

# Hope...

*in the  
Storms of Life*



How to Turn Trials  
into Triumphs

**DR. ED YOUNG**

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**Hope...in the Storms of Life**  
***How to Turn Trials into Triumphs***

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# **Hope...in the Storms of Life**

*How to Turn Trials  
into Triumphs*

## **Introduction**

No one is immune from the storms of life. They are a fact of life, often unexpected, and never welcome. And it seems that when you least expect it, your life can be turned upside down by the overwhelming waves of life's difficulties.

For some it's finances—your month always has more days in it than money. For others it may be health—the unexpected news of an illness that has you worried. And for others it may be relationships—a marriage gone bad... the ending of an engagement...

estranged children...a lifelong friendship on the rocks. Regardless of the trial, I suspect you may be facing one today...or will be soon. So how do you weather the storms of life? Or more importantly, how do you turn the trials of life...which are certain to come...into triumphs? Not surprisingly, the New Testament gives us the answer. And I believe that answer is modeled in the person of the Apostle Paul. As you read the New Testament it's easy to see that Paul is one of the greatest men who ever lived. He was dynamic, a leader, wise, a visionary, powerful, and passionate. Paul is someone who could be classified as one of those who has most influenced history—secular and Christian.

To have the stuff that Paul had—to live that kind of life—is something I think we would all aspire to. But what was it that stimulated Paul to live one of the most powerful, most influential, most joy-filled lives?

The first hint is found in Second Corinthians, Chapter 11, in which Paul

tells us some of the things he went through. In this passage he tells us he was beaten with a bull whip thirty-nine lashes on five different occasions. He tells us he was in three different shipwrecks; and on one occasion he spent twenty-four hours floating around in the sea.

He goes on to tell us he was once stoned so badly that he was left for dead. And he was in prison more times than he could name. On top of that, he was robbed, beaten on the road, betrayed by friends, pursued by those who would bring him down, and he had been slandered.

If there ever was someone who suffered trials...ever one who had experienced the stormy seas of life... it was Paul. And yet, Paul, despite all he suffered, found great joy in life. And lived one of the most influential and powerful lives ever.

So what can we learn from Paul? We can learn how to turn our trials into triumphs.

## The Certainty of Trials

The first thing we learn from Paul's life is the reality of trials. They are a very certain part of life, no matter how righteous or dedicated we might be in our walk with Christ. I don't think anyone would argue with Paul's spiritual walk...but he certainly suffered trials!

Paul's spiritual focus is seen in his passion to reach Rome for Christ. It was something he pursued with a vengeance. And on three different occasions God told him he would be going to Rome. In fact, Jesus Christ appeared to Paul, as recorded in Acts 23:11, confirming to Paul that he would go to Rome to be Christ's witness there. It was an unconditional promise!

So for 10 years Paul pointed his nose and the compass of his life toward Rome—clearly in the center of God's will. Finally, he was on his way to Rome...but not as he thought he would travel. He did so by leaving Caesarea in handcuffs, a prisoner of Rome. Yet he was going to Rome, at long last setting sail on a little Mediterranean cruise.

But just when you think it couldn't get any worse, it does. It is on this cruise he runs into stormy seas...severe trials...and difficulties beyond measure.

How in the world can someone who is seeking with all of his heart and life and passion to do exactly what God wants him to do, end up shipwrecked on a beach on the island of Malta? How does that happen?

Three shipwrecks weren't enough?  
Five beatings weren't enough?  
Betrayal by family and friends and compatriots wasn't enough?  
In prisons more times than you can count? Wasn't having a thorn in the flesh that hounded him (in all probability poor health, bad eyesight) enough?  
What more needs to happen to Paul?

But more does...on a beach in Malta...  
the victim of yet another shipwreck.  
Why?

Because trials are woven into the very fabric of life. Stormy seas are just a reality—for Paul and for you and me!



