

How to Overcome the Storms of Life

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, friend. We all go through storms in our lives. You may be tempest-tossed right now. You may be in the middle of a storm in your marriage. It may be financial, it may be physical, it may be with just your mental well-being, or you may feel like just some well-calculated evil spiritual attack has been launched against you. Well, I want to tell you there is good news in the Scriptures for you, and we're going to look at it in just a minute.

We are going to be reading from Acts 27, a story that is just packed with truth. The Apostle Paul has been taken into custody. He's actually being taken to Rome. He has been put under the charge of a Roman officer, and they are setting sail to go. That's where I want to pick the story up. Now, Paul has certain companions with him. And all in all, there are 276 passengers and people aboard this boat, that's crew, passengers, everyone.

We pick it up in verse 9 of Acts 27. Listen, there's something here that is going to help you. If I can ask you, just give me your undivided attention. If you can, just marshal all your resources, spirit, soul, and body, and just lean out because I honestly believe God has something for you here that is really going to help you. A key that can change the trajectory of your life. A door that can help you get out of a situation that you feel like you're firmly locked in. A light that's going to illuminate the pathway for you in the darkness. I believe it's going to be here in this story. In verses 9-12 of Act 27 NKJV, it says,

⁹ Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, ¹⁰ saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." ¹¹ Nevertheless the centurion (This is the roman officer that has charge over Paul) was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. ¹² And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.

Now, so far, you've got Paul; he has this perception. It's not based on anything outward. It is not based on his familiarity with the sea and with boats and with these particular waterways. It is not because he was a skillful skipper. It wasn't because this happened or that happened. It was an inward perception. It was based on nothing outward. It was something that the Holy Spirit gave to him. The Scripture says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." The New Testament says in the book of Romans, "The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit." Paul has this inward perception, but the helms, and that means "the captain, the skipper," he disagrees, and he's the expert.

He knows about these waterways. He knows about the seasons. He knows everything. He knows about boats. He knows all that stuff. Paul doesn't. He disagrees with Paul. The owner of the boat disagrees with Paul. After all, he's got all this cargo and everything they're taking as well. If he loses his cargo and loses his ship, that might just put him on an irreversible course toward poverty, but he disagrees. He says, "No, we need to go." It says, "the majority." All the

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majority said, "Well, no, we need to go as well." It wasn't just that because the next thing we read in verse 13 says,

¹³ When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.

You've got the expert, you've got the owner of the ship, you've got the majority, and now you've got the south wind. Now that south wind, it was like a good omen to them. It was like an open door, somehow confirming that they're making the right decision and they needed to go. They launched out. Well, it turns out the experts were wrong, the owner was wrong, the majority was wrong, and the south wind that blew softly was wrong. You can't believe every south wind that blows softly. In fact, that soft south wind took them into a hurricane-force wind before it was over. Next, verses 14-15 say,

¹⁴ But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. ¹⁵ So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive.

Says in verses 19-20,

¹⁹ On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. ²⁰ Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.

Now, you think about that. They hadn't seen the sun, not a star, not the moon, not for a day, not a couple of days, not a few days, but many days. They've now given up hope. The rain is falling in sheets. The lightning is flashing around them. The wind is howling. The waves are coming over the little ship. The thunder is going off like cannons on all sides. In the midst of that, this is what happens in verses 21-22,

²¹ But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. ²² And now I urge you to take heart."

Take heart, take courage. I like the old King James says, "Be of good cheer." Why? Be of good cheer, why? Because we've got a good skipper, and he's an expert in these things, and we entrust him? No, he'd given up hope as well. Be of good cheer because we've got a real sturdy boat, and we can trust the boat? No. Be of good cheer. Take heart. He went on. Verses 22-26, he said this,

²² "And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³ For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, ²⁴ saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' ²⁵ Therefore take heart (Be of good cheer), men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. ²⁶ However, we must run aground on a certain island."

Now think about it. In the midst of the thunder, and the lightning, and the rain, and the howling wind, and the waves, Paul says, "Hey, be of good cheer." Nothing has changed around them. It still looks the same. You may be in the middle of a storm right now. You are tempest-tossed. Like I said, it might be financial. You're ready to pull your hair out. You don't know what to do. You've exhausted all your resources.

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Maybe the bank is threatening to foreclose on your home. It may be with your family, you've got some kids that have just gone off the rails, or your marriage is in trouble. Maybe you've just found out that your spouse has been unfaithful, and your heart is broken. Maybe you have a raging battle with your health, and you've just gotten a bad report from the doctor.

