

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of March 5th, 2023

Sermon Series: The Book of Acts

Sermon: Surviving the Storms of Life (Acts 27)

Speaker: Pastor Mike Burnette

Icebreaker

- John 16:33 - "In the world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world." We all experienced a violent storm this week. How did God see you through it?

Discussion Questions

Introduction

- Do you handle relational storms (marriage, friendships, family) differently than you handle proverbial storms (jobs, finances, circumstances)? Why?

Stand on a Word from God (v. 21-26)

- How do you hear from God? How do you know when it's from God or from somewhere else? Share the last time that you heard from God in a situation. How did it turn out?
- Who helps you remind you of God's Word and provides you with godly counsel when you're struggling? Do you have a storm buddy?
- Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing a word from God!" Sometimes we get a word from God, only to ignore it. Describe a time when that happened and how it might have turned out if you had been courageous enough to stand on that word. What did that moment show you? What did you learn from it?
- Share some of the words from God or scriptures that help you stand strong in difficult times.
- Do you read the Bible as a history book or as the Living Word, pointing toward your future? Why?

Develop a “Stay Put” Attitude (v. 27-32)

- Sometimes God wants us to stay in the boat, but we think we know better and decide to go our own way. Why do you think the men who lowered the lifeboats still tried to abandon ship, despite hearing what Paul shared with them? Why do you think we as humans would think we know better than God?
- People today quit when things are hard! But hard times make you stronger! How much stronger did it make Paul when he trusted God and kept digging in when he encountered tough times? Why couldn't trusting God work for you through the troubles life throws at you?
- What are some tools that you use now that help you “stay on the ship” during difficult times?
- What “lifeboats” do you need to cut away from your life so you can hear from God? What do you normally use as your escape?
- Do you have a “stay put” mentality like Paul, or are you more likely to look for ways to get out and save yourself? Why?
- What are some situations in which you need to stay put? How do you know when God is telling you to jump ship?

Be Still and Know He is God (v. 33-38)

- Do you take breaks during the storms in your life? What do they look like? Do you use them to rest and recharge or to escape and avoid?
- Paul actually tended to the soul care of the men on the ship, telling them to rest and eat. Have you ever endured a tough situation for a long time? How much easier is it when you take a break from the stress to rest, eat, and regroup? Why is that?
- When life is spinning out of control, what value do you see in Paul's example of stopping to break bread?
- The storm had not yet ceased, yet they rested from the storm, broke bread, and worshiped and thanked God while the storm raged on. What is happening in your life that seems like the world has turned it

upside down? What would it look like for you to praise God during the storm?

- Because he trusted in God, Paul encouraged all 276 men on board to stop worrying, break bread and give thanks to God for their own good. How many people in your life are affected by you trusting God?

Trust God, even with Broken Pieces (v. 39-44)

- Paul and everyone else on the ship made it to shore, and some of them made it on broken pieces! Do you trust God to help you survive the storms of life? Why or why not?
- Is there something God is telling you to do that doesn't make sense? Are you being obedient or questioning? Why?
- Do you look at broken pieces as failure? Why or why not?
- What's left after the storm in your life is enough to get you where God wants you to be! That original ship is gone, but you can make it by what it is now! What is left in your life that God will use to get you back to shore and His path for you?
- With God, just a piece is enough. Share a time where you've seen broken pieces or things become something beautiful.

Now What?

Encouragement: John 16:33 reads, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Just because we follow Jesus doesn't mean we won't have some tough storms in our lives. But because we follow Jesus, we can have hope in difficult times, and we can overcome them in a way that brings glory to God's name. Paul was in the middle of a literal storm and had a crazy outcome, all because he stood firm on a word from God. Because God told him he would survive, Paul stayed put on the boat and encouraged other people to stay put as well. Paul's faithfulness didn't just help him, but it saved so many lives. Sometimes, it's safer to stay the course than to jump ship. Hard times make you stronger, so don't give up and don't quit! Relax and trust that God is God, even when your world is

turned upside down. Don't allow a storm to silence your praise. Stop focusing on what you're losing and focus on what you have left. What's left after the storm is enough to get you where God wants you to be.

Ask:

- If you're in a storm right now, what do you think God is trying to show you? What are some promises from God that you need to stand on?
- If you're thinking about jumping ship, why? What would it look like for you to stay put?
- Do you need to take a break and regroup? How are you tending to your soul care?
- If we're going to survive the storm, we need a perspective shift. How do you need to shift your perspective?

Challenge: Whatever storm you're going through – get a word from God, be still and know the Lord is with you, determine that you're not going to quit, and finally, trust God that even if your ship is destroyed, you're going to trust Him to get you where he wants you, even if its on broken pieces. Take some time this week to look up some of God's promises in scripture to help guide your prayers so you can make it through the storms you're currently facing or will face.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you for being present with us in our storms and giving us the strength to be overcomers. As we face difficult times, give us Your Word to stand on so we have peace, assurance, and comfort that surpasses all understanding. Remind us of Your promises. Give us steadfastness and perseverance so that we're not quick to quit. Help us to put our trust in You instead of trying to control a situation. Helps us be still and to trust that You are Lord over all. You are with us, and You control the waters. And You will always make a way to bring us to where You want us to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of February 26th, 2023

Sermon Series: The Book of Acts

Sermon: A Changed Life is Useful for God (Acts 26)

Speaker: Pastor Mike Burnette

Icebreaker

- Are you someone who enjoys running marathons, or are you someone who only runs when being chased? Why?

Discussion Questions

Introduction

- Have you experienced a “Damascus Road” conversion? Describe a situation when you were at a crossroads and were changed by God. How did that make you useful to God?

God Doesn't Waste Our Pain (v. 1-3)

- Think about the Apostle Paul's incredible story of pain and how God didn't allow that pain to go to waste. Is there a specific pain that you've experienced that God was able to use?
- Take a moment to read Paul's story of pain in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28. Have you shared Jesus with someone who has persecuted you in the past? If so, how hard was that? If not, how do you think Paul was able to do it after all he went through?
- Share a time when you had bitterness toward God because you blamed Him for what you were going through at the time. How did you work through that, or are you still in a season of bitterness toward God?
- You don't have to lose your love or hope in the Lord because you've been going through something painful. God will see you through it, and God will not waste your pain. Are you sharing your story just to share it, or are you sharing the Gospel through your story? How do you know?

Your Story is a Connection Point (v. 4-23)

- What can we learn about Paul's posture towards Agrippa when sharing his story? What are the tools that he used to appeal to Agrippa and how can we use those same tools in our approach to sharing the Gospel through our story?
- Pastor Mike shared the quote, " God will let your mess become His message." What is your "mess" that can be used as a connection point to someone else in order to deliver God's message? When has God used your pain to connect with someone else?
- Everyone has a story, no matter how big or small the circumstance. Do you feel like your story is insignificant? Do you believe God can use your "insignificant" story to make an impact? Why or why not?
- Are there parts of your pain that are the result of a sinful decision? Paul owned that part of his pain and had a humble and repentant heart. Are you willing or do you struggle to own your sinful behavior? What's needed to share your sinful story to make it glorifying?
- In 2 Corinthians 12:1, Paul says there's nothing to gain by boasting. How do you make sure you're not glorifying your story above glorifying God?

Boldly Let the Lord Use You (v. 24-29)

- Other people may not agree with or like what God's doing in or through you. Don't let it discourage you or let it make you lose your cool. Have you had a moment when your faith was attacked and you weren't able to keep your cool? What was the outcome?
- Paul realized the special nature of his private audience with King Agrippa, and he went for the grand prize - to tell Agrippa about Jesus! When have you had an opportunity to invite someone to know Jesus? Did you act boldly like Paul? How did it turn out?
- Even though Paul was faithful in telling Agrippa about Jesus, Agrippa didn't instantly come to faith in this passage. Do you share the Gospel with expectation or with hope? How do you trust God with that?
- Do you have the confidence in your ability to boldly share the Gospel

and/or your story when God sets up that opportunity? Why or why not?

Now What?

Encouragement: We all have endured so much in our lives. There have been seasons of praise and seasons of tears. There have been some really great highs and really bad lows because we live in a fallen world. As long as that's the case, we have to learn how to look to and for God in all times, not just the good or bad times. God won't waste our pain. God may allow us to go through some pain, but he can also heal us of that pain and allow that pain to become a catalyst for Him to do something special in and through us. Paul endured all that he did and still managed to stay close to God, so don't allow tough times to make you bitter and pull you away from God. Sharing the things you've walked through allows others to see the God that has changed your life. Let God use your story as a connection point for others to connect to God, and be bold about it. Recognize when God has positioned you to be bold for Him. Let your life be available for God to use.

Ask:

- How have others' stories of pain and discomfort influenced you in your walk with Christ?
- What has God allowed you to walk through to become a useful connection that He can use in the lives of others? How does that look in your story?
- Do you believe that God can use the pain in your life for good? For those who love the Lord? Do you see the power in your story?

Challenge: Ask God to provide you with an opportunity to share your story. Consider sitting down this week and writing out your story - the before and after. Consider who you were before committing your life to Christ and then capturing what your life has been like since you made your commitment to following Christ.

Throughout this week, whether you're on a mountain high or walking through a really low experience, let God use you, and be bold about it. Let Romans 8:28 be your guiding verse this week. Your story is a connection point to others, so that you can connect them to God. Who do you know is going through something you've already experienced? How can you help them get through their difficult time?

If you're going through something difficult now, take a moment to see what God is trying to do in and through you in this season.

Closing Prayer

God, you've seen every moment of our lives. No part of our story is out of your view. Thank you for walking with us in hard times and good times. Thank you for giving us the strength to endure all that has been happening in our lives, and give us the power to continue to endure every day. Thank you for seeing the beauty in our pain. Help us to have the same sight when it comes to hard times. We may not see the purpose when we're walking through the valley, but we believe that you do. Help us to see Your face in the triumphant and in the tragedy. Keep our hearts tender and guard against any bitterness that tries to take root in our lives. Help us see our journey as a story of grace and compassion that we can share with others. Lead us to those that we can connect with and help connect them to You. Move us from dwelling and replaying the negatives in our stories to sharing the purpose and the Gospel in our stories. Help us move forward in boldness, to allow you to use us as you need. We make our lives available to you, to help others come to know who you are. We give you all of the access. You can have all of us and use it freely. Amen.

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of February 19th, 2023

Sermon Series: The Book of Acts

Sermon: Keep Your Focus on Faithfulness (Acts 24:22-26:3)

Speaker: Pastor Mike Burnette

Icebreaker

- In what ways are you currently serving your church? Do you serve on a Dream Team? If so, which one? If not, how can you get started on one today?

Discussion Questions

Introduction

- What would your life be like if you committed to living 100% focused and faithful to Jesus?
- Paul was falsely accused of stirring up riots and being a heretic, and causing major social and religious problems. Many people wanted him to suffer, to be beaten, stripped of all privileges, and even dead! What would you do if you were in Paul's position? How could you maintain the simple focus in your life that Paul had?
- Are you trying to get through something before you become faithful? What are you waiting on and why?

Keep it Simple (Acts 24:22-27)

Paul kept his message simple and centered on Jesus. He kept the main things, the main things:

1. Righteousness in Christ
 2. Self-control as a Follower of Jesus
 3. The Coming Judgment for All People
- When it comes to learning about Christianity, do you have an attitude like Felix or Paul?
 - What can we learn from Paul's simplistic approach to sharing the Gospel? Why do you think he chose to talk about righteousness,

self-control, and judgment over anything else?

- There's no right standing or righteousness before God apart from a life with Jesus. Do you rely on the blood, sweat and tears of your own efforts and actions? How do you realign yourself to stop from doing that?
- Do you rely on the Blood, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus? What does that look like? What kind of guardrails do you have to maintain reliance on Jesus?
- Are you following the "known" (upbringing, social trends, natural impulses, etc.) or are you letting the Holy Spirit lead you? How do you know?
- Do you acknowledge that the Holy Spirit dwells in you? In what ways do you see the Holy Spirit helping you grow in your self-control? What does it look like in your life?
- Read Hebrews 9:27-28. Everyone, regardless of faith or lack thereof, will die and face judgment. When you face death and stand before God, what will you say you did with Jesus?

Don't Get Discouraged in Faithfulness (Acts 25)

- Read 1 Peter 5:9-11. Why would God allow us to suffer when we're faithful?
- Some of us really struggle to trust God through tough times. Describe a time when you had trouble believing God. Were you able to stay focused? If not, what would have helped?
- What things in your life are keeping you from being faithful and fruitful for God? How could you be more like Paul and not be discouraged against God?
- Read Galatians 6:9. When it feels like you can't catch a break or overcome a struggle or temptation, do you let the situation become your reason to lose hope or lose effectiveness? How can you use these opportunities to stay focused on your faithfulness to God?

- What are the good things that we're supposed to be steadfast in, that help us stay strong, in tough times?
- Share a time in your life where, after going through a struggle, you saw God's purpose. How did it affect your view and approach to future trials?

God's Purpose Will Prevail Through You (Acts 26:1-3)

- If you were on trial in front of a hostile judge and jury, would you take the opportunity to testify on your own behalf or use that time to share your faith in Jesus? Why or why not?
- Paul got the chance to testify in front of King Agrippa, the grandson of the king who killed Jesus. What's the significance of this encounter? How would you have handled this moment?
- Whatever Paul was going through, he was able to stay faithful to and stay focused on his love for Jesus. How is your prayer life and your devotion to The Word? What can you do to deepen these things today, so that you, too, can stay faithful to and focused on your love for Jesus?
- What does God's purpose prevailing look like?
- Are you willing to do what it takes to let God work through you? What does it look like to you to let God's purpose prevail through you?

Now What?

Encouragement: Paul had every reason to give up on his mission, but he never let his focus on Christ be shaken, and he remained faithful that all he was enduring to serve Jesus would be worth it. It's so hard to see the victory during the fight, but having focus on Jesus and faith in Him reassures us that it's there. What you're dealing with now will make sense in the future. The pain and pressure you're working through may be where God is refining you so He can use you to make the biggest difference ever! Stay focused on Jesus, stay faithful to Jesus and His mission, don't get discouraged, and watch how God's purpose will prevail in your life.

Ask:

- Where is your focus right now?
- How are you living out your faithfulness?
- Where do you need to commit to being focused on Christ and faithful to Him?

Challenge: How can you simplify your life so that you can be more focused and faithful?

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you for showing us how staying focused and faithful helps glorify Your name. Thank you for reminding us how focus and faithfulness are partners in achieving the mission of the Gospel. Lord, we know that the start of making a difference for Your Kingdom begins with us individually, so we're committing to recenter our lives on Christ. Help us to keep it simple, to focus only on the main things in our lives, in our homes, in our families, and as we tell others about You. Keep us encouraged as we encounter hard times so we don't start making excuses. Even when it makes sense to us to just give up, remind us that we have to keep going. Strengthen our hope so that we don't grow weary while living for You. Help us see times of pressures as opportunities to lean into Your Spirit and to allow for transformation in our lives. What we go through isn't just for us, but it's for You to get the glory, for You reach others, for You to prevail. Keep us on mission, keep us on vision. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of February 12th, 2023

Sermon Series: The Book of Acts

Sermon: How to Stand Strong in Tough Times (Acts 24)

Speaker: Pastor Mike Burnette

Icebreaker

- We ALL know that the true star of the Super Bowl is the food. Name your favorite Super Bowl dish!

Discussion Questions

Introduction

- Share a time where your devotion and relationship with God grew closer during a difficult season.

Don't Let Others Decide Your Devotion (v. 1-9)

- Where in your life do you feel the most challenged in your devotion to God?
- Describe a time where you felt pressured to just go along with the crowd. Did you give in or stand alone? Why?
- How do the people in your circle encourage you in your devotion? How do they discourage you? Have you tried communicating that?

It's Easy to Defend When You're Living Right (v. 10-21)

- Is there a certain person or group that you find it the hardest to stand up for your faith around? Why?
- How have you set up healthy boundaries that help protect your faith? Where in your life do you need to establish them?
- In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Paul urges the church to "live quietly, mind your own affairs... and walk properly before outsiders." Why is it so important to God for our lives to be dependable and honorable to non-believers?

Favor Follows Faithfulness (v. 22-27)

- When we don't have a foundation of devotion, what are some of the ways that we tend to deal with challenges in life?
- Favor followed Paul's faithfulness to God in a generous prison sentence, but he was still in prison. How does this affect the way you see God's favor in your own life?
- God's favor in our lives isn't just for us. We should be sharing how God works in our lives with others. Share where you've seen God's favor in your life recently.
- Throughout the Book of Acts, we see Paul was building his life on God way before this tough season started. Right now, how are you growing your devotion and your relationship with God so that when you encounter hard times, it doesn't crush you?

In closing, how was Paul able to stay strong for God in tough times? He built a life with God before the tough times showed up! The person he was becoming before the hard season is what prepared him to endure the tough times.

1. Paul had a life-changing encounter with God!
2. Paul was filled with God's Spirit!
3. Paul had a regular prayer life!
4. Paul had a strong community of faith!
5. Paul's whole life was deeply devoted to Jesus!

Now What?

Encouragement: Paul's tough time in Acts 24 is a perfect example of how God desires us to survive and stand in touch times. God knows that standing up for Him is a challenge, and it can sometimes feel lonely, but through our faith in the Lord, we can stand tall in the storm. Things and people will try to make you doubt what you're doing, but don't ever let anyone or anything get in the way of your devotion to God and lead you away from living a life full of the Holy Spirit. And when you're living devoted to God and living a Spirit-filled life, you can stand strong against any lie or

compromise. It's easy to defend yourself when you're living the right way. And favor follows faithfulness. Stay the course and continue to the Lord your gift of faithfulness, and He will continue giving you His gift of favor. Paul didn't wait until the tough times to get serious with Christ. Build your life with God now so you'll be able to conquer the tough seasons in the future.

Ask:

- How have you been letting others decide your devotion?
- Is your life easy to defend?
- In what ways can you get better at giving God your faithfulness?

Challenge: Take some this week to reflect on your devotion life. What does it look like currently? Pray and ask God how it can be deepened. Also, be intentional about looking for signs of God's favor in your life this week and share it with someone.

Closing Prayer

God, we thank you for this message. We thank you for Paul's story and what it's teaching us about living a life dedicated to you. As your children, we know we're not exempt from difficulties, but because we are your children, we can stand strong in the face of adversity. When we face hard times, we pray to be reminded about what we've learned about standing strong in Christ. Help us strengthen our devotion lives like never before. Lord, give us the wisdom and strength to guard our devotion from things and people that will try to lead us away from our faith. Remove anything from our lives that is keeping us from living honestly and living a fully devoted life to Christ. Help us to stay faithful in the midst of trials. We want to keep our eyes on you, Lord, and on the purpose you have for our lives. We ask all of these things in your precious name, Amen.

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of February 5th, 2023

Sermon Series: The Book of Acts

Sermon: God's Plan Will Prevail - Acts 23:12-35

Speaker: Pastor Beau Jensen

Icebreaker

- If you could give Pastor Beau a topic to “freestyle rap” about, what would it be?

Discussion Questions

INTRODUCTION

- Are you a planner? What should you be planning, and is there flexibility for God's will in your planning?

I. The Heart is Deceitful (v. 12-15)

- What is the significance of “more than 40” making this oath?
- Do you ever feel like it is acceptable to sin? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt like everyone was out to get you, yet you were in the “right” about something? How did that make you feel?
- Share a time when you went against God's will because you thought it was better to do things your way? What was the end result?
- Have you ever been passionate about something and believed it was God's will, and then found that it was not? Describe how that made you feel.
- Are you like Paul, or the priests and elders who came against him? Why?
- If you are speaking to someone with differing opinions, do you act like these 40 who came against Paul, or do you ask clarifying questions to provide a clearer picture? How do you do that?

Jeremiah 19:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately

wicked: who can know it?" NKJV

- This is why we need Jesus - because our hearts are wicked and will deceive us. How do you filter life, so that God is in control and not your heart?
- Have you ever been sucked into "religious thinking" that was not in line with God's plan? How did you work that out?

II. God Will Use Anyone & Anything (v. 16-30)

- God sometimes uses circumstances and seemingly the most unexpected person or situation to carry out his purposes and plans. How has God used an unexpected person or circumstance to make His plan clear in your life?
- What is the significance of the tribune taking Paul's nephew by the hand to privately ask what the nephew had to say? How old do you think the nephew was? If he was very young, why would God use a child to help bring His plan to fruition?
- Why did the tribune feel it necessary or important to listen to Paul's nephew?
- The soldiers were transporting someone they thought was a prisoner, but they were unaware God was using them to transport His preacher of the gospel safely. When has God used you to exercise His will, while you were totally unaware?
- Why would the tribune order 470 soldiers to guard Paul – one man -- during the transport? Does that convince you that God would do anything to make sure His plan prevails?
- Why did the tribune write to the governor, Felix? What do you think his intention was? What might have happened if the tribune didn't clarify his purpose in sending Paul to Felix?
- If God wants you somewhere, he will make sure you get there! Even now, you are sitting here reading this study because God wants you to be. How does that make you feel?
- Have you ever had to be faithful in your waiting season? Was it easy

or hard? How did you get through it?

III. God's Plan Looks Different (v. 31-35)

- Why was Paul taken to Antipatris at night?
- What's blocking YOU from following God's plan? Pride?... Ignorance?... Anger?... How can we get beyond these things that limit us and get closer to His plan?
- God's Plan for Paul was different than expected. The only directive he received was from Jesus, "Take Courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem so you must testify also in Rome." Have you ever had a plan for your life, and then found God's plan to be different? How did it work out?
- God's Plan looks different for everyone. Sometimes God's Plan may not make sense to us (and may never make sense), but God's Plan will prevail. Look at your own life, and describe a way God's plan has surprised you. Does it make sense yet?
- God has an infinite number of options for working out His will in our lives. Why would we think we could understand His plan?

Now What?

Encouragement: We may never fully understand God's plan, but God will use any unique circumstance as an opportunity to reach those who have not heard about the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is because God's Plan will prevail.

God used Paul's life as an opportunity, he just needed to have the courage to be able to preach the gospel. In our own lives we should take advantage of the opportunities that are in front of us, take courage and share what God has done in our lives. It may seem trivial, however God will use what seemingly feels insignificant to us to do something significant in others.

God has an infinite number of options for working out his will in our lives. While our daily lives may not look spectacular, we can be assured and encouraged knowing that God is involved in our lives.

Ask:

- How can you be more aware of God's plan for your life this week?
- How have your own desires encouraged you to follow your own plan and not God's?

Challenge: Spend some time over the next seven days looking into what the Bible says about God's will. Pay particular attention to these verses each day:

Day 1: Psalm 25:4-5

Day 2: Psalm 25:8-9

Day 3: Psalm 119:105

Day 4: Proverbs 19:21

Day 5: Jeremiah 29:10-14

Day 6: Mark 3:33-35

Day 7: Matthew 6:9-10

Pray each day for God to reveal your heart to you and to make His will for you crystal clear.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we love you. God, thank you for this day and this time to come and worship you. We lift up your name, because it is a gift to love you. I pray that we would not fight back against your plan, God. Thank you, Lord, that your plan is the only plan. I pray that we would go the direction you would have us go, and we thank you for that decision. Jesus, I'm all in on your plan for my life. Because I know your plan will prevail. Thank you for giving me new life. Give me your Holy Spirit to lead me and to guide me. In Jesus' name, AMEN!

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of January 29th, 2023

Sermon Series: The Book of Acts

Sermon: This is Not What I Expected (Acts 22:30; 23:1-11)

Speaker: Pastor Jordan Smalley

Icebreaker

- If you made a movie, what would it be about?

Discussion Questions

Our Response is Our Choice (Acts 22:30; 23:1-5)

- Paul's opportunity to share the gospel to the council was like a dream come true. It was the opportunity of a lifetime. Describe a time in your life when you had a chance to say something really important. How did that go?
- Have you ever said something you thought was profound or witty, only to be smacked on the mouth for it? Put yourself in Paul's shoes. How do you think he felt after he said this and was struck on the mouth for it?
- Paul has a very human response in the heat of the moment here to being wronged. He knows he didn't deserve that! This has happened to us all. Describe a time when you let your anger get the best of you. How did that work out? How could it have been if you'd let God take control?
- You can't always control what happens to you, but you can always control your response towards what happened to you! Think of a time when you responded to a situation in a "less than Christian" way. Now, imagine how it could have gone if you'd have handled it differently. What would be different?
- Do you speak out against corruption? If so, how do you speak out against it? Is it the right way?
- Despite the reason why you're being persecuted, do you still choose to respond in a way that is pleasing to the Lord?

