

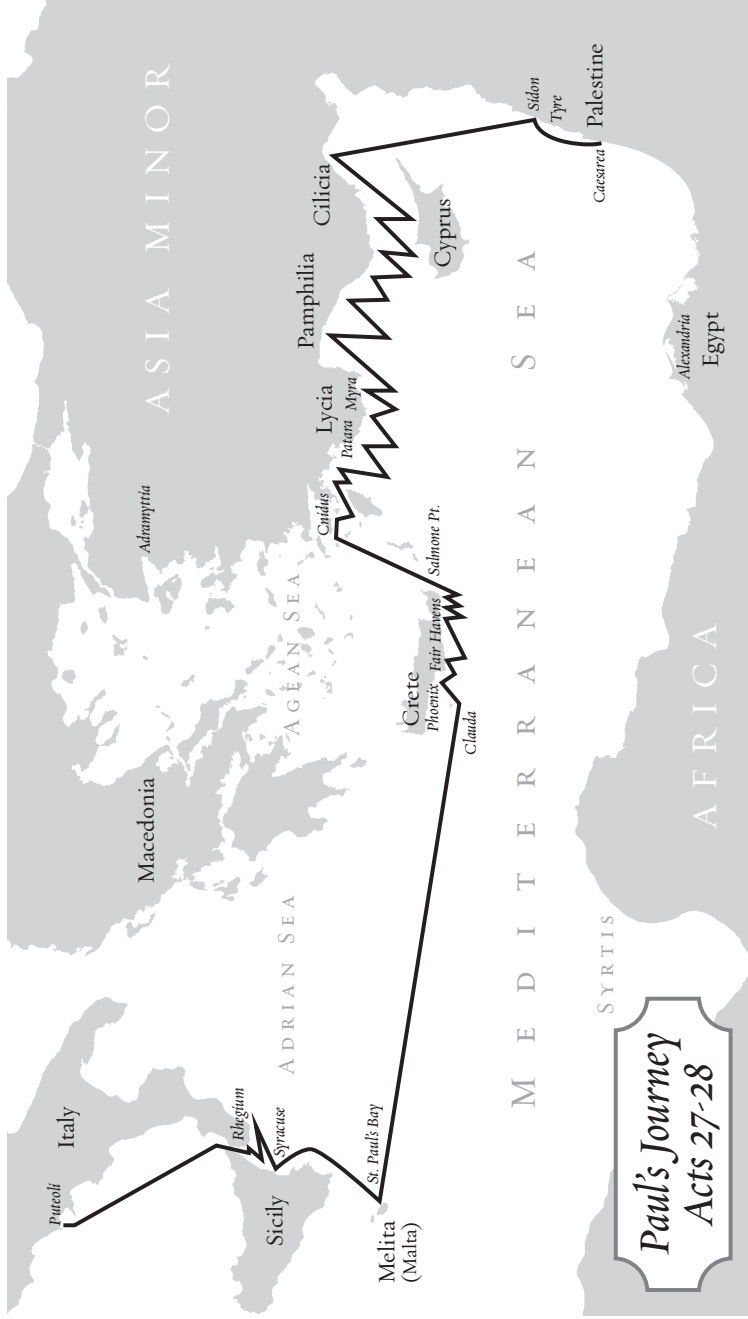
WHEN LIFE'S
A WRECK

*Walking with Christ
Through the Trials of Life*

DAN HAYDEN

CROSSWAY BOOKS

A DIVISION OF
GOOD NEWS PUBLISHERS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS



1

AGAINST THE WIND

*From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee,
when my heart is overwhelmed:
lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
For thou hast been a shelter for me . . .*

PSALM 61:2-3, KJV

— ACTS 27:1-8 —

¹ And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius. ² And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica. ³ And the next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care. ⁴ And from there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. ⁵ And when we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. ⁶ And there the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it. ⁷ And when we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us *to go* farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone; ⁸ and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a certain place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

*A*fter the plane crash that killed John F. Kennedy, Jr., his wife Carolyn, and her sister Lauren, much of the world was caught up in their tragic deaths. Some time later my wife Karilee and I visited Martha's Vineyard, and we stood at Gay Head and looked out over the ocean. That scene of tragedy is etched upon my mind. John, Jr. was not particularly gifted as a leader, and yet he seemed to be a wonderful young man; people around him seemed to appreciate him. He was not very public in his endeavors, so the national and international attention given to him after his death caused a little surprise among some. Perhaps it was because he was a favored son of American royalty. The Kennedy family and Camelot have been to America what the royal family has been to England. So the nation

mourned the death of John Kennedy in much the same way that England mourned the death of Princess Diana—with memorials of flowers accompanied by international grief. Our hearts went out to the Kennedy family, which has endured so much tragedy over the years.

BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

If the perpetual grief of the Kennedy family has taught us anything, it has taught us that the troubles of life are no respecters of persons. Bad things happen to the rich as well as to the poor. They happen to the famous as well as to the unknown. They happen to people who are good and to people who are evil. It is a common denominator of the human experience.

For instance, the apostle Paul was a righteous man, and yet in 2 Corinthians 4 he admitted to the Corinthian church that he had suffered deeply. He wrote, beginning in verse 8, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” Christians are not exempt from the troubles of life, but there is a special resource for us in the Person of Jesus Christ. Through Him we have wisdom, strength, and hope in the midst of adversity.

One time I got a fortune in my fortune cookie that read, “There appear to be many clouds but they will quickly pass.” Wouldn’t that be nice! Unfortunately, some clouds do not pass as quickly as we would like. But the truth above the clouds is the Son—the Son of God still shines above the clouds of life. As believers in Christ wait upon the Lord, the Holy Spirit bears them up on the divine wings of heavenly grace into the very presence of God where the sun is warm and invigorating to the soul—even when there are clouds.

THE JOURNEY AGAINST THE WIND: A SUMMARY

The story of the journey and shipwreck of Paul in Acts 27—28 is full of the clouds of life. Paul took several missionary journeys in the course of his ministry, but this story is his last recorded journey in the Bible. It appears that he was eventually released from his confinement in Rome, and that he did travel again. Our interest, however, is in this final story as recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts. It's a poignant story filled with excitement and harrowing adventure. In the pages that follow, we will ponder the spiritual implications of many things that happened, but first it will be helpful to get a panoramic view of the journey. So, let's take a few minutes to see where Paul went, so we can get a feel for where we are about to go.

There are many places and directions of travel in this scenario, so follow the map as we go. We'll talk about what happened at each place later, but for now, let's just get the itinerary in our minds.

The journey in Acts 27—28 began after the apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and taken to a place called Caesarea, a city on the coast of the Mediterranean (see Acts 21—26). At the time Paul was arrested, Caesarea was where the Roman government had its seat of authority. Pilate had his headquarters there, as did Herod. You can still visit the place today and see the archaeological excavation of the port that Rome used in Caesarea. That was where Paul embarked on a ship for Rome after two years of imprisonment for preaching the Gospel. He had appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen, so the authorities sent him to Caesar.

Thus he began the journey from Caesarea to Rome. At the time the ship began its journey in late summer, a strong wind was coming out of the west across the Mediterranean Sea; so to go west toward Rome was to go against the wind. Now remember, in those days travel was not as it is today, since sail-

ing was the principal means of transportation. Today we can take a steamship or an airplane that travels directly to our destination. Paul's ship, on the other hand, headed north because of the wind to take advantage of the coastline before making its way over to Rome. First the ship traveled from Caesarea north to Sidon, using a fair wind to sail north by northeast. It made that sixty-seven-mile trip to Sidon quickly and with relative ease.¹

The sailors took a break in Sidon and then headed up the coast, straight to Cilicia on the southern coast of what is now Turkey. First they passed under the lee of Cyprus, where they enjoyed a bit of a reprieve from the wind in the shelter of the island, and then they began to tack along the coast to a place called Myra in one of the provinces of Asia Minor. There the passengers caught another ship and headed to a place called Cnidus, a town in the southwest corner of Asia Minor. At this point they found it impossible to sail straight across the Aegean Sea because of the heavy winds; so they headed south to find shelter behind the island of Crete. Passing a place called Salmone, they finally came to a little harbor called Fair Havens.