As you watch me right now, you're maybe even having a difficult time because of how bad you feel physically. You may just feel that you're under assault spiritually, that somehow every demon in the spirit world has been put on assignment to attack you. Listen, in the midst of that, I can tell you, "Be of good cheer. Take courage. Be of good heart." Why? Just like Paul said, "I believe God that it will be just as it was spoken to me. God has said something, and I believe it." You might say, "Well, look, Paul had an angel appear to him and talk to him. If I had an angel appear to me, I might feel a little better about the storm I'm in."

Well, you know what? You've got something that's more steadfast than the word of an angel. You have the written Word of God. Heaven and earth will pass away, but His Word will not pass away. God cannot lie. All of the promises of God, in Christ, are yes and amen, from us to the glory of God. Find a promise that covers your need. Digest it spiritually. Feed upon it. Reflect upon it. Let it become a part of you and then boldly, in the middle of your storm, while the lightning flashes and the thunder is going off like cannons in the middle of that, stand and boldly say, "I believe God. That it'll be just as it was told me in His Word."

My friend, His Word will not fail you. It'll get you through your storm. I remember something happened. This was years ago. I had foolishly hired a gentleman, and he was a Christian, to do some major, major work for me. It was a huge expense. I brought him in. We looked at everything. I said, "This is what I need done. That's what I need done." I said, "This is how much money I have. It has to be done for this price. Can you do that?" He says, "Yes, I can." We shook hands. Now, for me, that's good enough. If I shake my hand with you, if I give you my word, I'll keep it, or I'll die trying to keep it.

Well, it wasn't so with him. He started taking some pretty big draws on the money right away. I said, "Hey, what's up? It looks like we're not going to reach the finish line within the promised budget." He says, "I'll get back to you." He got back to me. He says, "We got a problem. It's going to be this, this, this, and this, and it's going to be this much over." I said, "Oh." I said, "I told you I don't have that money." We sat down, and I took part of the project back myself, and I ended up doing it.

I was my own contractor so that we could finish under budget. It was a hard six months, but I did stuff that I didn't know anything about. I had to become educated on it, and buy the materials, and hire people out to do it all. We finished, and when we're just probably a month away from everything being done, I got home from an overseas trip, and he's waiting for me in my driveway. He said, "I made a mistake." He just put some papers in my hands, and he left. I went through the papers, and I thought, "Oh no." I was in trouble. There was money that I didn't have. It was going to cost this much more to finish it. I didn't know what to do.

I didn't have the money. I didn't have access to the money, and the project was going to stop. I don't have time to go into detail, but it put me and my family in a very hard place. I went into a tailspin. I didn't speak to my wife for 24 hours. She'd talk to me, and I'd just turn around and walk away. That's very unlike me. I'm pretty even-keeled as a person. I don't have big ups or terribly down lows. I just stay even most of the time.

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Man, I was in a tailspin, and that went on for a couple of days. I was sitting on the curb in front of my house and didn't know what to do. I was just saying, "God, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do." I felt like the Lord spoke to me. Spoke to my heart. He says, "You just need to do what you preach for everybody else to do." I didn't want to hear that, but I thought, "You know what, You're right." The verses that came to me were from Psalm 22, "That God inhabits, He thrones Himself upon the singing praises of His people."

In the book of James, "Count it all joy when you encounter various trials." From Isaiah, "God meets the one who rejoices." From the book of Philippians, "Let your request be made known unto God with thanksgiving." I said, "God, You're right. I haven't been practicing the Word that I preach." Right out there in front of my house, I just started walking back and forth. And lifting my hands up and started worshiping God, made my request known, thanking Him for the answer. I didn't know how it could possibly happen.

Literally, I had no avenue to go to. Had no resource to go to. It was an impossibility; it seemed to me at the time. I just lifted my hands for probably 20 minutes, maybe 25 minutes. I marched up and down in front of my house, in the street, with my hands lifted high, worshiping God. That depression broke off of me. I guess I didn't realize how loud I'd been because a few days later, one of the neighbors was up on his roof, and he yelled something at me. I said, "What'd you say?" He said, "I said, glory to God." He was just doing what I was doing out in front of my house. I said, "Yes, amen."

Anyway, it was just within a week, God came through and helped us from an avenue that I had not even considered. A miracle happened and got us out of the problem. You know what? I took a hold of a promise, and the promise defeated the problem. The promise gave the way out of the problem. Friend, find a promise that covers your need. Have a love affair with your Bible, and God will help you.

Now, in addition to this, there's a few other things that I'd like to just talk to you about here. First one is just about that south wind. "The south wind blew softly." So many people make decisions based on outward things that happen. They put out a fleece. We get that terminology actually from the Bible. Gideon was called upon by God to rescue Israel from the Midianites. Gideon is really unsure. He says, "God, look, I'm sorry, but if You're really going to use me to do what You said You'd do, I ask You to help me here. I'm going to put out a fleece."