- Is there a time when you were faced with a hard situation and your response was revenge? How did that turn out?

Refocus Our Attention (Acts 23:6-10)

- In a painful, challenging situation, Paul refocused his attention and got back focused on his hope in the resurrection and on his hope in Jesus! How much different would our response to life's curve-balls be if we kept our focus on our hope in the resurrection? What would that look like?
- When Paul's focus began to change and he got his focus back on his message and his hope in the resurrection, his circumstance did not get better. Still, God was able to begin working in his situation and God was able to defend Paul. Sometimes our circumstances might not change but our focus can! How could you change your focus in order to remember that God is good and he is working on the situation for you?
- When you see that you have gone down the wrong track, how do you refocus your attention back on God?
- Having a lack of faith that God can help you overcome anything, can leave you stuck where you are. Do you truly believe that you can overcome any circumstance with God's help? Why or why not?
- Are you ever tempted to turn to someone or something else, other than God in hard times? Who/what and why?
- What's a current situation you are going through where you feel like you have to defend yourself? How are you going about dealing with the situation? (i.e. scripture, prayer, solo) What is keeping you from surrendering it to God?

The Lord is With Us in Our Pain (Acts 23:11)

I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. (Psalm 16:8)

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

- In one of Paul's darkest moments, THE LORD CAME AND STOOD BY PAUL! Imagine how powerful that would have been. Now, remind yourself that even in your darkest hour, God is with you. How does that change the way you see adversity in your life?
- Are you here today feeling discouraged like Paul? How do these Psalms change the way you focus your attention and give you courage?
- Acts 23:11 reads, "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." Even though no one in the moment in the Sanhedrin was saved, God was still proud of Paul. How does this verse change how you feel about what success looks like when preaching the gospel?
- Can you persevere with God by your side? He may call you to continue to be in the fire. What is your focus while you are in the fire?
- There are times when you may wait awhile after going through a hard situation to hear from God? In that waiting, how do you center your heart and thoughts on God? How do you keep from spiraling or feeling discouraged?

Now What?

Encouragement: Even in our darkest hour and in the pains and challenges of life, God is with us! His presence is with us!! Hebrews says he will never leave us nor forsake us! Psalm 16:8 says, "I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me!" Psalm 34 says, He is close to the broken hearted! Psalm 46:1 SAYS, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble!

Ask:

- How can you include God in your responses more this week?

- How have your feelings been encouraging you to respond contrary to God's word?

Challenge:

In what ways do you need to change your response this week?

1. Forgive Quickly

There are some things in life that are just out of our control, but you can control how you respond. Do you forgive quickly, or do you hold onto conflict? Why?

2. Humble Yourself

Sometimes it's not someone else's fault or God's fault that we're experiencing pain. Sometimes it's our own refusal to humble ourselves and apologize that's keeping us in the place we're in. What pain in your life is the result of your own stubbornness? What would happen if you let go of that stubbornness?

3. Watch Your Mouth

We can choose not to complain or grumble. We can choose to honor. Instead of grumbling about a situation at work this week, what would it look like to honor your coworkers or boss for their hard work?

4. Turn to God in Prayer

Instead of stewing in the moment, what if we turned to God immediately and trust that He will deal with it in His will? How much better would it be if we trusted Him instead of shouldering that responsibility ourselves?

5. Reach out for help!

There is no reason to suffer through serious hurt and pain alone. What if you gave that pain and suffering away and came to rely on a small group or pastoral counseling? How much easier would your day be?

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you that we do not have to walk through difficult times alone. Thank you for being our hope in a broken world! Thank you that you

promise to always be with us! You are such a good Father. Remind us that even though we cannot control what goes on in our lives, we can control how we respond. Lord, help our responses show others you. May we love others in our responses and to remember to be gentle with our tongues. Would you show us how to encourage others with the encouragement you give us daily. Lord, guide us and lead our steps this week as we walk out what we have learned. Help us be a light to the darkness in this world. We love you, we thank you! In Jesus's name, AMEN!