

March 5/6, 2022

Storms Are Part of the Calling

Daring to Be the Church Series

Acts 27:1-44

Pastor Bryan Clark

So, how do you discern whether or not God is happy with you...like pleased with you? Or how do you determine whether or not you're in God's will? I would say, for a lot of Christians, they base that on circumstances. In other words, as long as it's smooth sailing, and everything seems to be working out, God must be happy with me. If this is God's will, then all the pieces fall into place. You hear people talk like that all the time. "I knew this was God's will, because all the pieces fell into place." So if that's true then, conversely, if instead of smooth sailing, it's pretty stormy and a lot of things don't make sense, then you'd have to conclude God is unhappy with you. And if, instead of all the pieces falling into place, nothing really seems to be working out, you'd have to conclude, "I must be out of the will of God." But here's the big question. "Where does the Bible teach that?" What if it was possible that the storms in life are actually just part of your calling? That's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Acts, Chapter 27.

If you're new with us, we've been working our way through the book of Acts and find ourselves in chapter 27. Paul is now beginning his journey to Rome to appear before Nero, the Caesar. We pick it up in verse 1:

When it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustine cohort named Julius. And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail for the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care. (*NASB Acts 27:1-3)

So the first thing we want to identify are the main characters. The first thing we see is the final what we've referred to as the "we" passages. We've seen this several times in the book of Acts, where Luke identifies himself as a traveling companion of Paul. "We" did this." Exactly how Luke got on the boat we're not told—maybe as Paul's physician—but he is on the ship recording eyewitness details.

Now, sometimes when we try to support the idea of the accuracy or the reliability of the New Testament documents as historical documents, we identify things that are more obvious, like how many documents, the quality of the documents, the date of the documents, or we look at things like archaeology. But we also look at things that are far more subtle. Acts chapter 27 offers one of those passages. Nautical experts would say the accuracy of the level of details that Luke records, as to what would have happened to a first century ship in a storm on the Mediterranean, is unparalleled. We don't know of another first century document with this level of accuracy. As a matter of fact, even skeptics of the New Testament have to admit that the details in this chapter are unbelievably accurate.

A second character is named Aristarchus, and we know he's from Thessalonica. It is highly likely he came with Paul to deliver the gift from the Church of Thessalonica to Jerusalem, and has simply stayed with Paul all the way through this journey. He's now going to get on the ship and go with Paul all the way to Rome. While in Rome, Paul writes Colossians and Philemon, and in both of those books he mentions Aristarchus, his companion, by name. So he obviously stayed with him all the way to Rome. History tells us he was ultimately executed by Nero for being a Christian.

Third you have Julius, who is a centurion, part of what we would call the Imperial Guard. He's on assignment—like the king's police—in order to get Paul all the way to Rome, to Caesar. And finally, it's very interesting to read over this without noticing **Paul and some other prisoners**. So why would you ship prisoners? The answer is because at this time of the Roman Empire, when someone was condemned to death, they would often wait until there was a large number of prisoners condemned to death, and they would ship them to Rome, in order to die at the hands of the gladiators, for entertainment. That is most likely what's happening here. So, this is a really rough crowd. These are condemned men with nothing to lose; these are sailors; these are soldiers.

The initial ship that would have left from Caesarea, would have been a smaller ship, intended to hug the coastline. So from Caesarea going north, they pull in at a port in Sidon, about 70 miles north. They will go as far north as they can, and then they'll have to head west, along what we would call the southern border of Turkey. But these small ships would stay really close to the shore, avoiding getting out in the big part of the Mediterranean, and just work themselves up the coastline. Of course, remember, these are not motorized ships; these are sailboats, so they're at the mercy of the weather. Verse 4:

From there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. When we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it. (Vs. 4-6)

One of the things we're going to wrestle with is, if this is God's will to get Paul to Rome to share Jesus with the Caesar, why not make it smooth sailing? "Let's get in there; let's get this thing done." But rather what the text says is this was a slow journey. The winds weren't favorable, so they're just kind of creeping along. Once they start heading west, there's a north wind that starts blowing them out to sea. So they creep around the island of Cyprus as a windbreak, in order to get some control, and they get as far as Myra. Myra was a wealthy city, a significant port, and there they encounter a much larger ship from Alexandria. Alexandria is in Egypt, and from Egypt they would go north across the Mediterranean with grain and cargo. This was huge business. As a matter of fact, it's estimated that these ships from Egypt to Italy carried roughly 150,000 tons of grain per year. These are huge ships, carrying massive amounts of grain, so these ships are big enough to go out into the open waters of the Mediterranean. So from the smaller ship, they move into the bigger ship. Verse 7:

When we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us *to go* farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone; and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea. (Vs. 7, 8)

So they get in the big ship, and they're heading west. When they get around the coastline, they are hit with a wind that is driving them south. So they pull around the backside of the island of Crete. It's about 165 -170 miles long and provides like a windbreak. They're creeping along this island because of the wind. Now notice what Luke says: **slowly...with great difficulty**. This is taking a really long time. Again, the question is, "Why?" Why not make this smooth sailing? Let's get Paul to Rome and let's get this done. They finally end up at a port called Fair Havens, about two thirds of the way down the coastline of Crete, and they pull in there. Verse 9:

When considerable time had passed 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 of 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 being 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.

When a moderate south wind came up, supposing they had attained their purpose, they weighed anchor and *began* sailing along Crete, close *inshore*. (Vs. 9-13)

So they're in this port and now the season is dangerous. What does that mean? It was always dangerous on the sea in the ancient world. But from mid-September to mid-November, it was *very* dangerous, as a matter some of the emperors actually paid more money to get grain delivered at this time of year as an incentive, because it was so dangerous. Luke mentions that Paul says it's dangerous because *the fast has already passed*. He's referring to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the Jewish feast in the late fall. So we're probably in late October, and there is no chance they're going to get to Italy before winter, and Paul is trying to convince them to winter it here; to try to go further would incur damage.

Now, even just the north-south of this journey is dramatically different. If you were in Italy, traveling south across the Mediterranean, all the way to Egypt—475 miles-ish—it would take approximately 9 to 12 days. If you made that exact same trip, only going from south to north, from Egypt to Italy—somewhere in the neighborhood of 50 to 60 days. So everything was against them making it to Italy before winter. Paul is a prisoner, but he steps up and tells them they probably shouldn't go any farther.

So one question would be, "What makes Paul the expert?" Some of you are thinking: a typical, know-it-all preacher. (*laughter*) Grant you, preachers are a troublesome bunch (*laughter*). But Paul may have more experience on the Mediterranean than almost anyone on this ship. At this point, as close as we can figure, he's taken at least 11 voyages across the Mediterranean, 3500 miles at sea. He's been in 3 shipwrecks; he knows what he's talking about. But the centurion listens to what would be the owner and the captain of the ship, and he takes their advice, which makes sense. Probably the ship's owner and captain are going to know more than the prisoner/preacher. But they also probably have ulterior motives. Maybe safety isn't the highest motive. If they don't get the cargo to Italy, they don't get paid. They've got a ship full of prisoners and a ship full of cargo. "Let's get this done."

They're going to try to get around the island of Crete, about 45 miles further to the west. But when you start to go around the island, this makes you vulnerable to the northern winds, if they hit you before you get in the port there. So a mild southerly wind creates the opportunity to sneak around Crete and get in the next port.

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. After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on *the shallows* of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along. The next day as we were being violently stormed tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. 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. (Vs. 14-20)

So they start trying to make their short journey to the next port, and suddenly there's a **violent wind**. The Greek word that's translated *violent wind* is the word from which we get our English word *typhoon*. It comes off of Mount Ebo, which was on the western end of the island of Crete, and seemingly comes out of nowhere. It's called a **Euraquilo**. It's made up of two words—a Greek word and a Latin word. *North and east*, the Northeaster. Of all of the winds that a sailor could experience on the Mediterranean Sea, by far, the Northeaster was the most feared.

Now they have no choice. The wind is blowing the ship out to sea and all they could do is ride it out. There's a little island called **Clauda**. They were able to swing in behind the island just long enough to have a moment to pull the little dinghy out of the water onto the ship in case they needed it. Then they took cables and wrapped them around the ship and cinch them down (it was called frapping) in order to hold the hull together to keep it from exploding. And all they could do is ride the storm south.