In Fair Havens the captain of the ship faced a decision as to whether or not they should go on. Paul warned them not to continue because of the risk of losing cargo, to say nothing of their very lives, due to the weather. The decision was made to ignore Paul, however, and to set sail hoping to make it from Fair Havens to Phoenix on the west coast of Crete. On the way a violent storm (which in Scripture is called Euraquilo) caught them by surprise and drove them south, around a little island called Clauda. For two weeks they were driven by the storm across the Mediterranean Sea, and finally wrecked upon a reef off the coast of the island of Malta, just south of Italy.

After recovering from the trauma of the shipwreck, they

resumed their journey and made their way around the island of Sicily to the coast of Italy. The story ends with Paul meeting his friends, after which he was taken to Rome, the city in which he would spend two more years in house arrest. This then is the journey behind the story of this book. The good news is that Paul survived the wreck, and the equally good news is that you can survive your wreck too.

AGGRAVATIONS AND RESTRICTIONS

First let's look at the aggravations and restrictions that hampered the progress of Paul and his traveling companions in these first eight verses. Since this journey was mostly against the wind, the contrary winds made it an extremely difficult voyage. There are principles here that will help us when we deal with situations in which we are sailing against the wind.

Aggravations

Have you ever been aggravated? There is a lot to aggravate us—pushy drivers, lines at the airport, phone solicitors, unkept promises or appointments, shoddy or incomplete work—aggravations are all around us. We are all plagued by them—those contrary winds.

The story in Acts 27:1-8 is full of aggravating things. Though it is not stated, we can surmise from the narrative and the principles of sailing that the initial direction of the wind was favorable. It says, "And the next day we put in at Sidon." That was a sixty-seven-mile journey from Caesarea up the coast of Palestine to the city of Sidon.² They sailed north and then north-east for a time, so a westerly wind would have been a fair wind. In fact, a west wind predominates in that part of the Mediterranean in late summer.³ Sixty-seven miles in a day was good progress for sailing in the Mediterranean; sailing under that steady wind must have been pleasurable. A fair wind, a

wind behind you or at your side, is a wind that will carry you along toward your destination.

I used to sail on a three-mast ketch in Lake Superior when I was working at a camp in northern Wisconsin. We would sail from Bayfield, Wisconsin, to the Apostle Islands on weeklong sailing junkets. The boat would carry up to twenty people, and I would go along as a Bible teacher. We had great times sailing on this ketch called “The Pride.”

I remember times when the wind was at our back as we were making our way from island to island. Kenny, the captain, would put up the spinnaker out front. It was a beautiful, colorful sail, and it would fill out and billow as the winds blew us along. Those were fun times. Often on the journey of life we experience such fair winds. We put up the spinnaker and make good progress. Things are going well, and it is enjoyable sailing along. We appreciate those times and wish that they would come along more frequently.

Unfortunately, however, there are many occasions during the journey of life when the winds are contrary to our course. And that is what happened to Paul and his company on the journey to Rome. The voyage resumed in verse 4: “And from there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were *contrary*.” Verse 7 adds: “We . . . sailed *slowly* for a good many days . . . with *difficulty*” (emphasis mine). It was the same situation in verse 8: “. . . and with *difficulty* sailing past it [Salmone] we came to a certain place called Fair Havens.” As they departed from Sidon on the coast of Palestine, they could not proceed in a straight line toward Rome. In a sailing vessel you have to tack back and forth to sail against the wind. And when forced to tack, you end up going many more miles than simply sailing in a straight line. It is truly difficult to tack back and forth, and the hours are long and arduous. It is no mystery why the text says that only with

difficulty did Paul's vessel finally make its way to Fair Havens on the island of Crete.

Have you ever been in a situation in which the wind is blowing so strongly that it is difficult to make headway? I remember such a situation years ago when I was a teenager. I took a bike trip with a friend of mine before biking became popular. We rode fifteen hundred miles on three-speed bikes up through the state of New York, across the Adirondack Mountains, down through the Finger Lakes of New York, over to Niagara Falls, and across Canada into Michigan. We had a little pup tent and sleeping bags and cooked our food along the road. It was a wild experience.