## The Right Perspective on Trials

As I thought about all that Paul went through and his perseverance through trials, Henry Van Dyke's poem came to mind:

*Oh, Maker of the Mighty Deep  
Whereon our vessels fare,  
Above our life's adventure keep  
Thy faithful watch and care.  
In Thee we trust, what e'er befall;  
Thy sea is great; our boats are small.*

*We know not where the secret tides  
Will help us or delay,  
Nor where the lurking tempest hides,  
Nor where the fogs are gray.  
We trust in Thee, what e'er befall;  
Thy sea is great; our boats are small.*

*When outward bound we boldly sail  
And leave the friendly shore,  
Let not our heart of courage fail  
Until the voyage is o'er.  
We trust in Thee, what e'er befall;  
Thy sea is great; our boats are small.*

*When homeward bound we gladly turn,  
O bring us safely there,  
Where harbor-lights of friendship burn  
And peace is in the air.  
We trust in Thee, what e'er befall;  
Thy sea is great; our boats are small.*

*Beyond the circle of the sea,  
When voyaging is past,  
We seek our final port in Thee;  
O bring us home at last.  
In Thee we trust, what e'er befall;  
Thy sea is great; our boats are small.*

I think this poem gives us a clue to what was behind the Apostle Paul and his fortitude in the midst of truly difficult and life-threatening storms. Look at that phrase, "Thy Sea is great; our boats are small." Paul knew he was in God's sea.

There's a difference between "The sea is great." and "Thy sea is great." All of us have small boats, but how we look upon life and the providence and sovereignty of God operating in our lives makes all the difference in the world.

Storms will come. Rain will come.  
Disappointments will come. Brokenness  
will come. Heartache will come.  
Frustration will come. Boredom will  
come. But we have to remember  
"Thy sea is great and our boat is small."  
The key: it's **Thy** Sea. That is the right  
perspective.

## Understanding Trials

To better understand the trials that come into your life and mine, I want us to look at Paul's little Mediterranean cruise. It is found in Acts 27.

When you read about it you wonder why in the world it's in the Bible. It reads like a ship's log. The nautical terms are precise and accurate. In fact, this is the finest description of how individuals would have sailed in the ancient world in the first century.

I believe it is here—at least in part—to help us understand the reality of trials and how we should respond to them. And as you spend time in this passage you realize there are three important parts: the ship, the storm, and the shipwreck.

## Setting the Stage

In order to understand the lessons from this passage, it's critical to understand the predicament they were in. Follow me as I briefly set the stage.

Acts 27:1:

*"When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius."*

Julius, an officer in the Roman army, would take prisoners who had made an appeal to Caesar. Remember, any Roman citizen, regardless of the crime for which they had been accused or convicted could say, "I appeal to Caesar." And Caesar—it was Nero at that time—would be the one who would ultimately decide their fate.

I mention this because I want you to remember Julius.

## Acts 27:2

*“And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coasts of Asia, we put out to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon...”*

Notice they stayed close to the coast. It was common in that day to stay close to shore because they had no weather warnings. So they would go from little seaport to little seaport.

As you read further, you find they left Sidon and continued up the coast—they went by modern Lebanon, modern Turkey, and Asia Minor. By then they thought they could cross over the Mediterranean Sea to the Island of Crete.

Verse 8 tells us, *“...and with difficulty sailing past it (Salmone) we came to a place called Fair Havens...”* that was on the island of Crete. By the way, Fair Havens is a poor name. The Chamber of Commerce must have called this port Fair Havens. It wasn't a good place

to dock. There wasn't a good harbor, it was dangerous, there was no activity, and there were few people...all of which plays into the situation.

