needed encouragement for what was ahead. Yes, he was exactly where God wanted him to be. And yes, he knew exactly what God wanted him to do. But being where you are supposed to be and doing what you are supposed to do doesn't mean it won't be difficult. Paul's trust in God and desire to share the gospel did not mean he was not prone to moments of weakness. He was not immune from doubt. He was not numb to fear and worry. He was not exempt from sin. Like all of us, Paul needed the church around him. He needed other believers to remind him of God's promises and warn him of the dangers of disobedience.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Mission of the Church (p. 24, PSG)

The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Paul made it clear that the only way to be rescued would be to stay on the ship as it endured the storm. This story echoes other events in which salvation came through judgment (Noah on the ark, the children of Israel walking through the Red Sea, etc.). Because Jesus endured judgment in our place, we cling to Him and His promises, trusting that He is able to carry us through the storm.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **We continually see God's faithfulness in Paul's life, despite sometimes difficult circumstances. How have you recently seen God's faithfulness in your own life?**
Answers will vary.
- **Whether in a court before kings or lost at sea, Paul always found a place to share the gospel. Where has God placed you to share the gospel this week?**
Answers will vary.
- **Like Paul, we are offered a choice to either believe and rest in the promises of God or believe in something or someone else. Why is God the better option?**
Whatever we choose to believe in apart from God will eventually prove itself to be sinking sand. In other words, it will prove itself to be pointless, and we will ultimately be hurt more as a result of trusting in it.
- **What stuck out to you in this story the most? What wisdom can you take away from it?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

During Paul's shipwreck, Jesus promised to save his life, but He didn't promise to save his ship. Like the Titanic, it sank to the ocean floor. Paul was saved, but he still went overboard. Sometimes God puts us in the water so we will have nothing to cling to but Him. We are better off for it and so are others. Christ often shines more through our suffering than He shines through our safety.

- **Paul was able to look to God's promises and not the storm raging around him. What are some ways we can keep our focus on God and not the difficult situations we find ourselves in?** *One way is to make sure our minds and hearts are being regularly saturated by Scripture. The more Scripture we have in us, the more Scripture will come to the surface of our lives as difficult situations press around us.*
- **What are some promises of God in Scripture that we can regularly remember during difficult times?** *Instruct students to use their phones or concordances in the backs of their Bibles if they need help finding specific texts.*



HEART

Think about the last time you encountered an "iceberg" in your life—the last time your smooth sailing was turned upside down. When your world fell apart, what did you cling to? What did you anchor your heart to? Were you like Jonah (who had to learn the hard way about anchoring to things other than God), or were you like Paul (you believed in God's promise to never leave you or forsake you)?

- **When have you clung to a promise of God even when it didn't make sense or when it felt like the world around you was falling apart?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What one thing might be keeping you from total surrender to God? How would it affect you if God took it away? How would you be better off in the end?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

Paul found courage, not only in the places God brought him, but also in the faces God sent him. Paul needed the church and so do we. God did not intend for any of us—not even Paul—to live in isolation from gospel community. We are not to always give and never receive. He has given us one another to lovingly encourage each other to fulfill the mission He has placed before us. We are not alone.

- **Just as the apostle Paul needed encouragement, so do your church's leaders. How can you encourage your pastor, youth pastor, and other leaders this week?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can you encourage a friend in the youth group who has encouraged you in your walk with Christ?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #5, which contains an informational chart of the ways Paul suffered for his faith.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSUMI8REV)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject