I’M STILL GRATEFUL

THANK GOD ON THE SHORE

STUDY GUIDE

Acts 28:1-5 · 1 Thessalonians 5:18 · Luke 10:19

Series: Birthday Sunday

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VERTICALTAMPA

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide walks back through Sunday's message, "I'm Still Grateful," so you can dig deeper on your own or with your group. Read each section, sit with the Word Study and Key Definition boxes, and let the questions move you from information to reflection. You do not have to answer every question in one sitting.

A suggested rhythm: read the Opening on day one, then one Movement per day across the next three days. On day five, sit with the Close and say the Declaration out loud before moving forward.

LAST WEEK IN OPEN HANDED

Last week, in "I'm Missing a Peace," we learned that some of what we think we lost was stolen in the in-between, and God has not called us to live without it. David wept, strengthened himself in the LORD his God, inquired, and pursued, and he recovered all. This week we stand on another shore, with a man who survived the storm and the wreck, and we learn to thank God right where we landed.

BIG IDEA

Learn to thank God on the shore, before you ever see Rome. Gratitude is not the reward after God fixes it. It is the response that carries you through it.

Paul did not choose Malta. He arrived wet, cold, and standing in the rain, holding pieces of what broke. But he did not arrive empty. He arrived carrying a promise God had already spoken in the middle of the storm. Some of you did not choose this shore either. You are still standing on a promise.

CENTRAL TENSION

The strike is real, and the strike is not final. The serpent strikes, but the Seed crushes.

ACTS 28:5, NIV

But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects.

That one verse is the whole message in miniature. What fastened itself to Paul did not get to stay with Paul. He shook it off into the fire, and he suffered no ill effects. This guide is about learning that same response: gratitude on the shore, and a shake off in the fire.

Thank God on the shore, before you ever see Rome.

REFLECT BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before you read any further, name the shore you are standing on: the place you did not choose, the season you did not plan. Then write one way God has already met you there, before anything else changed.

OPENING · HOW PAUL GOT TO THIS SHORE

Paul is not on vacation. He is a prisoner in chains, being carried to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. In Acts 27, his ship sailed into a storm so violent that the crew threw the cargo and the tackle overboard and gave up all hope of being saved. For fourteen nights they were driven across the sea. Then the ship struck a sandbar and broke apart, and all 276 people on board swam or floated to shore on planks and pieces of the ship.

That is how Paul arrives in our text: wet, cold, standing in the rain on an island he never chose, holding pieces of what broke. But before the storm ever broke the ship, God had already spoken. An angel stood beside Paul in the night and promised him: you must stand trial before Caesar, and not one life on this ship will be lost. So when Paul washes up on Malta, he is not a man hoping God shows up. He is a man watching God keep His word.

KEY DEFINITION

Enmity (Genesis 3:15): The Hebrew word is 'eyvah: deep, active hostility, a settled war, not a passing feeling. God put it there Himself. "I will put enmity." He declared war on the serpent so we would never make peace with what destroyed us. And the enmity sin put between us and God, Jesus abolished at the cross (Ephesians 2:15-16). The war with the serpent still stands. The war with God is over.

Before we meet the snake on Malta, meet the snake where the Bible first mentions him. The serpent's first weapon was not a bite. It was a question. He came to separate people from God by making them doubt what God said. And in the garden, God answered the serpent with a promise: the serpent would strike his heel, and the Seed would crush his head. Revelation names him plainly: "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (Revelation 12:9). The snake on Malta is not random. He is the same enemy, still striking at God's people on their way to God's promise. But Paul knew the other end of that promise: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20). Genesis 3 is being answered on a beach in Acts 28.

ACTS 28:1-5, NIV

Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live." But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects.

Read the text slowly one more time. Notice the order: safely on shore, unusual kindness, a fire in the rain, and then a strike at the hand that was helping. God was on that shore before the snake was. That order matters for everything that follows.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is your Malta right now: the shore you did not choose, between the storm and the promise?
2. What promise did God speak to you in the middle of your storm that you are still standing on?
3. Why do you think the serpent's first weapon in Genesis 3 was a question about what God said?
4. Read Genesis 3:15 and Romans 16:20 together. What changes when you know the strike was never going to be final?

MOVEMENT 1 · I DIDN'T CHOOSE WHERE I LANDED, BUT GOD WAS ALREADY THERE

ACTS 27:23-25, NIV

Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, "Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you." So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.

Verse 1 says safely on shore, and verse 2 says strangers built a fire in the rain and the cold. God provided on Malta before Paul preached one sermon there. God said Rome in the middle of the storm, so the storm could delay Paul, but it could never delete him.

KEY DEFINITION

Unusual kindness (verse 2): The Greek word is philanthropia, love toward people. God met Paul's need through strangers who did not even know his God.

The story under this point is Joseph in Egypt. Sold by his own brothers, Joseph landed in a country he never chose, first in Potiphar's house, then in a prison. And one sentence follows him everywhere he lands: "The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master" (Genesis 39:2). The shore changed, the presence never did.

GENESIS 39:2, NIV

The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

From the book Grateful and Grieving, chapters 1 and 2: before God changes your location, He settles your spirit. You can grieve the ship and still thank God for the shore. Joseph learned to thank God in Egypt before he ever saw the palace. Learn to thank God on the shore.

The shore changed, the presence never did.

HEART QUESTION

What shore did you not choose, and where has God already met you on it?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between hoping God shows up and watching God keep His word?
2. Who are the strangers God has used to build a fire for you in a cold season?
3. Read Genesis 39:2 again. What would change if you believed the presence travels with you into every place you land?
4. What is one thanksgiving you can speak on this shore before you ever see your Rome?