Now verse 9-12:

*"When considerable time had passed..."*  
(they stayed at Fair Havens for awhile)  
*"...and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them and said to them, 'Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.' But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was said by Paul. Because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest, and northwest, and spend the winter there."*

Now the fast would be the Day of Atonement. This means it was in October, and in October you did not sail in the Mediterranean. The winds were too capricious. You just didn't go out. So Paul, who'd been on that sea many times—remember, he'd already gone through three different shipwrecks—seeing they wanted to proceed and continue with the journey, tells them not to sail. It's just too dangerous.

But they did not listen to Paul's wise counsel about putting out to sea in the Mediterranean in the month of October.



## **The Lessons of the Ship and the Storm**

So they set out from Fair Havens, intent on making it to Phoenix, where they would stay for the winter. They felt they could make it because it was only a forty mile trip, and after all they were on an Alexandrian ship which they had transferred to earlier in the voyage. This ship was probably around 150 feet long and 90 feet wide. It was a good sized grain ship.

But take a look at what happens to them.

Verse 13:

*“When a moderate south wind came up, supposing that they had attained their purpose, they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, close in shore.”*

The trip starts off beautifully ...or so they think. What seems to be a gentle breeze is really the beginning of the storm.

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever been led astray by a moderate south wind? Have you? Sure you have. And so have I. That's the way it always starts out. What seems to be a gentle breeze slowly but surely leads us away from where God wants us.

We think it's innocent...just a moderate south wind of friends we think are such a wonderful and gregarious group. You're having such a wonderful time; and, while you know this isn't exactly what you should do, that moderate south wind is so appealing, so beguiling, and so beautiful.

It's that way with wrong relationships, immoral behavior, an addictive lifestyle, and financial debt. Just like these men who saw the gentle south breeze and set sail believing they could make this little forty mile trip to Phoenix. That one judgment landed them in a world of trouble.

## **Lesson 1 of the storm:**

*Be careful of the gentle breezes of sin, which can take you away from God.*

Verse 14-16:

*"But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along. Running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the ship's boat under control."*

You see, the southern wind led them out into the open sea and before long they were caught in a violent storm. What they thought was going to be a little sailing trip of 40 miles to Phoenix, turned out to be a four hundred and seventy-three mile excursion, driven by a typhoon through the Mediterranean Sea.

As the storm intensified, they began to throw things overboard. They threw cargo overboard, they threw their

tackle overboard...anything they could jettison. They had also let down the sails, tossed out the anchors, and done everything they knew to do. But this mighty storm kept throwing them through the Mediterranean.

Verse 20 tells just how intense the storm was...and their response:

*“Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.”*

They didn't know whether it was light or dark, the morning or the evening. It was total darkness. It was so intense that all those on board gave up any hope of being rescued. As they looked on that storm they would have said, “The sea is great; our boat is small.” All had a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness.

All but one. As Paul looked on that storm, he was saying, “Thy sea is great; our boat is small.” One little letter—what a difference. All the passengers saw **The** sea; Paul saw **Thy** sea.

Check out verses 21-24a:

*"When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, 'Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul.'"*

### **Lesson 2 of the storm:**

*No matter how large the storm or how small your boat, when God is the anchor of your life you will never be hopeless or helpless.*

When storms come into your life (notice I said "when", not "if"), the principle of first importance is whether or not you have anchors to hold you so that you will keep the course with God. My friend, what is anchoring your life today?

Paul tells us what anchored his life. First of all, he said, "It's **Thy** sea. It's not just **the** sea." He knew God was in charge. Remember, he said, "An angel visited me, a messenger from God, last night." He's saying, "God is with me." That's Paul's first anchor.

If the bottom falls out of your dreams, if your life goes totally upside down, can you stand up today and say, "God is with me?" If so, that's an anchor in your life...along with Paul you are saying you are in **Thy** sea, His sea. That's an anchor you can hold on to.

The second thing that anchored Paul's life was the knowledge he belonged to God. Notice he said, "It's God to whom I belong." In that one statement he was declaring, "I'm God's property."

Let me ask you, have you given the title deed of your life to God? Can you truly say, "I am owned by God. I belong to God?" Paul could. He said, "God is with me. I am God's property."

