

Survivor

Serving with Power After the Storm

Acts 28:1–10

Focus: Paul is bitten by a snake but suffers no harm and immediately shifts into serving and healing others. This lesson shows how God empowers those who have endured hardship to bring healing to others. Survival is not the end of your story; it is the beginning of someone else's breakthrough.

I. Why This Study?

A. Objective:

1. To explore how God uses survivors of crisis to become agents of healing
2. To examine Paul's transition from suffering to serving as a model for post-storm ministry
3. To inspire believers to move from self-preservation to Spirit-empowered purpose

B. Relevance:

1. Many people are coming out of seasons of survival, wondering what their purpose is now
2. This text affirms that enduring hardship is not wasted; it prepares us to minister with authenticity and power
3. In a world wounded by trauma, grief, and isolation, the call to serve after surviving is both timely and transformative

II. Context of Acts 28:1–10

A. The Background

1. After surviving a shipwreck, Paul and all 275 others arrive safely on the island of Malta.
2. The islanders show extraordinary kindness by _____.
3. As Paul gathers wood to help sustain the fire, a _____ fastens onto his hand.
4. The locals expect him to swell up or die, assuming _____ judgment. But Paul shakes the creature off, unharmed.
5. Their amazement quickly turns to _____, and they begin to see Paul as one touched by _____ power.

6. Paul does not linger in their awe. Instead, he begins to _____. He heals Publius' father of dysentery and fever, and then begins ministering to all who come.
7. God transforms Malta from a _____ into a _____. The one who washed ashore battered and bound is now the vessel of _____ and _____.

B. Key Takeaway:

The power of your survival is not for spectacle. It is for service. God does not preserve you for applause but prepares you for purpose.

III. What Can We Learn from Paul's Ministry After the Storm?

A. Survivors Still Serve (vv. 1–3)

1. Paul has just escaped a shipwreck. He is a prisoner. He is _____. Yet as soon as the fire is lit, Paul gathers sticks to help keep it going.
2. The Greek word *synebalen* implies _____ collection, not passive gathering. He is not waiting to be _____. He is looking for a way to serve.
3. Service is not reserved for the _____. It is born in those who know what it means to be cold, hungry, and in need of warmth.
4. Benedictine spiritual writer Joan Chittister observes, "Hospitality begins in the recognition of our shared vulnerability."
5. Paul's act of gathering wood is a holy act of _____ in the aftermath of crisis.

B. Attacks Don't Always Mean Abandonment (vv. 3–6)

1. As Paul serves, a viper latches onto his hand. The islanders interpret it as divine punishment.
2. The Greek word *kathēken* means "to fasten" or "cling"—this was not a passing sting.
3. Yet Paul does not panic. He shakes it off into the fire.
4. Sometimes, even after surviving the sea, you get bitten on the shore. _____ has a way of reemerging just when you thought you were safe.
5. Psychiatrist Dr. Bessel van der Kolk reminds us, "The body keeps the score. It remembers what the mind tries to forget."

6. But Paul teaches us that attacks are not always a sign that we are _____. Sometimes they confirm that the enemy sees our _____.

C. Shake It Off and Keep Moving (v. 5)

1. Paul's response is _____. He does not scream or retreat. He shakes the snake off into the fire.
2. The word apotinaxas is forceful, meaning to deliberately fling off something harmful.
3. There are moments when faith is not about speaking in tongues or casting out demons. It is about the quiet, gritty _____ to shake off what tried to kill you and keep your hand steady for what God has next.
4. Desert Father Abba Anthony once said, "A time is coming when people will go mad. When they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, 'You are mad—you are not like us.'"
5. Paul's steadiness in crisis is a mark of divine _____ in a _____ world.

D. The Pain You Survive Prepares You to Heal Others (vv. 7–9)

1. Soon after the snakebite, Paul is called to the house of Publius, whose father is gravely ill.
2. The word used to describe the illness, duserterion, points to an intense, prolonged intestinal disease.
3. Paul lays hands on him and brings healing. The same hand that was _____ is now a hand that _____.
4. Theologian Dorothee Sölle wrote, "Only those who have cried out for bread can preach with integrity about hunger."
5. Paul is not healing from a _____. He knows what it is to suffer. He knows what it is to serve through _____.
6. The storm and the snake did not disqualify him. They readied him for a ministry that could touch the sick without flinching.

E. When You Serve Well, Others Are Blessed (v. 10)

1. The people of Malta honor Paul and his companions with many gifts. They supply _____ they need for the journey ahead.
2. The Greek word timē, meaning _____ or _____, signals more than respect—it suggests recognition of divine presence.

3. Spiritual director Barbara Brown Taylor notes, “The practice of incarnation is to see the divine in what is vulnerable and ordinary.”
4. Paul’s willingness to serve in weakness opened the door for collective _____ and blessing.
5. When believers serve with joy after surviving with grace, communities are changed.

IV. Scholars’ and Theological Insights on Serving After the Storm

1. Joan Chittister: “Hospitality is not about inviting people into our perfect homes, but into our imperfect lives.”
2. Dr. Bessel van der Kolk: “Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health.”
3. Abba Anthony (Desert Father): “The truly healthy soul will be hated by the sick society.”
4. Dorothee Sölle: “The wounds of Christ are not to be admired. They are to be imitated.”
5. Barbara Brown Taylor: “Pain and beauty coexist. And the greatest truths are most often held in tension, not clarity.”
6. “The beginning and the end of all Christian leadership is to give your life for others.”

V. Prayer Focus

1. Pray for discernment to recognize your survival as preparation, not just preservation
2. Ask God to reveal new opportunities for service in the aftermath of hardship
3. Pray for courage to shake off what has tried to hinder your hands from healing
4. Intercede for others who are emerging from storms and may not yet see their purpose

VI. Key Takeaway

Surviving the storm is not the end of your testimony. It is the beginning of your calling to serve. Your hands may still bear the memory of what bit you, but those same hands can carry the balm that heals others. Let your pain become purpose and your survival become service.

VII. Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. How have you seen God use your pain to prepare you to help others?
2. What are some “snakes” that have tried to derail you even after your breakthrough?
3. How do you respond when your service is misunderstood or your motives are questioned?
4. Who has ministered to you after surviving their own storm? How did it impact you?
5. What steps can you take today to move from surviving to serving with power?