SAY IT

I did not choose this shore, but God met me on it.

MOVEMENT 2 · JUST BECAUSE I'M DOING RIGHT DOESN'T MEAN I WON'T GET HURT

ISAIAH 43:2, NIV

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Verse 3. Paul is not rebelling and he is not running. He is gathering sticks, feeding the fire that is warming everybody else, and the viper fastens on the hand that was helping. Paul passed through both in one chapter, water in the wreck and fire on the shore. The promise was never "you will skip it." The promise is "I will be with you in it."

KEY DEFINITION

Driven out by the heat (verse 3): The fire did not create the snake, it exposed it. Some snakes only show themselves when the fire gets hot.

Verse 4. The islanders misread the moment and called a survivor a murderer. And verse 6 says when nothing happened to him, the same crowd changed their minds and called him a god. Paul answered to neither label. He shrugged off their false praise just as easily as he had shaken off the snake.

The story under this point is Job. The Bible introduces him like this: "In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). Blameless, and he still lost his children, his wealth, and his health. And his friends did what the islanders did: they read his pain and called it guilt. But Job's first response to loss was worship: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be

praised" (Job 1:21).

JOB 1:21, NIV

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.

From the book Grateful and Grieving, chapter 5, The Cost of the Climb: the climb costs, and the cost is not evidence that you climbed wrong. Job praised God in the dirt before God restored anything. Learn to thank God on the shore.

The promise was never "you will skip it." The promise is "I will be with you in it."

HEART QUESTION

Where have you been hurt while you were doing right, and what label have you been answering to since?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it so tempting to read someone's pain as proof of their guilt, the way the islanders and Job's friends did?
2. What snakes in your life were not created by the fire, only exposed by it?
3. Read Isaiah 43:2 again. How does "I will be with you" land differently than "you will skip it"?
4. What would it look like to praise God in the dirt this week, before anything is restored?

SAY IT

The bite was real, but it is not my name.

MOVEMENT 3 · WHAT HAPPENED TO ME DOESN'T HAVE TO STAY WITH ME

LUKE 10:19, NIV

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

Verse 5. No panic, no funeral, no press conference. Paul shook the snake off into the same fire, and he suffered no ill effects. Jesus had said it long before Malta: the authority was given before the attack ever came. Paul was not lucky on that shore. He was walking in a promise.

WORD STUDY · GREEK

apotinasso *"shook off"*

To shake off completely, the same motion as shaking dust off your feet. Paul did not carry the snake, argue with the snake, or study the snake. He shook it off.

The story under this point is Paul and Silas at midnight. Years before Malta, Paul was beaten and jailed in Philippi for doing right, his back bleeding and his feet in stocks. And at midnight: "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). Gratitude was Paul's habit long before Malta. He sang in the cell, so he could shake on the shore.

ACTS 16:25, NIV

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

From the book Grateful and Grieving, chapter 7: gratitude is the sound of a heart getting free. Paul did not pretend the snake was a bracelet. He named it, he shook it off, and thanksgiving was the sound that followed. Thank God on the shore by shaking off what bit you and opening your mouth in praise anyway.

He sang in the cell, so he could shake on the shore.

HEART QUESTION

What happened to you that has been staying with you, and what would shaking it off look like this week?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does it matter that the authority in Luke 10:19 was given before the attack ever came?
2. What is the difference between pretending the snake was a bracelet and shaking it off into the fire?
3. How did gratitude at midnight in Acts 16 prepare Paul for gratitude on the shore in Acts 28?
4. Who is listening to your response right now, the way the prisoners listened at midnight?

SAY IT

I shook it off, and I'm still grateful.

CLOSE · THANK YOU, LORD

1 THESSALONIANS 5:18, NIV

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

The storm did not get the last word. The sea did not get the last word. The snake did not get the last word. What I lost did not get the last word. After all that I have been through, I’m still here. And I’m still grateful. Church, let gratitude leave our lips. THANK YOU, LORD. THANK YOU, LORD. THANK YOU, LORD.

This is how we thank God on the shore:

- Name the shore. God was already there before the snake was.
- Refuse the label. The bite is real, but it is not your name.
- Shake it off. What happened to you does not have to stay with you.
- Open your mouth. Gratitude is the sound of a heart getting free.

DECLARATION

> **After all that I have been through, I’m still here. And I’m still grateful.**

Final landing. Pray the prayer from Sunday out loud: Lord, we thank You for the shore. Thank You that the storm did not get the last word, and the snake did not get the last word. Today we shake off what has been holding on to us, the pain, the label, the loss, the low place. Teach our mouths to say thank You while our hearts are still healing. We are grateful, and we are grieving, and both are in Your hands. In Jesus’ name, amen.

THIS WEEK

1. The shake-off prayer, every morning. Name one thing you are still carrying, shake it off in prayer, and speak one thanksgiving out loud before you touch your phone.
2. Thank God on the shore. Write down the shore you did not choose, then write one way God already met you there: a fire, a kindness, a kept promise. Read Acts 27:23-25 over it.
3. Refuse one label. When an old label speaks this week, murderer, failure, finished, answer it with Acts 28:5 out loud: it fastened on, I shook it off, and I suffered no ill effects.
4. Sing at midnight. On your hardest day this week, pray and thank God out loud before anything changes, the way Paul and Silas did, and let somebody who is still in the storm hear it.

> **The snake did not get the last word. I’m still grateful.**