At some point, they're afraid they're going to crash into the shore of Egypt, still about 200 miles away, probably. But in order to avoid that, they throw out a floating anchor. Think of it like a parachute; it floats and keeps the boat from blowing quite so fast. At some point, they start dumping off the cargo. Think of it as dollar signs. This is the only reason they're on the ship. Everything that they've experienced is now for nothing. If all the cargo goes overboard, there's no payday. So they would only do this if they're going to die. At least that was the fear. So over goes the cargo.

Then the text says *over goes the tackle*. Now this is not talking about fishing tackle. There are some things that should never be thrown overboard! (*laughter*) The fishing tackle goes down with the ship. *Tackle* was a Greek word that referred to everything that wasn't nailed down, "Get it off the ship." As a matter of fact, the reason the text says **overboard with their own hands**, is Luke is making it clear it's not getting washed off the ship. They're throwing it off the ship because they're in survival mode. Because of the storm and the darkness, they can't see the sun; they can't see the stars; there is no way to navigate. And essentially, all hope is lost. Verse 21:

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; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’ Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I’ve been told. But we must run aground on a certain island.” (Vs. 21-26)

So Paul stands up before the ship, and essentially says, I told you so. I tried to tell you; you wouldn’t listen to me. Now probably the motivation is just to get them to listen—with credibility. “I tried to tell you this; you wouldn’t listen to me. But I want you to be courageous because **an angel of the God to whom I belong, the God whom I serve**, has delivered to me a message that I must get to Caesar. Therefore, no one on the ship will die. The ship will crash. We’re going to lose the ship; we’re going to end up on an island, but no one is going to die. So take courage!”

Again, it seems to me that raises some questions. Now it’s confirmed what we already knew: It is the will of God for Paul to get to the emperor; the angel has just confirmed that. If that’s true, why not make it smooth sailing? Why wouldn’t the God who controls the winds and the sea, blow them to Italy? Let’s get on with this thing. Nero needs Jesus. There’s nothing about this that makes any sense. I don’t know how comforting it was to hear, “By the way the ship’s going to crash and the ship’s going to be lost.” I mean, how long are you on Gilligan’s Island, (*laughter*) waiting for another ship to finally get to where God wants you to go? Verse 27:

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 further on they took another sounding and found *it to be* fifteen fathoms. Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak. 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, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.” Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the *ship’s* boat and let it fall away. (Vs. 27-32)

So the ship is moving to the south. They probably hear waves lapping up against the shore and realize they’re close to something. **Soundings** just meant they dropped a rope with a piece of lead at the bottom. When it hit the bottom, they could measure the depth. So it’s getting shallower, as they’re moving closer to shore. They throw out four anchors to keep them from crashing, hoping they survive till the sun comes up. For some reason, the sailors thought this was their chance to abandon ship. So they’re pretending like they’re going to drop the little dinghy in order to lay out the anchors. In reality, they are abandoning ship. Paul figures out what they’re doing, and says to the centurion and the soldiers, “If they’re allowed to abandon ship, no one will be saved. Who’s going to land the ship if there’s no crew onboard?” Now, again, Paul is the prisoner, but he’s completely taken charge of the ship. The centurion then cuts the rope; the dinghy drops, and everybody is still on board.

One additional note on verse 27, where it says, **When the fourteenth night came.** In the late 1800's, there was a nautical expert, very familiar with this part of the world, who decided to do research on what it would be like if you were on one of these huge ships, this time of year, facing a northeaster. And with all the details laid out in this text, he did all of the calculations and concluded it would take exactly 14 days to reach the island of Malta. The book is still available in reprint. It's called, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of the Apostle Paul*, by James Smith. It's just more evidence of the incredible accuracy of this text. Verse 33:

Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish." Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat. All of them were encouraged and they themselves took food. All of us in this ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons. When they had eaten enough, they *began* to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea. (Vs. 33-38)

At this point, it appears Paul the prisoner is now in charge of the ship. He calmly identifies, "Take courage, my God has said nobody's going to die. Everything's going to be okay. We've gone fourteen days without food, so we need to take some bread. We need to calm down. We need to eat for our preservation; we need to build up our strength for the last little leg of the journey." So he gives thanks for the bread, sits down and eats, and all of them were encouraged and took bread and ate it. **Two hundred seventy-six people!** I don't know how many in your mind you're imagining. That's a lot of people on a ship. And this is a really rough crowd—men condemned to death, sailors and soldiers. But by this time, Paul has got their attention. They listen and they're encouraged. Verse 39:

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; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern *began* to be broken up by the force of the waves. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape; 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, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land. (Vs. 39-44)

So the sun comes up; they see the land and they see a beach area where they think they can run the ship aground. If you were to visit the island of Malta today, you would find it identified as *Saint Paul's Beach*. You take all the description: the two seas, which means two currents, the rocks, the reefs, the beach, it's a perfect description of it. So they cut loose all the anchors; they're going for the beach. It probably wasn't a reef; it was more likely like a sandbar. They hit it; they drive the

front end into the sandbar, and they're stuck. The storm is obviously still going. It's beating the back of the boat up, and the boat starts to fall to pieces.

It would have been common practice for the Roman soldiers to kill all the prisoners to keep them from escaping. So that's what they're going to do. But Julius is determined to get Paul to Rome, so he calls it off. *"Those who can swim, jump! If you can't, grab something, and float."* And every single one of them makes it safely to the island of Malta. There, we will pick it up...next week.

A couple of details as we wrap this up. One of the things we always wrestle with is through these kinds of situations in life, "What is God's part and what is my part?" Most of this was in the hands of God—the wind and the sea, the waves, the storm. Paul can't do anything about any of that. But he also didn't just sit in the hull pouting. First he steps up and says, "I'm just telling you, maybe we should winter here. It's pretty dangerous out there." Then he steps up and says, "Hey, take courage. The angel of the God to whom I belong has appeared to me. We're all going to be okay. Settle down. Take courage. God's going to take care of us." Then he gets word that the sailors are abandoning ship, so he gives word to the soldiers. And finally, it seems like he's running the ship. "Hey, it's been fourteen days since we've eaten. Let's all calm down. Let's take some bread. Let's eat for our own nourishment. Everything's going to be okay."

So you have this tension between God's part and our part. In every situation, we have to try to discern, "What is the part of this I can't control?" That's God's part. And, "What part of this is my responsibility?" And I need to do my part.

But more to the point of what we're wrestling with this morning is, "How could this possibly make any sense?" It's been confirmed for us that God's will is to get Paul to Rome to see the emperor. He's going to share the gospel with the most powerful man in the world. Why wouldn't God provide smooth sailing? Why wouldn't God get him there? Why would He make the trip so difficult that they run out of time and have to winter and wait all this time in order to get to Rome? If that isn't bad enough, you have this storm that blows them completely off course. They're farther away now than when they started. The ship has crashed. They're all stuck on this island.

How do we make sense of this? Oftentimes, in these moments in life, we don't get answers. But in this case, I would suggest 276 reasons. On that ship were 276 people that God loved, 276 people that Jesus died for, 276 people that needed to listen to what Paul had to say about his God. I can assure you even though this was a rough crowd, Jesus loved them as much as he loved the apostles, the woman at the well, Zacchaeus, Nicodemus, and anybody else you want to name.

Yes, the mission was to get to Rome. But there was a mission en route to Rome that mattered to God. So you tell me, "How bad do you think a storm would need to be to get the attention of this really rough crowd to finally be willing to listen to what Paul has to say?" This is not new for Paul. This has been his whole ministry. If smooth sailing was the indication of being in the will of God, Paul has been out of the will of God his entire ministry. When he writes to the Corinthians, he tells them, "You know, I've been beaten up more times than I can even count. Five times I've received 39 lashes, 3 times I've been beaten with rods. Once I was stoned, apparently left for dead." God raised him back up. Three times he's been shipwrecked on the Mediterranean before this. Paul understands that sometimes the storms are just part of the calling. Sometimes, this is

what's necessary for God to accomplish His purpose. Sometimes things don't make any sense. Sometimes it feels like God is fighting against us. "God, I thought you wanted me to go to Rome and it seems like You're doing everything possible to keep me from going. Nothing seems to be falling into place." It doesn't mean God is mad at you. It doesn't mean you're out of the will of God. Sometimes there are things God is doing that we just don't understand, and we have to trust Him.