I will never forget the day we came down out of the Adirondack Mountains. We had just been to Lake Placid, a beautiful spot up in the mountains of northern New York where the Winter Olympics had been held in 1932. We were coming down the western side of the Adirondacks into the St. Lawrence Seaway area, and as we descended a wind was coming from the west, like this wind described in Acts 27. We had to pedal even going downhill because the wind was so strong. When we reached flat ground it was almost impossible to make any headway at all—even in the lowest gear. Finally we just quit, lay down on the side of the road, and talked for several hours to pass the time until the wind died down.

It is hard to make progress when contrary winds are blowing so fiercely against you. At times it seems like you are always bucking the wind. Sometimes life is like that.

A dear Christian couple whom my wife and I have known and loved for many years has faced stiff, contrary winds in their life. He was an electrician and had relocated to the north woods of Wisconsin. Finding no work as an electrician, he got his real estate license and began to sell real estate. But that did not go so well, and he was forced to look for other work. He was hired

by a prefab home company, but at that time the homes were not selling well either. So he enrolled in a school in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to learn another trade. He began this course with nine weeks of full-time studies followed by a year of part-time studies and spent hours and hours commuting back and forth from home. During this time their daughter was going through a divorce, and his wife couldn't find work either. Her mother suffered a stroke, and simultaneously this man's wife went into the hospital for major surgery. Shortly after that her father died. When all of this happened, I thought, *How can one couple go through so much adversity?*

Have you ever known anyone who experienced something like that? Perhaps you are going through a period of adversity yourself. Indeed, there are times when life is just plain difficult—when we face contrary winds—the aggravations of life.

Restrictions

Let's look at some of the restrictions Paul was under as well. In verse 1 we read: "And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners." Paul was a prisoner on this journey. He had been in confinement for two years, and he was just waiting for his case to come to court. At this point he had not been judged guilty of anything. For two years he had been waiting and waiting and waiting. Finally he had appealed to Caesar; so Festus, the governor in Caesarea, was sending him to Rome.

This restricted time was *unexpected*. Many of the restrictions of life are unexpected—they just come as invaders into our lives. We do not ask for them, and we do not like them, but they are there.

Acts 21 records that Paul was simply in the temple worshipping when a group of Jews from Asia, who did not like him, stirred up the crowd against him. A mob scene developed, and

Roman soldiers came in to quell the riot. When the soldiers discovered that Paul was at the heart of the trouble, they took him into the barracks to protect him. From that point on Paul was in custody. He was doing nothing more than worshiping his God and preaching the Gospel of grace, yet he was arrested. It came unexpectedly.

The restrictions were not only unexpected, they were also *unfair*. In Acts 26 Paul came before King Agrippa and Festus the governor to present his case. “When they had drawn aside, they began talking to one another, saying, ‘This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.’ And Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar’” (vv. 31-32). The situation was unfair—Paul had done nothing worthy of imprisonment.

Furthermore, in Acts 28:18-19, when he arrived in Rome, Paul himself said, “And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar; not that I had any accusation against my nation.” Paul knew that this whole thing was ridiculous. It was certainly unfair.

Perhaps you have struggled with this question during some hardship in your life: “What did I do to deserve this?” Do you know what the answer is? Probably nothing. Maybe you *did* do something to deserve what is currently happening to you, so you need to factor that into your understanding; but often the answer really is, “Nothing.” You see, it is not a matter of deserving hardship. It is often just part of living in a contrary world. Paul was ministering in a society that was contrary to Christ, and that is why he had to deal with confinement.

The restrictions to Paul seemed to be *unending*, too. He spent two years in prison in Caesarea for nothing worthy of

imprisonment. Then it took many months for this whole journey from Caesarea to Rome to come to an end. Once he arrived in Rome, he lived under house arrest, waiting two more years for his case to come before Caesar. At that point, tradition tells us, Paul's case was simply dismissed. So the bottom line is that he spent over four years waiting in confinement for nothing! Now that's a difficult trial to endure. I'm sure those days and months and years seemed to go on and on and on.

I saw a poster once of a flop-eared hound dog. He was lying down with his mournful face on the ground. He looked pathetic and forlorn, and the caption read, "How long, O Lord? How long?" (See Psalm 6:3.) Do you ever feel that way? I certainly have. Some problems just seem to go on forever, day after day, month after month, year after year.

