

## **Bad Decisions & Storm Tossed Seas**

### **Acts 27:9-16**

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-25-09

### **Introduction**

I'm not much of a game person, but there was a game that I enjoyed playing in the late nineties. It was Microsoft's Flight Simulator. You could have your choice of planes and enjoy flying over various cities, landing on airfields or even highways. I kept accidentally crashing the airplanes initially. But the game would also let you deliberately crash into buildings or mountains, or dive it into the water. But it really didn't matter because at the end of the game, it would restore itself back to the beginning and you could have another go at it.

Wouldn't it be nice if that could be the way it is in real life? It's actually some people's view of grace, and that is too bad. If we could hit a restart button, there are a lot of decisions that I would undo. But it's too late. There are some storms of my own making that I would avoid, but I've already lost my ships. And almost everybody has experienced this. People make bad decisions and spend too much time living in the past with regrets. They have lost money, friends, opportunities, jobs, and sometimes their stupidity has cost other people their lives. But instead of regrouping, they have gone into depression. In the case of Paul here, he has to live with a stupid mistake that others had made. It wasn't his choice. But all of us have had to cope with the repercussions of someone's bad decisions. If you live in America, you are going to be living with the consequences of some of the bad decisions being made in Washington, DC. And I'm sorry, but forgiveness does not restart the game.

Whether the storms you are facing or will face are your own fault or someone else's fault I think this is a fantastic little passage for teaching us about bad decisions and storm tossed seas. We will look first at ten common reasons for such mistakes – and they are all illustrated here. And then we will end with some ideas on how to make the best of the storms that have followed.

## I. Why we sometimes make bad decisions (vv. 9-13)

### A. *We are impatient and feel the pressure of time (v. 9a)*

One of the most common reasons for bad decisions is that we feel the pressure of time – we’ve got to make a move. Verse 9 says, “**Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous...**” We’ll get to the dangerous part in point B, but I want to look at the time pressures they were facing. Sailing was already in the dangerous time of year, and if they waited much more, they would be entering what was considered the suicidal time of year. Time was running out to get to a good harbor. One expert who has calculated each step along this journey estimates that they had already waited at least five days in this harbor and they were feeling the pressure of time.

Some of the stupidest mistakes that I have made in my lifetime have been because people were pressuring me to make a decision and I didn’t have much time to think about it. How many times do people buy things because the salesman says that this deal is only good for today, or this is the last item in stock, and you can see that there is a line of people here? How many times do people unwisely take on debt because they don’t want to lose that perfect deal? Impatience has lost many a battle down through history. King Saul lost his kingship because he disobeyed God on this critical test. God had told him to wait until Samuel showed up to give a sacrifice. And Saul waited for a while. But Samuel didn’t come until the last minute, and Saul felt that he *had* to make a decision because of the dangers ahead.

And we like to excuse ourselves thinking that we couldn’t help it because of the time pressure. But you know what? These kinds of mistakes can be avoided. People do it all the time. Firemen, military commanders, nurses, pilots, and others are constantly making good decisions under incredible time pressures. You cannot excuse bad decisions because of time pressures. How do these professionals make such good decisions when others are making bad decisions under the same time pressures? Some people credit these good decisions to intuition because these guys don’t have the time to list out all the pros and cons in their minds. They don’t have the time to work through resources, risk-reward ratios, goals, possible obstacles, and possible solutions – they can’t do that on the fly. There isn’t enough time. And that’s why people call it intuition. But it isn’t entirely intuition. It is a kind of instant perception such as Paul had here, but it is based on a whole network of worldview issues, past experiences, numerous clearly thought through decisions of the past, and maturity, other foundational

leadership issues that you guys are trying to train your children in. And when those begin to gel in our heads, it enables us to make those snap decisions.

Field commanders were taught MDMP, or Military Decision-Making Process. And the idea behind MDMP was that the decision-maker needed to list out all possible courses of action and then choose the best, based on available information. Then one researcher, Gary A. Klein, decided to study how expert field commanders *actually* made decisions. He observed firefighters in emergency situations, and military field commanders and discovered that they don't use anything even remotely like MDMP. They used what he called Recognition Planning Model. Instead of amassing a list of all possible courses of action (which you can't do when you're not under a time crunch), these field commanders quickly assessed the situation and picked only *one* plausible course of action. They mentally played out the probable outcome of that course of action, and if it seemed likely to work, they would try it and then adjust their plans as needed.

But here's the point – their decisions were based on a boatload of experience. And this is basically what Paul does here. Paul is not giving a prophecy in verse 10. He is giving a perception. This was his Recognition Planning Model. He said, “**Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.**” Now it turns out that no lives were lost, but this was *the most likely scenario* as he saw it. And again, don't think this was a false prophecy. It didn't say that he prophesied. He was giving an instant perception to a suggested course of action – and it was a very accurate perception that only needed slight adjustments on the field.

But back to these time-pressure situations that we find ourselves in, here is the point: if we have in place the life skills and life values that the Bible calls us to have, we are much more likely to be able to make the right decisions under time pressures. For example, if you have a budget and stick to a budget, you are much less likely to be pressured into buying something that you will have buyer's remorse over. If you have already matured in character issues like contentment, deferred gratification, and long term planning, you are much less likely to get yourself into debt in order to enjoy something now. You don't need to make foolish mistakes because of the pressure of time.

***B. We aren't prudent in our handling of risks (v. 9b)***

A second common reason for bad decisions is that we aren't prudent in handling risks. Verse 9 said, “**and sailing was now dangerous...**” The Roman sailors had a rule of thumb – they considered anything after September 15 as being very risky, and anything after November 11 as suicidal. According to verse 9, the Fast Day (or Day of Atonement) was already past, and in 59 AD the Day of Atonement fell on October 5. So they are already at least three weeks into the dangerous season, and time is a'wasting. They know that they won't be able to make it to Italy. Those seas would be completely closed to travel in a couple more weeks. So they are not even going to try to make it to Italy. It's just too late. But they don't want to stay in their ship in this port for the winter. Phoenix, just 35 miles west, is much more commodious. So they are thinking risk/reward. It's only 35 miles to the next port, and if we hug the coastline with a good wind, we can make it there.

Now in one sense, we all make calculated risks, don't we? That's not a problem. Every time you drive your car there is a risk that you could get killed. Every time you get on a roller coaster there is a risk that you could throw up. But the rewards in those situations usually outweigh the small risk. But when risk climbs higher and higher you go from wisdom to foolishness.

Here's what made this risk unacceptable to Paul. First, the difference in reward is small. They could weather the next three months quite well at Fair Havens, so it is not as if they are moving from a risky port to a non-risky port. It is just the degree of comfort that they would have. Second, the amount of risk they were taking by traveling at this time of year was huge.

Let me give you four reasons why this short trip was a huge risk. 1) First, most sailing quit after September 15. It was already October 5. Actually, one chronologist says that it is October 10. They were really pushing their chances. 2) Second, the soft south wind was an anomaly for this time of year, and there was no history to suggest that they would have it for the next 35 miles. 3) Third, the direction they were taking was the wrong way for the usual prevailing winds of that time of year. 4) Fourth, if they got caught in a strong wind, the area around Crete was loaded with islands and treacherous reefs. All around, it was not an acceptable risk. They were taking huge risks with their lives for the sake of comfort.

And this debate continues to go on today. People are taking huge risks with their future by putting a comfort item on their credit card now. There

are all kinds of people telling our current government of the enormous risks to the global economy if we continue to engage in bail outs, government running of businesses, inflationary tactics, more government regulation, etc. Unfortunately, there are owners and helmsmen who disagree with this sound advice. I am convinced that we will face an economic storm in coming years that could lose everything we have. But there are people who are not being prudent in their handling of risks.

***C. We don't want to hear uncomfortable news or advice (v. 10)***

The third reason people make bad decisions is that they don't want to hear uncomfortable news or advice. It's an amazing aspect of our sinful human nature to prefer risking a storm than to hear what we don't want to hear. Doctors will tell their patients that they need to quit smoking cigarettes or they will die. Do you think they care? No. Often they keep on smoking. Or the doctor will say that they need to lose weight if they want to avoid huge health consequences from diabetes, or they need to exercise their painful joints or they will lose all mobility. But people don't like to hear what might be uncomfortable. One dad came home with a bad attitude after a rugged day of work and told his wife, "I've had a bad day! Please! If you have any bad news tonight, keep it to yourself!" To which she replied, "O.K. No bad news. Now for the Good News. Remember our four children? Well, three of them didn't break an arm today." Why is it that we don't want to hear bad news? Perhaps you have been ignoring the warnings to prepare for disaster with groceries, gold, and guns. Perhaps you've been ignoring the warnings about debt because you don't like that bad news.