Would I rather have smooth sailing? Absolutely, yes! I would much prefer smooth sailing. But more than anything else, at the end of my story, I want my life to have mattered. I want to know I've invested myself in the things that will matter forever. I want to know that I diligently sought to be obedient to God's call on my life. And I understand that if that's the case, then it will include storms, because I do understand—storms are part of the calling!

Our Father, we're so thankful that You love us, You've sent Jesus to save us, and You've called us to be proclaimers of that message to others. God, there were 276 people, a rough crowd on that ship that You deeply loved, that You sent Jesus to die for, that needed to listen. There wasn't much chance of that without a storm. God, may we be faithful all the way to the finish line. When the sailing is easy, and when we are in the storm, Lord, may we trust You in the most difficult moments of life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Winter 2022 // WEEK 8

Life Group Questions

Acts: Daring To Be The Church // March 5-6, 2022

Storms Are Part of the Calling // Acts 27:1-44

Introduction

With the trial before Agrippa over, Paul sets sail as a prisoner on a ship bound for Italy. Given the significance of Paul’s mission to share the Gospel with the Emperor in Rome, we might expect God to pave the way for a quick and safe journey. However, Luke details a voyage in Acts 27 that is anything but smooth. There are lessons for us to learn about responding to the storms of life as we observe Paul’s response this week.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over the questions below and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. If you were given \$100,000 to celebrate someone or something, who or what would you celebrate and how might you go about it?
2. **Sign-ups for Serve Day 2022 are live on March 6th!** Take time to either propose a project or to look through opportunities on the website and discuss where/how you want to serve. We encourage you to take the time to sign-up while you are meeting. Use this QR code or here is a link to the website: <https://www.lincolnberean.org/serveday>



Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
 - 2) Invite someone to read the passage in the group. Due to the lengthy passage of Scripture this week, try referring to the narrative as guided by the discussion questions
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) What did you sense the Holy Spirit impressing on your heart from this passage or the sermon?
- 2) *Read Acts 27:1-9 and 2 Corinthians 11:23-30.* These kind of circumstances have defined the life and mission of Paul since his conversion. **Based on the message this weekend, would we conclude that these circumstances were evidence that Paul was out of God's will or that they were part of his calling? Explain your answer.**

When have you struggled with determining whether you were in God's will based on your circumstances? Why is this a dangerous thing to do?

- 3) *Read Acts 27:9-21.* In most cases Paul's struggles were from the hands of those opposed to the Gospel he was proclaiming. However, in this narrative the struggles are really a result of factors only God could control. **What do we learn from this?**

Are struggles and storms simply challenges we must endure because we live in a fallen world or are some of them actually strategically created or allowed by God in order to accomplish the missions we've been given? Explain your answer.

How have you seen God use struggles or storms in your own life to grow and transform you?

How have you seen God use struggles or storms in your life as a means of influencing others towards the Gospel?

- 4) *Read James 1:2-5 and Romans 5:3-5. What do these verses have to say about responding to the struggles and storms of life?*

Paul lived as an agent of hope throughout this storm because he believed strongly in the sovereignty of God. *Read Acts 27:21-37. Where do you see Paul being hopeful and encouraging in these verses?*

What would it look like to live as agents of hope in the harsh culture of our day?

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Is anyone going through a storm right now? Pray God’s purposes will be accomplished through the storm and that God’s peace and assurance would be felt in the midst of the storm.

Some things to consider during prayer time:

- What did the message or group discussion cause you to notice about your relationship with Jesus?
- How can you express gratitude for what God’s teaching you?
- What questions are stirring that only God can answer?
- Are there troubling things in your life that need to be confessed to God?
- Is there an unmet need that only God can fulfill?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves – mind, body, spirit – we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in your Life Group, take a few moments to share how either of these exercises may have changed your outlook on your daily life.**

Sitting With God: Imagine having a cup of coffee with Jesus. Review the people, events and happenings of the last few days. Ask Jesus to speak to you about your life. **What things does Jesus seem to be pointing out to you?**

Soaking in the Word: For most of us, learning is the goal when we read scripture, but in this context we simply want to hear what God is saying; to listen, feel and experience the Words of Christ washing over you.

Read Matthew 6:19-34 (or listen on a Bible app if you have one) for 5 days in a row, perhaps from different versions. **What words or phrases seem to be emphasized? Ask Jesus, “What do I need to know today about my life with you?”**