I am reminded of a couple from our church. On one occasion they were at a Chicago hospital where the husband was being treated for a heart problem. I had an opportunity to visit with them, and I was greatly encouraged to see that their spirits were up. We had great fellowship together, but at the same time I realized that it had been two and a half years of confinement for him. The severity of his heart problems and all of the side effects of multiple medications made it a very difficult time. And it just seemed to go on and on. I often asked myself the question, *When is this ever going to end?* My friend must have thought, *This may never really end. This may be what God in His providence has for me for the rest of my life.* Not long after my visit he died. Sometimes confinements and restrictions are with you for life.

ALTERNATIVES AND RESOURCES

So, what is the answer to these aggravations and restrictions? The answer is to focus on alternatives and resources. I will just mention a few.

Alternatives

I heard the story of a man who was looking at another man pulling a chain. He asked the man, "Why are you pulling that chain?"

The man replied, "Hey, you ever try to push one?"

Sometimes there are ways to do things that make it easier. There are alternatives in the midst of hardship. Often the way we respond to hardship can make life better. Three aspects of the sailing scenario give us principles of response that can help us when we are journeying against the wind.

First, as I mentioned previously, to sail into the wind requires tacking back and forth. You cannot sail directly into the wind; so instead you *sail at an angle* to the wind.

When we were tacking on one occasion in the Apostle Islands, I asked Kenny, the captain, to explain it to me. I said, "I know nothing about sailing. Help me understand how in the world we can go against the wind like this."

He answered, "You notice how the sail is sort of shaped like an airplane wing? If you take an airplane wing and put it in the vertical position, that's the same principle. You see, in flying it's not the air that holds an airplane up. There's a large curve on the front of the wing that slants to a taper in the back, so that when the air flows over the top it shoots back and provides a vacuum on the backside of the wing. Now it's that vacuum seeking to be filled that pulls the wing up. That's what makes it possible for airplanes to fly. Well, take that airplane wing and put it in a vertical position. See how it billows in the front and comes around and then tapers in the back to create a vacuum? That vacuum is pulling this ship against the wind."

I thought, *Isn't that amazing! We can go against the wind because there is a vacuum seeking to be filled that is pulling us against the wind.* What a wonderful principle for dealing with adversity in the Christian life! When we face a problem and try

to go directly into the problem, it is going to blow us away. What we need to do is to get ourselves at an angle with our face set toward the Lord. Then when we concentrate on the Lord, the vacuum in our life that is caused by this adversity—some loneliness, some pain, some difficulty—that vacuum, instead of being a hindrance in our journey through life, becomes the very thing that draws us to God. We actually *make progress* in our journey against the wind.

Isaiah told us how to do it in Isaiah 26:3-4. He said, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock” (ESV).

So, here’s the idea: When adverse winds arise, just keep your mind on the Lord; and as the troubles come toward you, let them just whip on by. As they do, it will create that pull toward God. In that way the trials of life will pull you toward the Lord. Learn how to tack as you sail spiritually against the wind.

The second aspect of sailing is the need to *make use of shelters*. Verse 4 indicates that the ship came under the lee side of Cyprus. Now, since the wind was blowing from the west, they sailed on the east side of the island, and the island actually broke the wind. Then they were able to make progress more quickly because they were in the shelter of the island of Cyprus. That is the reason they went north instead of west toward Rome. Then when they reached Cnidus, a city on the southwest corner of Asia Minor, they did the same thing again. Instead of going straight across the Aegean Sea, they went south to find shelter on the lee side of Crete. That way they had a little break from the wind.

We need to learn how to do that. God has provided so many shelters for us. Home is a shelter, and it ought to be. Where there is love and acceptance we can escape the trials of life and find shelter from our difficult circumstances. We come home,

and there we find respite. There we find encouragement. In like fashion, God also intends the church to be like that for His people. When we come to church we leave all of the trials of life behind and find that it is a place of encouragement, a place to be helped, a place where others are sensitive to our needs. Sometimes when people are facing difficulties, they shut out their families at home or stay away from church, when those are the very places where they can find shelter, comfort, and encouragement.