Some of the people just don't want to believe what Paul says in verse 10. **"Paul advised them, 'Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.'"** Paul has already experienced three shipwrecks, in one of which he was swimming in the open sea for a night and a day before being rescued (2 Corinthians 11:25). He would rather know the hard truth than to suffer what happens when you ignore the truth. But many people aren't like that. Cain didn't want to hear God's warning of sin crouching at the door and wanting to capture him. And because he ignored the bad news, he ended up murdering his brother and being exiled. Almost every sin we commit, we are ignoring the bad news of the repercussions that will flow from that sin. Homosexuals engage in extremely risky behavior, and don't want to hear about the disastrous consequences. I think of 1 Kings 22 where the king of Israel tells Micaiah **"How many times shall I make you swear that you**

**tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?”** But when Micaiah tells him the truth, the king is upset and puts him in prison. We must ask God to make us rejoice in the truth, no matter how hard the truth might be.

***D. We listen to the wrong experts (v. 11)***

The fourth reason why many people make bad decisions is that they listen to the wrong experts. Now in the case of this Alexandrian ship, that made a bit of sense. Who would you believe, a frequent traveler like Paul or the helmsman and owner of this ship? I mean, the owner would be the expert, right? Verse 11 says, **“Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul.”** Luke appears to be surprised by this. In fact, F.F. Bruce says, “The narrator seems to find the centurion’s preference surprising, not to say reprehensible” (p. 482). And that has puzzled liberal commentators. What’s there to be surprised about? A centurion is obviously going to believe experts over a landlubber. But conservatives have pointed out that even experts can have their judgment skewed by their desires and/or by their economic interests. Nobody is 100% objective.

Consider the evidence: Captain James Smith said, “Fair Havens is so well protected by islands, that though not equal to Lutro, it must be a very fair winter harbour; and that considering the suddenness, the frequency, and the violence with which gales of northly wind spring up, and the certainty that, if such a gale sprang up in the passage from Fair Havens to Lutro, the ship must be driven off to sea, the prudence of the advice given by St. Paul may probably be supported even on nautical grounds.”<sup>1</sup> So we aren’t just talking about a naïve opinion versus an expert opinion. Paul’s opinion is much more well-grounded than the ship owner’s opinion. We are talking about genuine disagreements over the value of moving. Traveling won’t get them any closer to Italy. It is convenience and comfort and *only convenience and comfort* that motivated the owner of the ship. A few questions from the centurion would have made him realize that it wasn’t worth it for the small gain of comfort. And he wouldn’t have to be an expert to figure that out. But the centurion appears not to have dug very deep in his investigation.

Let me tell you a story that shows how theology, worldview, and mature thinking can save a life. A few years ago I got a call from a close friend of mine who was in the hospital. He was saying, “Hey Phil. My

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<sup>1</sup> James Smith, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul* (London:, 1880), p. 85, n. 2.

cousin got into a car wreck, and I am listed as the next of kin for making medical decisions for her. And she has been declared dead, and they want to harvest her organs. And I just wanted to call you before I did anything. Are there any questions that I should ask?" I asked him what definition of death they were using. He said, "She is brain dead." And I suspected that. And I told him that theologically that is not a valid criterion for death, and that I know several people who have been declared brain dead who have recovered. Life is not in the brain. Life is in the blood and the traditional cardio/pulmonary definition of death should really be followed. I told him that some hospitals are notorious for pressuring people to sign so that they can harvest the organs right away. Anyway, after talking for a few minutes and wrestling with some other theological issues involved, he made the hard decision of saying "No," to organ harvesting until such time as she qualified under the cardio vascular definition of death. And boy were they upset, but he stuck to his guns. One of the complaints was, "Your pastor is no expert, and you are not expert." You really need to trust the experts. But he said "No" based on theology and worldview. And here is the end of the story: within two weeks she was up and walking around and perfectly normal. Boy was she freaked out when she came to understand that they had been pressuring my friend to let them harvest her organs. The moral of the story is that you can't blindly follow experts. Yes, take their testimony serious. But you've got to think for yourself, and hopefully think with a Biblical worldview. The Bible helps you to sort through tough decisions even in areas that you are not an expert in.

