

# Standing Strong

The Life and Ministry of Paul—part 10

August 28, 2016

**This week we'll look at strength and weakness. One of the great ironies of life is that often, those who appear strong are often weak, and those who appear weak are often strong. Note: you don't have to feel strong to be strong! And just because you feel weak does not mean you need to be or act with weakness!**

2. One kind of strength is needed when relating to difficult people. That's what we'll look like on DAY 1 and DAY 2. A second kind of strength is needed when "all hell breaks loose." That's DAYS 3-5.

## **DAY 1: Standing strong when appearing weak**

*Acts 25:23 The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.*

1. Agrippa and Bernice walk in with all the trappings of strength. Paul is brought in "at the command of Festus," looking for all the world as the weak man in the room.

2. Governor Festus confesses to King Agrippa that he has no case against Paul. The dilemma Festus faced was sending Paul to Rome without making a case against Paul. Festus, for all his *appearance* of strength is baffled as to how to handle his dilemma.

3. Here are excerpts from Paul's defense:

*Acts 26:6 And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today.*

<sup>7</sup>*This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me.*

<sup>8</sup>*Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?*

4. Paul is not only defending himself against bogus charges but using it as a platform to witness to truth! He details how he had previously acted violently against Christians. He now picks up his conversion.

*Acts 26:12 "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. <sup>13</sup> About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. <sup>14</sup> We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' <sup>15</sup> "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. <sup>16</sup> 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. <sup>17</sup> I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*

6. Go back and underline every piece of his story that deals with his conversion to Christ.

7. Paul includes more about his conversion story than we've heard previously, especially in 26:17-18.

8. What stood out to you the most from his conversion story?

## DAY 2: Standing strong in the presence of another's perceived strength

1. Paul “finishes” his defense...

*Acts 26:20 “First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds....<sup>23</sup> that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”*

2. Paul, once again, hits the bright notes of the gospel message!

a. What gospel facts does he present?

b. What “action items” are there for the listening audience to do?

3. What follows is a back-and-forth dialogue between the king and Paul...

*Acts 26:24 At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."*

4. How would you have responded to Festus' point?

*Acts 26:25 "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable.<sup>26</sup> The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.<sup>27</sup> King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."*

5. Paul's response is remarkable at several levels.

a. How would you categorized Paul's demeanor and attitude?

b. To what does Paul appeal, in 26:26-27?

*Acts 26:28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"*

*Acts 26:29 Paul replied, "Short time or long--I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."*

6. This is a remarkable scene with remarkable words.

a. Consider the scene. Paul is in chains, on trial. Surrounding him are the king, queen, and a room full of nobles and soldiers. If you were a fly on the wall you'd “see” one weak man, in chains, surrounded by “strong” people.

b. Paul uses this very image as he crafts his final words. Go back and read 26:29. What strikes you most?

7. In real life you may often **feel** weak in the presence of people who **appear** strong. If you feel intimidated, don't let that “rule” your demeanor or your words! Strength does not come from appearance; it comes from truth and character!

### DAY 3: Standing strong in hurricane-like storms

1. It is decided to send Paul, by ship, to Rome to appear before Caesar. They left the port city of Caesarea and made their way north and west.

*Acts 27:4 From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against...*

*Acts 27:9 Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, (10) "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also."*

2. The captain and crew did not listen to Paul. Instead they "had obtained what they wanted...." They sailed off.

*Acts 27:14 Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the island.*

*<sup>15</sup> The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. <sup>16</sup> As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. <sup>17</sup> When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together.*

*Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. <sup>18</sup> We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. <sup>19</sup> On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. <sup>20</sup> When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.*

3. Underline every danger they encountered, above.

4. Why would a professional captain and a professional sailing crew listen to a "prisoner"? Scripture exhorts us to listen to wise counsel. Our problem? "We KNOW better."

*Acts 27:21 After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. <sup>22</sup> But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. <sup>23</sup> Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup> 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.' <sup>25</sup> So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."*

5. Paul stands strong in the midst of the literal "storms" of life. You may remember the prophet Jonah, who when the seas began to rage went below deck and fell asleep. Below, list how Paul stayed strong and exerted leadership.

a. What vision did he communicate?

b. How did he inspire the men?

c. How would you describe his attitude?

6. What did you see in Paul's leadership you'd like to do?

## DAY 4: Standing strong as a leader in chains

*Acts 27:27 On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. <sup>28</sup> They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. <sup>29</sup> Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and **prayed** for daylight.*

*Acts 27:30 In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, **pretending** they were going to lower some anchors from the bow.*

*<sup>31</sup> Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved."*

*<sup>32</sup> So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away.*

*<sup>33</sup> Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food--you haven't eaten anything. <sup>34</sup> Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." <sup>35</sup> After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. <sup>36</sup> They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.*

*<sup>37</sup> Altogether there were 276 of us on board. <sup>38</sup> When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.*

1. After TWO WEEKS, their ordeal seems to be finally coming to an end. There are some very noteworthy things to notice.

a. Previously, the captain and sailors ignored Paul's advice. What did they do this time?

b. What changes do you notice in the captain and crew from before and now, both in regards to Paul, and in regards to God?

c. What affect did Paul's leadership have on the crew? (Look for at least three things)

2. All of this effectiveness in the leadership of 276 men comes not from the experienced sea captain, or the professional sailors. Neither does it come from the Roman soldiers. It comes from a prisoner, in chains.

3. It has been said that leadership is more about influence than position. Think about the influence you can bring to bear at work, at church, in your neighborhood, and at home.

4. What is something you can do to be a positive influence in your arenas of life?

## **DAY 5: Shipwreck: throwing in the anchors**

*Acts 27:39 When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. <sup>40</sup> **Cutting loose the anchors**, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. <sup>41</sup> But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.*

*Acts 27:42 The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. <sup>43</sup> But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land.*

*<sup>44</sup> The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.*

1. Maybe the tight economy has people at your work wondering about their employment, paying their mortgage or rent, putting food on the table. Maybe you've been in and out of doctor's offices, living with uncertainty about what is going on medically. Maybe you've had a spouse walk out the door.

2. What allowed Paul to remain strong through the "trials" ordeals and the shipwreck ordeal? The sailors threw in the four anchors. What would be four anchors that could give us strength?

a. The promise of God.

God promised Paul that he was going to Rome. Spending time with God in prayer, and particularly with the promises of God is vital.

*Isaiah 43:1-2*

b. His "team"

Instead of hiding or running, he leaned in to the team, and led them. (27:27-32)

c. Sustenance, of all kinds. The men ate after fourteen days. Sometimes getting some exercise or heading to a scenic location for a few hours, having lunch with a good friend, or enjoying a good book can allow some fresh winds into our soul. (27:33-36)

d. Action. (27:41-44)

Sometimes, you must take action. Procrastination is no longer an option. Get some godly counsel, make the decision, engage yourself in the dilemma, "jump in," etc.

A kind of strength is needed: (Both with Agrippa and the shipwreck)

- Standing when others are sitting
- Speaking when something needs to be said
- Moving toward the crisis rather than running from it
- Pressing into a problem rather than avoiding it.

## **Conclusion:**

Review the four anchors.

Which of these anchors do you need to throw in the water?

## **EXTRA MATERIAL:**

### **DAY 1: KING AGRIPPA**

*Acts 25:13-15*

King Agrippa agrees to hear Paul.

The next day, it's all about the pomp and ceremony, the "important people" throwing their weight around, displaying their superiority. (WEAKNESS)

Festus is brought in and explains his dilemma. Though he knows he is obligated to send Paul to Caesar, he realizes he has no case to bring! (WEAKNESS) He is asking Agrippa for help. (25:23-27)

Paul begins his defense. Paint the picture: chained; manacled; little steps, unshaven,

What strikes you about his demeanor? Calm, respectful, gracious, polite. He is kind. Lesson for us: when we speak to people speak to them as people: respectfully, graciously, disarmingly no matter what their politics, views, morality, deficiencies, etc.