How important it is for us to be sensitive to other people and enhance the benefit that comes from being in the company of caring people. It says in verse 8 that the travelers finally arrived at Fair Havens. Fair Havens was a small harbor on the south side of the island of Crete near a little town called Lasea. That was where they finally found some relief. Fair Havens is a beautiful, descriptive name for a harbor of respite.

I have known some fair havens in my life. Fort Wilderness Camp and Camp Forest Springs in northern Wisconsin have been such places for me. Many families that come out of difficult circumstances in Chicago, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Madison, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and from all around the Midwest go to Fort Wilderness or Camp Forest Springs to find shelter from the storms of life. For a week they have a wonderful time together, and then they return home rejuvenated and ready to continue their journey. But for a time, among the people of God, they enjoy a fair haven.

The ultimate shelter is prayer and fellowship with the Lord. What a shelter it is to go into a time of prayer and to let your heart be drawn into the very presence of God. I love the refrain of that hymn, "Under His Wings." "Under His wings, under His wings, who from His love can sever? Under His wings, my soul shall abide, safely abide forever."

The third aspect of sailing in this story is that the sailors

utilized certain advantages. In verse 5 we read: “And when we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia . . .” You see, they made a beeline from Sidon straight up to the southern coast of Asia Minor. Now if they had come from Sidon straight across the Mediterranean, it would certainly have been shorter. But they sailed to the north to utilize two advantages.

The first advantage was land winds from the north. A certain French navigator made a similar journey from Syria to Marseilles, which is on the southern coast of France. He wrote in his account that after making Cyprus, “The winds from the west, . . . which prevail in these places during the summer, forced us to run to the north. We made for the coast of Caramania (Cilicia) in order to meet the northerly winds, and which we found accordingly.”⁴ So there was an advantage to sailing to the north in order to catch the land winds that were more favorable.

A second advantage was that there was a sea current that ran westward along the coast of Asia Minor. A current running to the west was an advantage even against the wind as they moved along the coast. So the north winds from the land and the westward current were both advantages as the ship made its journey to Rome.

Years ago my wife’s brother passed away. He was a young family man who developed a malignant brain tumor that took his life. He went to be with the Lord, leaving a wife and three children. At the time of his illness they were living in Oregon, where Jim worked with the U.S. Forest Service. When he passed away, his wife Lin was alone. It was a difficult time—there was a strong contrary wind in her life.

One of the things Lin did was to seek help and to utilize the advantage of moving from Oregon all the way to northern Wisconsin where we were living. She went there for two rea-

sons. First, she went there to be with family, so that we could be of help. I as her children's uncle became a sort of surrogate father to my niece and nephews. Second, she came so that she would have the advantage of the Christian camp where I was on the staff. She knew that the camp would have a positive influence on her children. When Lin moved to Wisconsin she found great advantages there to help her amidst the contrary winds in her life. God has done wonderful things in her family since that difficult time. The two boys are now in ministry serving the Lord, her daughter married a wonderful Christian man and is raising a family, and Lin has remarried and is enjoying life in the Wisconsin countryside.

So, as we see, there are often alternatives that can make difficult times a little easier as we learn to keep our minds on the Lord and sail at an angle to the wind. We can make use of shelters that are fair havens in our life. And we can utilize certain advantages that present themselves along the way.

Resources

Another thing to be mindful of is that there are special resources that can be of great advantage to us when we face contrary winds. In Acts 27:1-8 there is an emphasis on people. You see, people can be one of the greatest resources that we have in time of trouble. Where do you go when you are in trouble? Well, you probably go to a friend, a family member, or some other person who can help you. We see this happening in verse 3 when it says that "Julius . . . allowed him [Paul] to go to his friends and receive care."

Let me just suggest to you four types of friends in this story.

First, there were *contact friends*, as I would call them. In verse 3 it was Julius. He was a centurion of an Augustan cohort, which means that he was the commander of a hundred soldiers. He was in charge of accompanying the prisoners to

Rome along with many of his own soldiers. Julius treated Paul with consideration, and later during the journey he intervened to save Paul's life (see 27:39-44). But here we simply appreciate his friendliness to Paul. We read in verse 3 that "Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care." Now, he didn't have to do that, but he had compassion on Paul—he was a considerate man.