Now here is another slant on this - sometimes people will only listen to the experts who will tell them what they want to hear. This has certainly been true in America on the issue of Global Warming. The left wing of America doesn't want to be confused by the facts, even though there are thousands of scientists who have put their necks on the line by giving evidence that there is no problem with Global Warming, the left keeps pushing anyway. Despite the marshalling of very compelling facts by economists who show the devastation this will bring to the economy, the left is insisting on very intrusive resolution to Global Warming. Despite the fact that world temperatures have been lowering every year, they keep pushing. In the case of the king of Israel in 1 Kings 22, he rejects Micaiah's message, but he has 400 yes-men prophets who will tell the king what he wants to hear. I am convinced that our nation will be going through an economic and political hurricane because we have ignored the sage advice of many Paul's in this nation. And if we want to weather the storm, we had better start

paying attention. There are experts out there who are telling us that the depression is over. There will always be people who want you to believe that a south wind will blow softly and carry you through. But if you know much about the Bible you will realize that we are in deep trouble as a nation.

*E. We don't like inconvenience (v. 12a)*

A fifth reason why people make dumb mistakes is because they don't like inconveniences. Verse 12 says, “**And because the harbor was not suitable to harbor in...**” It was actually quite a fine harbor as far as protecting from wind and waves. The numerous islands protected it. But the word for “not suitable” can also be translated “inconvenient.” And there were at least two reasons why this safe harbor was not convenient. First, everyone would have to stay on board for three months. It was doable, but not as convenient as living on land. Second, it would be a bit more wavy and cold, and so not as comfortable.

And it is comfort and convenience that frequently make people take bad risks. Many of the decisions of our present administration are justified by what amounts to inconvenience. The “Too-Big-To-Fail” policy of bailing out major companies is justified because too many people would suffer as a result of letting a company fail. Little do they realize the economic storm that will result from bailing out so many companies.

But all kinds of pressures of discomfort and inconvenience are factoring into why Christians make bad decisions about schooling of their children, day care, taking two jobs, taking on more debt, etc. Let me tell you a story that shows how the convenient way may not always be the best way. Back in the 1940's, Ruth Gruber worked for the Department of the Interior, helping to promote the Alaskan territory to homesteaders. She was quite an outdoorswoman. She often travelled by dog sled, but often travelled by truck and plane as well.

In 1942 she was about to board a small plane to Nome, when she was handed an urgent message from the Secretary of the Interior. Back in those days you had to have the telegraph operator decode the message, so she went to the desk. But the guy was being real slow, and the pilot became impatient and took off without her. She was so stressed out by missing the plane that she was almost in tears at all of the lost time and inconvenience. But her perspective changed when the plane made an emergency turn around trying to land again and crashed, killing everyone on board. She said that this ten minutes between missing her plane and the crash completely changed her perspective. Now if ten minutes can change your perspective, what about



eternity? Most of our inconveniences that determine our decisions are inconsequential in light of eternity. And we can protect ourselves from bad decisions by relaxing a bit in light of eternity.

***F. We listen to a majority (v. 12b)***

A sixth reason we make bad decisions is that we listen to the voice of the majority. Verse 12 says, “**the majority advised to set sail from there also.**” Bible believers need to avoid the idea that “the majority is right.” The moral majority sought to appeal to this American sense of democracy, when in reality, the majority has rarely been right in human history. Majorities tend to come to the side of whoever is winning, like they did here. This centurion appeared to be unsure of what to do. But when the experts and the majority were advocating doing this dangerous stunt (and it was a dangerous stunt), he decided to go along.

How many times has the peer pressure of a majority gotten a child to do a stupid thing? It happens all the time. And until we gain a God-given courage to stand for principle even when a majority does not believe it, we can fall victim to bad decisions too. After all, this centurion according to Roman law had the final decision. But it was hard for him to go against a majority. What about you?

***G. We are pushing for something nicer (v. 12c)***

A seventh reason we make bad decisions is the constant push to find something nicer. Verse 12 continues: “**if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.**” Prior to a major earthquake in the 500’s AD, that tilted the land up and angled it differently, Phoenix had two inlets facing exactly as Luke describes it here, and making it the best port on Crete for wintering. And isn’t that what we tend to want? We want the best. We want the best of everything, even if it means living beyond our means. Benjamin Franklin said, “Content makes poor men rich, discontent makes rich men poor.” So true. This little bit of discontentment made the owner lose his ship and all its cargo.