### **Lesson 3 of the storm:**

*When you hand over the title deed of your life to God...when your life is given over to God...God will be an anchor to you in the midst of the storm.*

The third anchor for Paul is the knowledge he is doing God's business. He makes this clear when he says, "The God whom I serve." God was the One he was serving—God was his partner in business.

Ask yourself today, "Is God the One I am serving, or am I living for my own pleasure and satisfaction?" If you are living for yourself, you will be tossed around by the storms of life...with no anchor, no stability. For there is nothing to anchor your life.

But if you are living for God, if He is the One you are serving, He will be the anchor to your life—no matter how difficult the storm.

## **Lesson 4 of the storm:**

*When you know you are doing God's business, you will have the courage to anchor your life in the midst of the storm.*

The fourth thing that anchors Paul's life is his trust. He is cool. Look again at those verses. He clearly says, "I'm not afraid."

Paul said, "Everything is cool," because he had those other three anchors in his life. He knew God was with Him, he was God's property, and he was doing God's business. That's why he knew that regardless of what happened, he was unafraid...and calm.

Dear friend, storms will indeed come into your life. As a pastor, I hear so often the storms and difficulties people experience. I still remember a Mother's Day Sunday when a beautiful young 46 year old mother, who attended our church that day, was killed in an automobile accident that afternoon. She was a godly, godly mother.



There are moments in all of our lives when—even though we are trying to seek God and His way—storms come. Adversity comes. Health problems come. Losses come. And we begin to wonder, doubt, and become afraid.

But, if we are anchored on the knowledge that God is with us, we're His property, and that we're seeking to do business with Him no matter what circumstances come our way...whatever alien winds drive us ...we can say, "Everything's cool."

## Lessons from the Shipwreck

So storms will come into every life... including your life. The question is, will your anchor hold? Paul's did. Let's see how. Let's see what we can learn from Paul's shipwreck in the midst of the storm.

Let's start at verses 27-28:

*"But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land. They took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms."*

A fathom is six feet. It's roughly the distance between the tips of your outstretched hands. And as they began to take soundings, they realized the water was getting shallower, and they knew they were getting close to land. After all of these days, over 400 miles through the sea, finally they were nearing land.

But it begins to get interesting in verse 30:

*"But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow,"*

As they approached land, the ship had struck a reef and the veteran sailors were trying to get into a little dinghy they were pulling along behind the boat. They were pretending to work on the anchors but they were really trying to escape the storm and get to shore even though Paul had told them they would all be safe.

### **Lesson 1 of the shipwreck:**

*Trust God by always keeping His commands no matter your circumstances.*

As I read this passage, I realize that sometimes we do exactly the same thing as those sailors. Even though God tells us to stay on board, we jump ship. We react in the flesh and tell the Lord,

"I see a certain way that I can be saved. I'm going to let down my little dinghy and I'm going to go right on into shore."

Instead of trusting God as we should, we take matters into our own hands... we are willing to break God's commands...only to make things worse. My friend, never compromise on doing what is right, no matter how difficult the situation.

Once they got through that little crisis, Paul did an amazing thing. A staggering thing. It is recorded in verse 33: *"Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food,..."*

I like that. In a time of crisis, here is a man of God saying, "Let's eat." Godly sense is practical, common sense. He shows his complete trust in God and doesn't allow the difficulty of the circumstances to keep him from doing the practical thing of eating—which would have only made matters worse. So Paul says, "Let's eat."

## **Lesson 2 of the shipwreck:**

*Demonstrate your trust in God during the storms of life by not neglecting the practical things of life...which if you do neglect, will only make things worse!*

The last lesson we learn is in verses 38-40, 42-44:

*"And when they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea. When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders... The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners...but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land and the rest should follow, some on planks, others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land."*

Why would the Roman soldiers want to kill their prisoners? Because they knew if one prisoner escaped, the soldier would pay with his life. So, they said, "Let's kill all these prisoners. Some of them may escape."

But remember Julius who I mentioned at the beginning of this booklet? He steps in and rescues Paul and the other prisoners from certain death and—notice the last line in the verses above—"they all were brought safely to land."

### **Lesson 3 of the shipwreck:**

*God is fully trustworthy in the storm, no matter what unexpected things may come into your life.*

We need to know that when the storms of life blow into our lives, God will keep His promises. God had promised none would perish, whether because of the storm or at the hands of the soldiers.

You can trust God, regardless of the storm you may be going through...even when there are unexpected turns and difficulties.

## Why the Storm?

As we look at Paul and this group now shipwrecked on Malta, it's very appropriate to ask the obvious question. Why did this happen?

Paul is heading for Rome. He is in God's will, but having been driven by a horrible storm he is now beached on this island. God's man, Paul, is shipwrecked! Why do storms come in your life and my life? Why? Let's look at some possible explanations.

### Satanic opposition

This is a real possibility as Paul shares (about his travels to Rome) in I Thessalonians 2, verse 18 says, "*For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan thwarted us.*" Satan did not want the Good News of God in Jesus Christ to be explained in the city of Rome. That's obvious, isn't it?

Satan didn't want the Romans coming to faith in Christ. And so he did all he could to prevent Paul from getting to Rome.

Perhaps you are asking, “Does God let Satan run the winds and the waves and the storms?” Sometimes. We know that’s true from the book of Job. I believe it could have been Satanic opposition to slow down Paul, to discourage Paul, to depress Paul.

And the same is true for your life and mine. There are times when the storms of life are Satanic opposition to what God wants to accomplish in and through our lives.

### *A witness to unbelievers*

Storms also come into your life to give you a chance to share your faith in Christ. And to show unbelievers that when storms come into your life your anchor does indeed hold. I have known more than one person who has been stricken with cancer, which has opened the door for them to share their faith with countless people who did not believe in the Lord.

I know many people who’ve gone through a broken marriage— they fought to hold on at any cost. But



because they went through that broken marriage, as a man or a woman of faith, they've had great chances to counsel and influence others. I've known godly individuals who've gone through sicknesses that had absolutely no explanation.

Sometimes storms come and we're shipwrecked so we can witness to unbelievers.

*To continually shape us*

As we look at this story, I believe God is still getting Paul into condition. He's getting Paul into shape. He's shoring him up. He's building him up. He's disciplining him so he can be an effective witness in the most prestigious place on earth.

Sometimes storms come into our lives to slow us down or to speed us up, to cause us to look up. God is using the storm to make us more powerful and effective for Him. We'll always be more powerful for Him after going through the storm than if we'd just had a nice, sweet little Mediterranean cruise.

Let me end with a powerful word (cited in Oswald Sanders' classic, *Spiritual Leadership*) which I believe sums up all that God is seeking to do when you and I go through the storms of life...and why there is always **HOPE** no matter what you may be experiencing today.

*When God wants to drill a man,  
And thrill a man  
And skill a man,  
When God wants to mold a man  
To play the noblest part;*

*When He yearns with all His heart  
To create so great and bold a man  
That all the world should be amazed,  
Watch His methods, watch His ways!*

*How He ruthlessly perfects  
Whom He royally elects!  
How He hammers him and hurts him,  
And with mighty blows converts him*

*Into trial shapes of clay which  
Only God understands;  
While his tortured heart is crying  
And He lifts beseeching hands!*

*How He bends but never breaks  
When his good He undertakes;  
How He uses whom He chooses,  
And with every purpose fuses him;  
By every act induces him  
To try His splendor out –  
God knows what He's about.*

Anonymous

My friend, I don't know what storm you might be going through today, but let me assure you, there is hope. You can turn your trial into triumph as you trust God who knows what He's about.



### **About the Author**

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