Nov 15, 26 Leader's Guide

Acts 27: 13-44 "Living in the Mystery"

1. Some people believe that our lives are ultimately directed by fate, destiny, or a sovereign God. Others believe that our future is shaped by our choices and free will. How might each of these views shape the way we navigate our world? What attitudes or postures might they give rise to in us?

This opening question invites people to consider the practical implications of what they believe. If everything is fixed regardless of our actions, we might become passive, indifferent, or cynical. If everything depends on our choices, we might become anxious, fearful, or even prideful (if we believe we always make the best of choices). Encourage people to explore these tendencies without feeling the need to resolve the theological tension just yet. The passage will help us do that.

Read Acts 27:13–44

2. In verses 13–20, Luke describes the increasingly desperate efforts of the sailors to save the ship. What steps do they take, and what is the eventual outcome? What do you notice about the way their circumstances affect their hope?

The sailors do everything they can to save themselves—securing the ship, throwing cargo overboard, taking wise and necessary precautions. Yet eventually all hope of being saved is abandoned. The storms of life have a way of bringing us to the end of ourselves, revealing the limits of our wisdom, resources, and ability to control our circumstances. Allow the group to sit with the desperation of the moment before moving to Paul's response.

3. In verses 21–26, Paul urges everyone to *take heart*. What is the basis for his confidence? What does he understand about God that allows him to speak with such assurance in the midst of the storm?

Paul's confidence is not rooted in favourable circumstances or his own ability to navigate the storm. It rests in the promise of the God to whom he belongs. God knows him, has spoken to him, and will accomplish his purposes. They are not ultimately at the mercy of the storm. This is the consoling truth of God's sovereignty: our lives and our futures are in the hands of a God who, in Jesus, knows us and loves us. Notice that the promise does not mean the ship will be spared or that suffering will be avoided.

4. In verses 27–32, the sailors attempt to abandon the ship. How does Paul's warning in verse 31 seem to stand in tension with God's earlier promise that everyone will survive? What does this teach us about the relationship between God's sovereignty and our responsibility?

Here is the central tension of the passage. God has promised that everyone will survive, yet Paul insists that unless the sailors remain on board, no one will be saved. God's sovereignty does not render human choices irrelevant. Rather, God accomplishes his purposes through the actions and decisions of his people. The soldiers must cut the ropes. The sailors must remain aboard. Paul must speak up. The promise is certain, and their actions matter. Resist the temptation to explain away the mystery.

5. Scripture seems to insist on a *both/and* rather than an *either/or*: God is absolutely sovereign, and our choices really do matter. Why might we find it difficult to hold these two truths together? How might embracing both change the way we approach the decisions and uncertainties of life?

We often want to resolve the tension by emphasizing one truth at the expense of the other. Yet Scripture insists that God is sovereign and human beings are responsible. We see this most clearly in Jesus' death: the cross was central to God's saving purposes, yet those responsible for his betrayal and crucifixion were not absolved of responsibility. We may not be able to explain how these truths fit together, but we are called to live faithfully in the mystery. Encourage the group to consider what this means practically rather than getting lost in theological debate.

6. The truth of God's sovereignty and our responsibility can be both *bracing and consoling*: bracing because we cannot remain passive or indifferent, and consoling because we cannot ultimately thwart God's loving plans for us. Which of these truths do you most need to hear at this point in your life? Why?

This question begins to move the conversation toward personal application. Some may need the encouragement to act - to make a difficult decision, take responsibility, or step forward in faith. Others may be carrying anxiety, regret, sorrow, or an overwhelming sense of responsibility. They need to hear that their lives are not ultimately at the mercy of their circumstances or their own imperfect decisions. God's sovereignty is not intended to produce passivity but trust; our responsibility is not intended to produce anxiety but courage.

7. Jesus has promised to come again and make all things new. Yet God has chosen to work through ordinary people, empowered by the Spirit, to give the world a foretaste of that future even now. How does the certainty of that promise give significance to our choices today? Where might God be calling you to *have courage* - to act, to speak, to love, or to serve?

The book of Acts begins with the promise of Jesus' return and the gift of the Spirit. Throughout Acts we see ordinary people, empowered by the Spirit, crossing barriers, caring for the vulnerable, confronting the idols of their culture, and proclaiming Jesus. God's promised future does not make their actions irrelevant; it gives them significance. As Paul reminds the Corinthians, because the resurrection is certain, our labour in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). Help the group consider concrete ways they might participate in God's work in the world.

8. We are invited to live with two convictions: *Take heart—God is sovereign. Have courage—your choices matter.* Where are you facing a storm in which you need to trust God more deeply? And where is there a decision or action you have been reluctant to take? How can we encourage and prayerfully support one another in these things?

Give this final question time. Some may be facing circumstances beyond their control - sickness, loss, broken relationships, or unrealized hopes. Others may be wrestling with decisions or opportunities that call for courage. Help people distinguish between what they are being called to entrust to God and what they are being called to do. Both require faith. Encourage the group to listen carefully to one another and to offer prayerful support rather than quick solutions.

Close in prayer

Invite people to share where they most need to *take heart* and where they need to *have courage*. Pray for a deeper confidence in God's loving sovereignty, wisdom to make faithful choices, and the Spirit's power to live as people who anticipate the coming kingdom of Jesus. Where appropriate, encourage group members to continue supporting and praying for one another in the week ahead.