***H. We read too much into “open doors” and “providential confirmation” (v. 13a)***

The eighth reason for bad decisions is that Christians have a tendency to read too much into “open doors” and “providential confirmation.” When everything is lining up to make our pet desires possible, we convince ourselves that *God is guiding us*. Well, if you were in Crete, you might have

thought – what an open door; we need to take advantage of it. Look at verse 13: **“When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.”** When the south wind blew softly. How inviting this was, but it proved their disaster. I am not saying that God cannot guide us through providential openings. He can. All I am saying is that some open doors lead to elevator shafts, and to step through them means disaster. Jonah could have argued that he had providential confirmation. There was a ship ready to sail just when he got into port, it was going the right direction, the wind was right, and the timing was right. Surely God is guiding me away from Nineveh this time. And you might think, “Oh, who thinks like that!?” But people do all the time; sometimes in the most ridiculous ways. I argued for two hours with a pastor who had convinced himself that God was leading him to divorce his wife and marry one of the members of his congregation. I told him that I could be dogmatic from the Bible that God was *not* leading him to do that. But I couldn’t convince him. He knew what he wanted, and he had the rationalization. Don’t read too much into open doors and supposed providential confirmation. It has led to disaster for many people.

### *I. We are blinded by our desires (v. 13b)*

Ninth, we are blinded by our desires. Verse 13 again: **“supposing that they had obtained their desire...”** It wasn’t a sinful desire. It wasn’t a huge desire. It was just an inappropriate desire *at that particular time*. Sometimes we make bad decisions because of good desires that aren’t the best desires. I think of the times that I have allowed my desire to get a project done get in the way of connecting with the hearts of my children. And the stronger the intensity of the desire, the more blinded we become to what could be redeemed in the moment. I want to read a short story by Gary Williams, taken from his website, *Seniors Quiet Time Miscellany*, and see if you can’t see yourself in this father:

One day a nine-year-old boy and a man began a walk to the beach. The man’s body was on vacation, many miles away from home and business, but his heart was still business-blinded. He thought his duty was to make sure that he and the boy got to the beach efficiently. This man wanted to hurry. The nine-year-old had a less pressing agenda. He found a small rock and began kicking it down the road. It took effort to keep the stone ahead of him, but the boy saw no reason why the rock could not keep them company on the way. “Come on, now!” the man scolded. “I don’t want to wait for you to kick that rock!”

Resignedly, the boy kicked it to the side of the road and began walking silently beside his father. Suddenly the father stopped. We cannot say why. Perhaps he just then realized that the beach was not a board meeting or that

sunshine is enjoyed best without a sundial. Maybe the eyes of his heart caught something in the face of the boy. Or perhaps just then his own boyishness flashed to the surface. We know only that he turned to the boy and said, “How ’bout it if I help you, and we kick it together?” “O.K.!” said the boy, and he quickly retrieved the rock.

Soon four feet were scuffling in the dust of the road and the man was trying to show the boy his idea of a “good kick.” And somewhere in the magic of their slow and halting progress, the man and the boy became father and son. They discussed the best way to kick such a small rock and experimented freely as they passed it back and forth between them. They shouted unabashed praise and admiration at each other’s well-placed kicks, and laughed at the other ones. And the father discovered anew that morning what the boy had known all along. Kicking rocks can be fun. Fun is not complicated. It need not be expensive. All you need is a road and a rock. Companionship is not complicated. It need not be expensive. All that is needed is something to share and someone to share it with. The father did not solve any major problems that day, and the world may never know about his walk to the beach. But for a moment, there were two less troubled hearts in the world because a father kicked at a rock with his son. Perhaps some of that good continues yet. This world needs more boyish fathers and fewer businessmen. It needs fathers willing to kick rocks with their children. And children willing to teach them how.<sup>2</sup>

There are storms of loneliness, regrets, missed opportunities, the lost hearts of children, simply because we have been blinded by good desires. But we need to evaluate our desires and see if they are the best.

### *J. We think we are being careful (v. 13c)*

One last thing that I see as having led to the disaster in this chapter is that we think we will be careful. The last phrase in verse 13 says, “**they sailed close by Crete.**” They were hugging the coastline. They didn’t want to be risky and get too far away from shore. Surely if we are careful, we will get there in one piece.

I remember one of the first places our family visited when I came home on furlough. It was a home right on the beach of Vancouver Island. And while the adults were fellowshiping, my brothers John, Stan, and I found a rowboat that we thought we would take out a few feet into the ocean. We were going to be careful. We weren’t going to go too far. Unknown to us, there was a strong current that pulled us away from shore very quickly. And it was such a strong current that it scared us. We rowed and rowed trying to get back to shore, and were moving away faster than we could row. My oldest brother suddenly realize that we would be lost at sea if

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<sup>2</sup> As told by Pastor Bobby Scoby.

we didn't row somewhat with the current at a diagonal and aim at a point. John and Stan put all their might into rowing, and when we almost missed the point they jumped out in water up to chests and managed to pull the boat ashore. We learned that day that doing the wrong thing with care would still get you into trouble.