Don't you appreciate friendliness, a smile, a word of encouragement, or a helping hand? Proverbs 12:25 says, "Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad." A good word, a smile, or some other simple act of encouragement may go much farther than you ever imagined, even if you are just a contact friend.

Then, secondly, there were what I call *community friends*. Again looking at verse 3 we see that Paul was allowed to visit his friends in Sidon. Paul also had friends in Tyre (see Acts 21:3-4), which was near Sidon. They were twin cities. He stayed there for a whole week on one occasion. This time he received care among his friends in Sidon. The fellowship of the saints, the community of God's people, or *koinonia* as the Bible calls it, is a wonderful aspect of the body of Christ.

The gifts of the Spirit in the early church were exercised mostly as they ministered to one another in their homes and in the community. There were no church buildings and no church programs. We have institutionalized the church and made it a weekend experience, but God never intended it to be that way. We are to be involved in each other's lives by using the spiritual gifts that God has given for us to encourage one another. God wants us to care for each other, to be praying for one another. That is what community friends are for.

Then, thirdly, there were *close friends* in this story. Verse 2 mentions Aristarchus. In Acts 19:29 he is called a "traveling companion" of Paul. In two of Paul's prison epistles, Colossians

and Philemon, he is called a “fellow prisoner” and a “fellow worker.” He was so close to Paul that he was caught up in Paul’s problems. Do you have friends like that? These kinds of friends are close enough to get caught up in your problems, to pray with you, and to encourage your heart. They are friends who really care and share your troubling experiences.

Then there was Luke. Perhaps you have noticed that his name is not mentioned. However, eleven times in these eight verses the little pronouns *we* and *us* can be found. Luke is the author of the book of Acts, and he was there on the ship. Luke was also in the middle of this, and he was there by choice. No doubt he was paying his own way. He was sharing Paul’s trouble at great expense to himself. What an encouragement it is when people share in our troubles like that. That is a friendship to be treasured.

There was a fourth friend—our *Christ-friend*. He is not mentioned, but you can be sure that He was there. Paul walked with Christ—it was the habit of his life. Christ was with him on the ship, and the presence of Christ was his greatest encouragement. If you have read Paul’s writings, you know that must have been the case. In John 15:15 Jesus said, “No longer do I call you slaves; . . . but I have called you *friends*” (emphasis mine).

I think of the hymn “What A Friend.” “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!” Abraham was called “the friend of God” (see Jas. 2:23), and so is every true believer in Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews 11, after talking about Moses’ affliction, his reproaches, and his rejections, verse 27 says, “He endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.” Can you see Him who is unseen? Jesus was the invisible friend to both Moses and Paul. Throughout chapters 27 and 28 in Acts we see times when Jesus was Paul’s invisible friend. In confinement Paul communed with

Jesus. In the trial of the storm, Jesus strengthened him. As the boat tossed and turned, the presence of Jesus calmed his fears. As he plunged into the cold waters off the coast of Malta, he was protected and delivered by Jesus. Paul endured and did not give up. He found comfort in the presence of Jesus; and by his example, Paul encouraged everyone else to endure. Do *you* know what it is to walk with Jesus?

In the providence of God there are alternatives and resources to help us through times of trouble. There are friends to help, but the greatest resource in any trial is Jesus, the Son of God. He is the Christian's greatest friend. Do you know Him as your personal Savior and friend in difficult times?

My dear mother suffered a lot in her latter years. She had severe asthma and allergies. Her favorite song during all of those trials was the hymn "In the Garden." "And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own; and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known."⁵ The presence of Jesus was her greatest comfort.

GOD WILL PROVIDE

I hope that as you read this, you caught something of the wonder of God's provision even in the midst of difficult times. God's provision for Paul can also be God's provision for your own heart. He provides for us in so many ways—teaching us to tack against the wind by keeping our eyes on Him, giving us shelter and the pleasure of friends. But remember, whatever difficulty you are going through, your most important resource is to walk with the Lord, to know His fellowship day after day, to be in His Word, and to be in prayer.