He says, "Let the ground in the morning be wet with dew all around the fleece but let the fleece be dry. Then I'll know that You're really telling me to do this." He puts out the fleece that night, and in the morning, it's wet all around the fleece. The fleece is dry. He says, "God, don't be mad, but one more time." He says, "Tonight, I'm going to put the fleece out, and tonight let the fleece be wet with dew and let it be dry all around the ground, all around it." God accommodated him. In the morning, the fleece was wet. He rungs a bowl of water out of the fleece, says, "Okay, God. You're calling me to do it."

People take that and say, "Well, I'm going to put out a fleece. If this happens, I know it's the will of God. If this and this and this lineup, if this door opens, if this south wind blows softly, I know it's going to be God's will." Well, you need to realize a few things about Gideon putting out the fleece. Number one, it was in the Old Testament, not in the New Testament. This is prior to the new birth and prior to people being able to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Also, Israel was in a state of great apostasy at this time, even Gideon's own family. They were all idle worshipers. He knew very little about God. He didn't have the knowledge that we have. He didn't have access to the Word of God like we have access to the Word of God. The only thing even similar

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to this in the New Testament is where after the resurrection, the Apostles, they cast lots to find a replacement for Judas.

That was before the coming of the Holy Spirit. After the Holy Spirit came in Acts 2, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke with other tongues, never again, never again is there a record anywhere in the Scripture of anyone practicing anything like that. No, those that are led by the Spirit of God, they're the sons of God. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit. Jesus says, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He'll show you things to come. He'll take of the things that belong to Me and He'll reveal, and transmit them to you."

We look to the Holy Spirit to guide us inwardly. Even as Paul said, "Men, I perceive. Sirs, I perceive. I have an inward perception." It was from the Holy Spirit. They trusted the majority and the experts, et cetera, and "the south wind blew." I have known a number of Christians that have lost all of their fortune. They've lost their retirement, lost everything they had because they invested in a company, because "the south wind blew," so to speak.

They said, "Pastor, it was so highly recommended. We wanted to grow our nest egg. We were told if we did this and invested this within six months or a year, it was an absolute ironclad guarantee. And it was going to grow our nest egg, and we'd be able to live better in our latter years." Said, "We got ripped off." I know several couples that's happened to, literally, in the latter years of their life. They lost everything because they were taken advantage of. "The south wind blew softly." The doors opened.

Friend, just even we come to Acts 28, the story goes on. They're shipwrecked on an island, and they're there. The natives of the island, the inhabitants of the island, treat them kindly. They're generous to them. They supply everything they need. Then it says that they're ready to go again. They get on another Alexandrian ship after being on this island for three months. Verses 12-13 NKJV, it says,

¹² And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days.

They're on this Alexandrian ship going, it says,

¹³ From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli.

Here we've got "The south wind blows" again. Is there any hesitation about them launching out this time? No, why? Paul has no inward perception this time. Same south wind; you just can't believe it. Friend, sometimes the wind is telling you to do this; sometimes it's saying do that. You need to base your actions on more than that. You need to be led by the Spirit of God. In fact, be led by the Scriptures.

Pretty much almost everything we face in life, the Scriptures have something to say about it. Whatever you're going through, maybe it's your marriage, maybe it's handling your finances. Maybe you've got a neighbor that has put up his fence on the side of your property. He overstepped the property line, claimed a little of your property, so you've got a little war going on with your neighbor. Maybe you're being mistreated at work, maybe you are having temptations flood your mind, you've got a secretary at work, and she's flirting with you, and you've been thinking about things you shouldn't be thinking about, and you need to stay faithful to your spouse.

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Virtually, whatever it's going to be, the Scripture has something to say. God's Word will tell us what to do. If we will search the Word, God will speak to us through His Word. His Word, it's your road map for life. Forget about "This door open, and that door open." "I put out a fleece." Learn to listen to the Holy Spirit and be guided by the Word of God. When I was a brand-new Christian, I needed to rent an apartment. I found this little, just a cute little apartment. It was the perfect size for me, and the price was right. I was delighted to find out that the woman that owned it was a fellow believer.

I met with her, and I said, "Look, I'd like to rent out your apartment." She says, "Well, Bayless, get back to me tomorrow, and I'll let you know." I said, "Okay." Anyway, I get back with her. I actually went to see her the next day, and in no uncertain terms, she says, "I'm not going to rent the apartment to you." No explanation. She says, "I'm not renting it to you." She didn't rent it. I was baffled. I couldn't figure out why until a couple of days later, a mutual friend said, "You didn't get that apartment. I know why." I said, "Why?" Said, "She put out a fleece." I said, "What?" "Yes, she put out a fleece."