I have a friend who has herpes from a one-night stand. He thought he was careful. To this day he can't believe he got it. I know a former pastor who lost his pastorate and eventually his life because during a time of deep depression he tried some crack to relieve his stress. He was never able to break his addiction. He remembered thinking that he was going to be careful and only try it once. But he landed in a perfect storm that turned his whole world upside down and eventually led to his death.

All of these things we have gone through are common reasons for bad decisions. And some of you are suffering right now for past bad decisions. The worst thing you could do is to beat up on yourselves. That is just adding to the storm. Certainly you should repent of bad decisions, and learn from them. But in point II let me list the three things that come from these storms (surprise, fear, and helplessness) and encourage you to glorify God during the ride.

## II. How to make the best of the fallout (vv. 14-15)

### A. *Handling the surprise (v. 14a)*

Verse 14 shows the shock and surprise that hit this party. **But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon.** We don't know if "not long after" means a few minutes from departure or an hour or so from departure, but it came as a total surprise, and the direction of the wind made it impossible to get back to Fair Havens. When the shock finally hits you that your life is falling apart because of a mistake, what should you do?

#### 1. Don't b \_\_\_\_\_

First, don't blame shift. It's easy to start saying, "It's not my fault" when bad things happen. That flows from pride, and Scripture tells us that God always resist the proud. The last thing we need is God's resistance added to the storm. So don't listen to pride by blameshifting.

#### 2. Don't play i \_\_\_\_\_

Don't listen to pride by playing ignorant. Tell your family what has happened, and what corrective action you are going to take.

**3. Pray for deliverance.**

Third, pray for deliverance.

**4. Don't bail out on your fri\_\_\_\_\_**

Fourth, don't let pressures make you bail out on your friends. It's easy to go on attack mode when times are frustrating, but don't lash out against your friends. You will need your friends more than ever to face the storms that may be in the near future. The following verses show that these guys hung together on that ship. It wouldn't do any good for Paul to sulk and refuse to join their efforts and to say "I told you so." No, they just joined in and helped.

**5. Convince yourself that God is for you.**

Fifth, convince yourself that God is for you even in the storm.

**6. Convince yourself that God controls the s\_\_\_\_\_**

Sixth, convince yourself that God *controls* even the storm, and is using it to advance His purposes.

**7. Take hope from the laws of harvest.**

Seventh, don't let the surprise of the laws of harvest actually working make you despair. Instead, take hope. Let the realization that the laws of harvest really do work make you trust God even more. Begin planting seeds of righteousness. So there was surprise.

***B. Handling fear in a world turned upside down (v. 14b)***

A second thing that would have overwhelmed these men once this storm hit was fear. The *New American Commentary* says, "Luke described it as being 'typhonic' (*typhonikos*) in force, a word that in Greek as well as in its English cognate refers to a whirling, cyclonic wind formed by the clash of opposing air masses (v. 14; 'hurricane force,' NIV). More specifically, he designated the storm as ... the deadly winter storm of the Mediterranean known by sailors as the gregale."<sup>3</sup>

The point of my reading that is that this would have been terrifying. Everything soon would become totally out of their control. Their world was being turned upside down. And fear can hit any of us when economic times make us lose our house, lose our loved ones, or lose our liberties. But we can

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<sup>3</sup> John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 2001), p. 520.

handle our fears in a godly way by implementing the three steps of Philippians 4:6-9.

1. **P\_\_\_\_\_ rightly (Phil. 4:6-7)**

First, Paul calls us to pray rightly. Some prayers are so problem-focused that they increase our fear and sense of hopelessness rather than helping. They make matters worse. God is not honored with prayers that despair, that grumble, or that lack faith. Instead, Paul said, **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made know to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”** He is not saying you can’t offer up your problems. Of course you can. But make sure you do it in a God-centered way. He says, **“with thanksgiving.”** The more you thank God for your perfect storm, the more you will realize that He is greater than the storm. The more you intercede for others on the boat, the more your attention is taken away from your own fears. So he says pray rightly.

2. **M\_\_\_\_\_ rightly (Phil. 4:8)**

Second, meditate rightly. All kinds of horrible thoughts can flood our minds during the storm. What if I lose my kids; what if, what if. But God in Philippians 4:8 says that we must discipline our thoughts.

