

IN THE FIRE I WAS BORN FOR THIS

Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way. If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. ... Anyone who meets a testing challenge head-on and manages to stick it out is mighty fortunate. For such persons loyally in love with God, the reward is life and more life. James 1:2-5, 12 MSG

With our appetite for both food and life long gone, Paul took his place in our midst and said, "Friends, you really should have listened to me back in Crete. We could have avoided all this trouble and trial. But there's no need to dwell on that now. From now on, things are looking up! I can assure you that there'll not be a single drowning among us, although I can't say as much for the ship—the ship itself is doomed.

"Last night God's angel stood at my side, an angel of this God I serve, saying to me, 'Don't give up, Paul. You're going to stand before Caesar yet—and everyone sailing with you is also going to make it.' So, dear friends, take heart. I believe God will do exactly what he told me. But we're going to shipwreck on some island or other." On the fourteenth night, adrift somewhere on the Adriatic Sea, at about midnight the sailors sensed that we were approaching land. Sounding, they measured a depth of 120 feet, and shortly after that ninety feet. Afraid that we were about to run aground, they threw out four anchors and prayed for daylight.

Some of the sailors tried to jump ship. They let down the lifeboat, pretending they were going to set out more anchors from the bow. Paul saw through their guise and told the centurion and his soldiers, "If these sailors don't stay with the ship, we're all going down." So the soldiers cut the lines to the lifeboat and let it drift off. With dawn about to break, Paul called everyone together and proposed breakfast: "This is the fourteenth day we've gone without food. None of us has felt like eating! But I urge you to eat something now. You'll need strength for the rescue ahead. You're going to come out of this without even a scratch!"

He broke the bread, gave thanks to God, passed it around, and they all ate heartily—276 of us, all told! With the meal finished and everyone full, the ship was further lightened by dumping the grain overboard. ... The soldiers decided to kill the prisoners so none could escape by swimming, but the centurion, determined to save Paul, stopped them. He gave orders for anyone who could swim to dive in and go for it, and for the rest to grab a plank. Everyone made it to shore safely.

Acts 27:21-38, 42-44 MSG

THREE WAYS TO HANDLE THE HEAT

1. _____ **IT** _____.
2. _____ **IT** _____.
3. _____ **IT** _____.

Once everyone was accounted for and we realized we had all made it, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. The natives went out of their way to be friendly to us. The day was rainy and cold and we were already soaked to the bone, but they built a huge bonfire and gathered us around it. Paul pitched in and helped. He had gathered up a bundle of sticks, but when he put it on the fire, a venomous snake, roused from its torpor by the heat, struck his hand and held on.

Seeing the snake hanging from Paul's hand like that, the natives jumped to the conclusion that he was a murderer getting his just deserts. Paul shook the snake off into the fire, none the worse for wear. They kept expecting him to drop dead, but when it was obvious he wasn't going to, they jumped to the conclusion that he was a god! ... Word of the healing got around fast, and soon everyone on the island who was sick came and got healed.

Acts 28:1-9 MSG

TALK IT OVER

- What unexpected troubles are you currently dealing with?
- What hardship do you need to shake off that you haven't yet?
- What can you do to better see adversity coming so you don't go running?