She said, "God, if I'm supposed to rent my apartment to that young man, let the telephone ring twice before two o'clock today." Well, it only rang once before two o'clock. She was certain that it was not God's will to rent me the apartment because she put out a fleece. My friend that is not the way Christians are to be guided. I'm not saying that you cannot recognize the hand of God in the affairs and the circumstances of life. Sometimes we realize that the Lord has opened a door. Sometimes we realize that this has happened, but our spirit bears witness with that.

Those people that I mentioned to you, that lost all of their retirement, and I truly do know several couples that happened too. In those cases, I remember one couple in particular; they're talking to me, says, "Pastor, we were troubled inside about it. We were hesitant inside, but it was so highly recommended. This person said, 'Yes,' and while we're thinking about it, somebody else mentioned it to us. We just looked at that as an open door. We figured it was a sign, but the truth is that as we considered it, all that time leading up to when we invested in our nest egg," said, "We were troubled. We were bothered inside." The Holy Spirit was trying to talk to them.

They were agitated inwardly, but they didn't listen to that inward perception, and that they just did it strictly based on the outward things that happened. The Bible says in Colossians 3:15, that we should let the peace of God—this is the amplified Bible, "Let the peace of God act as an umpire in your heart, continually deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your mind."

I think the other versions of the Scripture will just say, "Let the peace of God rule in your heart." Well, the word rule there, the Greek word, it literally "speaks of the job of an umpire." It's what an umpire would do in a football match, a soccer match. Say, "Okay, that's out of bounds. The ball is in play. That was a foul." The umpire lets you know if you're in bounds or if you're out of bounds. What is it that the umpire does? It says, "Let the peace of God," that comes from the Holy Spirit, "Let the peace of God be that umpire in your heart. Deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your mind."

Listen, if I've got a decision to make, and I don't have something specific in the Scripture that tells me, "Yay or nay," I will pray. And I will wait upon God, and I'll listen to the umpire, the Holy Spirit. I'll either be troubled inside, or I'll have peace as I think about it. And lean in the direction of doing that. If I have peace, I'll do it. The umpire is making a call, "Bayless, that's fair territory for you. Keep going." If, as I pray and lean out about doing that, I'm troubled inside, I don't have peace; the umpire is making a call. "Bayless, that's out of bounds for you." That's an important

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lesson we learned from this, but as well, I think it's important to have the right associations. Two hundred seventy-six people on this boat were saved because Paul was on the boat.

God's hand of protection that extended to Paul extended to them as well. I remember listening to a Hollywood actor that had come to Christ many years ago. He began to support and travel with a particular street evangelist. They asked him one time. Because they would travel to some war-torn areas of the earth, some dangerous places to bring the gospel there, and this actor would go with the preacher.

He was asked; I watched the interview, they said, "Aren't you afraid to go to some of these areas?" He said, "Well, no, actually, I'm not. I feel like God has called me to support this man's ministry with my finances and with my presence. When we're standing in these areas," he said, "I feel like I'm in the safest place on planet earth because I feel like I'm in the will of God, and the hand of God that shields him, shields me because I'm obeying God as I support him."

There's a lot of merit to that man's statement and the answer that he gave to that interviewer. Two hundred seventy-six people, souls, they're saved because they're on the boat with Paul. You read about Joseph in the house of Potiphar in Egypt. The Bible says that God blessed the house of Potiphar for Joseph's sake. All that he had inside of his house and out in the fields, his household, his business were blessed because Joseph was in the house and working in the house. The blessing on Joseph's life spilled over into the life, into the household of Potiphar, and touched everything that he had. I think about Jonathan. His heart was knit to the heart of David. He swore loyalty to David and knew he was to be connected to David. But in the end, Jonathan chose to be with his father, Saul, which I suppose on some levels is commendable, but Saul had become wicked.

He had become a persecutor of David, and he had become cruel concerning God's people. He even got involved in witchcraft and just basically had taken a path of wickedness. Because Jonathan chose to associate with his father, who'd become wicked, instead of with David, he ended up sharing in the same fate that his father Saul had. They were both killed on Mount Gilboa by the Philistines. The Bible says, "If you walk with wise men, you'll be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed." My friend, choose your friends carefully. Not only will they influence you, but what's on them can get off on you. I think even more than that, I want to be the kind of person that if you associate with me, the favor of God that's on my life will come on your life.

The blessing of God that's on my life will come on your life. In fact, I pray that for those that support us. And just the thought came to me right now; there are people that faithfully and regularly support us with their prayers and with their finances as we take messages like this around the world in multiple languages.

My prayer is that the favor and the blessing on us, and on this ministry, on what we do, comes upon you, on your household, and on your family as well, in the mighty name of Jesus. God bless you.

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