3. **A\_\_\_\_\_ rightly (Phil. 4:9)**

Third, act rightly. Don’t cower in a corner. Rouse your spirits to keep the ship afloat and to help each other on the boat. Paul says, **“the things which you have learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”** Well, on this boat, Paul modeled action. Luke did too. Verse 16 – **“we secured the skiff with difficulty.”** Notice the “we.” They were all involved. Verse 19 – **“we threw the ship’s tackle overboard with our own hands.”** Etc. All through the storm they modeled how to not be overcome by fear, by taking appropriate actions.

***C. Handling feelings of helplessness (v. 15ff)***

And that leads us to verse 15 and following – handling the feelings of helplessness. Verse 15 says, **“So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive.”** The words “caught” and “let her drive” show that they were feeling pretty helpless out there. What do you do when you feel helpless?

### 1. Can stop going the wrong direction (v. 15b)

You can stop going the wrong direction. Verse 15 says that they let her drive. They turned around and let the wind drive her. I have known people who have not been willing to do this, and it has ended in disaster for them. When you know that your actions are suicidal, it is best to stop doing the same failed actions. But some people simply won't. And it isn't just addictive behavior like drug addicts have. I've seen people who have \$10,000 on their credit card not cutting lose the things that are dragging them down. They continue their irresponsible lifestyle hoping that a miracle will come along. Forget about miracles when the storm is a discipline. I think of one family whose bills just kept ratcheting up from \$10,000 to \$80,000 without taking any corrective action. They were passive. So you can turn around.

### 2. Can look for opportunities to help you ride out the storm (vv. 16ff)

The second thing we can do is to look for opportunities to help you ride out the storm. Verse 16 says, “**And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven.**” There were a few minutes of slight reprieve under the shelter of this tiny island that gave them just enough time to get the skiff on board and to wrap cables around the whole ship to keep the waves from pounding the boards apart.

The point is, do what you can. You may not be able to do much, but do what you can do. Don't be passive. Make every opportunity to survive count. Too many times when storms hit, families sit shell shocked doing nothing. They are so depressed and discouraged that they paralyzed. Doing nothing will guarantee that you will sink. These men did everything they could to keep the ship steered in a direction where it wouldn't capsize. They took what actions that they could to hold the boat together. And this is what I counsel people who are facing economic disaster. Even if it feels like action won't help, you make the corrective steps that the Bible says you should, and trust God to bring you through.

Kevin DeGroot has a book that shows story after story of people taking their tiny corrective steps, and watching God open the doors of heaven in blessing. God honors such responsibility by blessing above and beyond what we could ask or think.

## Conclusion

In conclusion I want to summarize with ten things you can do to help you either avoid or to ride out the storms of life.

### 1. Make yourself storm-resistant by putting off the reasons that contribute to bad decisions.

First, make yourself storm-resistant by putting off the reasons we looked at under point #1. Nobody will ever be storm proof. But if we can avoid the storms of our own making, it would be good.

### 2. Let the storms drive you to God (Heb. 11:6)

Second, let the storms of life drive you closer to God. Don't let them make you bitter. Don't let them make you cling to idols such as government bailouts, or get-rich-quick schemes, and other bogus saviors. God only honors one thing – faith in Him. Hebrews 11:6 says, “**But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.**”

### 3. Don't let yourself be paralyzed into inaction (Prov. 24:16)

Third, don't let yourself be paralyzed into inaction. Some people curl up into a ball and hope the storm will go away. It won't. Take action or you will go down, whether you are a Paul or a Phil Kayser. Storms know no favorites. Proverbs 24:16 says, “**For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity.**” He's not saying that the righteous can't go down. They may fall seven times. But he is saying that no matter how many times the righteous fall, they get right back up again and try.

### 4. Don't see the symptoms as the problem.

Fourth, don't see the symptoms as the problem. This is what the welfare crowd does. It tends to see the problem as poverty, drugs, or crime, or falling apart families, etc. That's not the problem; that's the symptoms. The problem started before the storm hit. It was the bad character, vision, worldview, and all the other things that led to bad decisions. Certainly we can sometimes alleviate the symptoms, but our ultimate goal should be conformity to Christ. People who come for counseling often just want pain relief. They don't want to repent of the sins that led to the storm. They want to be rescued from the storm, and that's it. I tell them that there is no point in counseling them until they desire to please God more than to be rescued



from the pain Sometimes God brings storms to wake us up to what the real problem is.

