

ACTS STUDY QUESTIONS, WEEK 10

Shipwrecked

Monday, July 19—Acts 27:1-12

1) Julius, the centurion in charge of Paul during his journey to Rome, allowed Paul to visit with friends in Sidon during their journey. The text attributes this to Julius's kindness, as he did not need to give a prisoner this freedom. Often—perhaps especially when we are in positions of power—it can be easy to respond to others with indifference instead of compassion. How might you, like Julius, extend extra kindness to those around you, especially those to whom you feel little obligation to do so?

2) Paul's friends were ready and willing to take care of him during his stop in Sidon. This might have included providing a meal, offering prayers and encouragement, or just spending time together. Today we can be hospitable by inviting others' into our homes, but even more importantly, by inviting them into our lives with a spirit of welcoming inclusion and a desire to help meet their needs. How can you be attentive to the needs of those around you (at school, at work, in your neighborhood/apartment complex/dorm community, places you frequent throughout the week, etc.) and welcome them into your life? How can our church better create welcome spaces for people from all walks of life?

Tuesday, July 20—Acts 27:13-26

1) Everyone on the ship with Paul was particularly frightened when they hadn't seen the sun or stars for several days—in other words, because the sky was overcast. Clouds indicated not only more bad weather, but also that they would have been having difficulty navigating based on the positioning of celestial bodies. Have there been times when you have felt so troubled by life's storms that you have felt disoriented, lacking any means of navigating yourself back to safety? How did your relationship with Christ help you are those moments?

2) In Jewish culture, the Ancient Near East generally, and Greek culture, water is often used as a symbol of a terrifying chaos, and rightly so, as this story demonstrates. Paul, Julius, the soldiers, and the crew easily could have died—but they didn't. In this section we see that an angel told Paul that they would arrive in Rome safely because God wished for Paul to testify before the emperor. The implications, then, are that, first of all, Paul's testifying before the emperor is important, and secondly, that God can accomplish whatever he desires, even in the face of chaos. Are there certain problems in your life or in the world that sometimes feel insurmountable? Pray that God would give you and give our church the ability to trust his power over chaos.

Wednesday, July 21—Acts 27:27-44

1) When the sailors were frightened, they prayed to their gods for rescue. This is a common response—in difficult situations some of us are quick to ask for divine intervention, whether or not we maintain the same closeness to God during times of peace. On the other hand, for some people, troubles lead to a feeling of alienation from God, even if they are quite close to God most of the time. Difficulties have a way of shifting how we relate to God in both good and bad ways. How do you typically respond to trouble? Think of how you relate to God, how you take care of yourself, how you interact with others. What are some positive ways that you deal with everyday stress? Positive ways in which you've coped with bigger challenges? Negative patterns? Are there habits that might lead to better relationships with God and others, and into deeper healing and better health for you?

2) When everyone finally reaches land, they aren't quite sure where they are, just that they have had to make a major detour. Do you tend to be a person who wants more control over situations or are you ok with detours? What parts of your life have not turned out exactly as planned? Have any of the places (literally or figuratively) you've ended up felt completely foreign to you? What has been hard

about not having control or being out of your comfort zone? What has been fun or beneficial? How has God met you in these places?

Thursday, July 22—Acts 28:1-16

1) The people who welcomed the shipwrecked group to Malta had some strong opinions about Paul: When he was bitten by a snake, they concluded that he must be an evil murderer, but then when he was unharmed by the snake bite, they changed their minds and assumed he was a god! It is easy to dismiss this way of thinking as antiquated and silly, but in reality, it is still alive and well in our culture. Many people accept some version of the idea that “what goes around comes around” or that God will bless you if you’re righteous and have enough faith and give enough money to the church—and might not bless you if you don’t. However, it is clear from Paul’s story of trials, as we have read in Acts, that this is not always the case. Paul, though doing God’s work, has endured beatings, imprisonment, rejection by his own Jewish people, and now shipwreck. While his story doesn’t help us explain where suffering comes from, it does show us that suffering indeed comes to even the most faithful Christians. Where have you heard the idea that good comes to good people and bad comes to bad people? Do you know people that are suffering because of something they or others have done? What about people who are suffering for reasons none of us can understand? How might you offer God’s comfort and grace to both?

2) When Paul and his traveling companions reach Puteoli, they are greeted by a number of Christians, and again, they are greeted by Christians from Rome upon reaching Appii Forum and Three Taverns. Sometimes it is easy for us to feel disconnected from Christians around the world, or even just down the block, but for Paul, all of these Christians were his brothers and sisters. How might you better live out the unity we have with other believers in Christ? What could our church do?

Friday, July 23—Acts 28:17-30

1) Paul refers to a passage in Isaiah about people not understanding God’s message even though they hear it. This has been the case of many people, both Jewish and Gentile, throughout the book of Acts. In the end, though, Paul says that more Gentiles will come to believe, and indeed they do, leading the church to grow tremendously in its first few hundred years. Today, Christianity is a world religion—present all over the globe—and yet areas that have traditionally practiced Christianity (e.g. Europe and North America) are becoming increasingly secular. Sometimes it feels like everyone knows a little about Jesus or even have been to church before, but many people misunderstand what Christianity is really about. Are there certain ways in which you see the good news about Jesus misunderstood by others? How might we begin to correct some of these common misunderstandings?

2) At the end of Acts, as Paul spends time under house arrest in Rome, he continues to share the gospel with others and give them further instruction in how to follow Jesus. Not only does he continue this work, the text also mentions that he supports himself financially while doing so. Paul’s ministry has cost him a lot—both financially and otherwise—throughout the years, yet he decided it was worth the trouble. What sorts of ministries do you value most? What cost to you or to the church do you think these ministries are worth? What are some ministries that might often be undervalued by individuals or churches? How might you and/or our church support this important work?

This week’s questions were written by FBCP’s own Ashleigh Bailey. Ashleigh comes from North Carolina and is a current student at Fuller Theological Seminary. She is finishing her M.A. in Theology this summer and beginning work on an M.S. in Marital & Family Therapy this fall. In her free time she enjoys playing German-style board games, visiting the L.A. Arboretum, reading, and eating Thai food.