They listened with rapt attention.

He starts with points of grand agreement with the Jewish accusers:

--Resurrection of the dead

--Hope of a Messiah

Notice how transparent he is about his past:

*Acts 26:9-11*

He is surrounded by skeptics, those ready to pick apart any word he utters, yet he minces no words about what he's done.

**DAY 2:** The reality of the transformation in Paul is stunning! He's gone from being a wild wolf, hunting his weak prey, to someone with the **courage of lion**, but with the **gentleness of a lamb**. (STRENGTH)

Paul dives right back in, but answering Festus by looking directly at King Agrippa, and appealing to what he knows the king already believes.

*vv. 25-27*

Agrippa is off his high horse, pondering, but attempting to look regal and "in control," above the message of Paul. (WEAKNESS)

*Acts 26:28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"*

As he raises his chained hands in his epochal conclusion, the chains rattle as he utters these words.

*Acts 26:29 Paul replied, "Short time or long--I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."*

The regal entourage abruptly step out into the hall.

As Paul awaits the decision, he must have been stunned by the irony of the scene. Think of this: The only man in the palace who was genuinely free was the Apostle Paul, while king, queen, governor and all the rest were in chains to self and sin.

And think of just how close King Agrippa, who sat on his king's throne came to bowing at the throne of grace before the King of Kings!

As Paul is led out of the throne room, the only sound you could have heard was the clanking of chains. The only thing you would have seen was enormous joy on the prisoner's face.

I wonder how often these words haunted King Agrippa... "*except for these chains, except for these chains, except for these chains.*"

*Acts 26:30 The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. <sup>31</sup> They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment." <sup>32</sup> Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."*

### **DAY 3:**

Paul is sent on a ship to cross the Mediterranean Sea and land in Rome. But this turned out to be no pleasure cruise. They were going to hit a torrential storm that would last for ... weeks, with NO idea which way they were headed.

On board is Paul, a Roman centurion named Julius, Aristarchus, and Luke, who is recording the voyage.

Disembarked out of Caesarea, and sail around Cyprus, Myra, Rhodes, and to Crete. Next up was the long sail to Malta.

Along the way, there was a three-month delay, putting the next leg of the trip in jeopardy due to the anticipated winter weather and stormy seas.

*Acts 27:7-13*

*Acts 27:14 Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the island. <sup>15</sup> The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.*

They sailed into winds stronger than gale-force winds. It is likely that in addition to raging winds and harrowing seas, they also encountered sleet.

The storm only become greater in its rage. Desperate men took desperate means...

They were now at the mercy of the storm and waves.

*Acts 27:15-20*

--Jettison the cargo, in an effort to make the boat lighter

--Jettison the tackle

--Gave up hope of being rescueded. The boat was most likely to come apart, take on water and sink.

*Acts 27:27 On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land.*

<sup>28</sup> *They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep.*

<sup>29</sup> *Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.*

Professional sailors had sailed through storms before, but it appears no one had sailed through a storm of this magnitude. Just beneath the surface was a sense of panic, that the storm would bring destruction to the boat. This storm lasted over two weeks, with no end in sight. Maybe you relate to that. Perhaps you've been in a storm that has last weeks, or months, or years, with no end in sight.

**Illustrations:**

**Mother Theresa** at the 44<sup>th</sup> National Prayer Breakfast:

“I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because Jesus said, ‘If you receive a little child, you receive me.’ So every abortion is the denial of receiving Jesus, the neglect of receiving Jesus. Abortion is really a war against the child, and I hate the killing of the innocent child, murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that the mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another? How do we persuade a woman not to have an abortion? As always, we must persuade her with love.... Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love one another but to use violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion.”