**5. Don't neglect the body of believers.**

Fifth, don't neglect the body of believers. That ship would have gone down if every passenger had not pitched in with the work during that storm. Benjamin Franklin once told his comrades, "We must hang together, gentlemen... else, we shall most assuredly hang separately." This is not the time for grousing about each other and tearing down each other. As we face a future storm, we will need to hang together as a church.

**6. Don't be distracted by the most "obvious" choices.**

Sixth, don't be distracted by the most obvious choices given to you in life. If this group could have strategized on how to make their stay at Fair Havens work better, they could have come up with all kinds of solutions to the inconvenience. But because their focus was on how to make one solution work, they got themselves into trouble. It's easy to be blinded to alternative solutions when experts only present one. Brainstorm. When you get yourself in trouble, try to think outside the box and come up with other ways of "skinning the cat" biblically.

**7. Don't overreact to time pressure and stress.**

Seven, don't overreact to time pressure and stress. I think we've talked enough about that.

**8. Don't desperately hold to your lifestyle.**

Eighth, don't desperately hold on to your lifestyle. Desperately holding onto their lifestyle has gotten several of my friends into trouble. Be willing to downsize. If there is anything you are convinced you cannot give up, God is likely to blow it away with a storm anyway because He is in the idol destroying business. So take the attitude of Job – the Lord has given, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Lord, everything I have is Yours anyway; help me to use it or relinquish it as a wise steward.

**9. Realize that all decisions reveal values.**

Ninth, realize that all decisions reveal values. There is no secular decision. All decisions either glorify God or do not. That was true of this decision to go to Phoenix, and it is true of our financial decisions or decisions about our children. Make sure your values are biblical.

### **10. Learn from your failures**

Finally, learn from your failures. We will all make mistakes from time to time because we are human. But if you learn from them, you will grow. NBA coach Rick Pitino said, “Failure is good. It’s fertilizer. Everything I’ve learned about coaching I’ve learned from making mistakes.” That might be slight exaggeration, but the best leaders do indeed learn from their mistakes. Washington Irving said, “Little minds are subdued by misfortunes; but great minds rise above them.” Let each of us have great minds that are determined to glorify God through how we handle our past bad decisions and the storms that have resulted. Amen.

# Bad Decisions & Storm Tossed Seas

## Acts 27:9-16

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-25-09

### Introduction

- I. Why we sometimes make bad decisions (vv. 9-13)
  - A. We are impatient and feel the pressure of time (v. 9a)
  - B. We aren't prudent in our handling of risks (v. 9b)
  - C. We don't want to hear uncomfortable news or advice (v. 10)
  - D. We listen to the wrong experts (v. 11)
  - E. We don't like inconvenience (v. 12a)
  - F. We listen to a m\_\_\_\_\_ (v. 12b)
  - G. We are pushing for something nicer (v. 12c)
  - H. We read too much into "open doors" and "providential confirmation" (v. 13a)
  - I. We are blinded by our d\_\_\_\_\_ (v. 13b)
  - J. We think we are being careful (v. 13c)
- II. How to make the best of the fallout (vv. 14-15)
  - A. Handling the surprise (v. 14a)
    1. Don't b\_\_\_\_\_
    2. Don't play i\_\_\_\_\_
    3. Pray for deliverance.
    4. Don't bail out on your fri\_\_\_\_\_
    5. Convince yourself that God is for you.
    6. Convince yourself that God controls the s\_\_\_\_\_
    7. Take hope from the laws of harvest.
  - B. Handling fear in a world turned upside down (v. 14b)
    1. P\_\_\_\_\_ rightly (Phil. 4:6-7)
    2. M\_\_\_\_\_ rightly (Phil. 4:8)
    3. A\_\_\_\_\_ rightly (Phil. 4:9)
  - C. Handling feelings of helplessness (v. 15ff)
    1. Can stop going the wrong direction (v. 15b)
    2. Can look for opportunities to help you ride out the storm (vv. 16ff)

### Conclusion

1. Make yourself storm-resistant by putting off the reasons that contribute to bad decisions.
2. Let the storms drive you to \_\_\_\_\_ (Heb. 11:6)
3. Don't let yourself be paralyzed into \_\_\_\_\_ (Prov. 24:16)
4. Don't see the symptoms as the problem.
5. Don't neglect the body of believers.
6. Don't be distracted by the most "obvious" choices.
7. Don't overreact to t\_\_\_\_\_ pressure and stress.
8. Don't desperately hold to your lifestyle.
9. Realize that all decisions reveal values.
10. Learn from your \_\_\_\_\_