

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, February 2, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: Difficulty – Time to Dream (IV)

I want to start with a story about Florence Chadwick, a long-distance American swimmer...

Over the past three Sundays, we've been in a sermon series called "Time to Dream." Throughout this series, we've focused on "God's Six Phases of Faith." Spiritually speaking, nothing significant happens without a dream from God. Once He gives us a vision, it's up to us to decide whether or not we're going to pursue it. But along the way, we often find ourselves in what I like to call God's "delayed waiting room." After that, we may face even more challenges—like Florence did when she was trying to swim with endurance through a foggy ocean. In life, sometimes we feel like we're swimming through fog—facing difficulties. But whether we recognize it or not, we are often in one of three places: either in trouble, coming out of a test, or heading into one. By faith, we need to focus on God's promise that our divine visions will be realized in His perfect timing.

Today, in our main text—Acts 27—I want us to look at a wonderful example of overcoming difficulties by faith. In this account, a centurion named Julius, along with his soldiers and sailors, was transporting prisoners—one of whom was the Apostle Paul—on a ship heading to Rome. Along the way, they were caught in a violent storm. The storm was so fierce that everyone on board lost all "hope of being saved" (Acts 27:20). But Paul, a man of faith, stepped up. He encouraged them to take courage and keep moving forward toward God's promised destination, even in the face of the overwhelming storm.

This morning, I want us to learn from Paul—how we should respond when facing difficulty—and how we can apply those lessons in our own spiritual journey.

First, I want us to look at two wrong responses to challenges.

First, don't drift, and don't despair. In verse 15, when the storm hit, the people on the ship began losing hope of ever reaching Rome safely. For fourteen days, they had not seen the sun or stars—tools they relied on for navigation back then. They had simply been tossed around by violent winds, unable to handle the challenge. During that dark time, they lost their sense of direction. They were no longer headed anywhere with purpose. Instead, they were being driven wherever the winds took them. Someone once said, "Life is like a voyage from one side of the sea to the other." In our faith journey, we all experience different seasons. There are times when we're enjoying a peaceful adventure with clear skies and gentle winds, feeling like everything is going according to plan. But there are also times when we're paddling just to stay afloat. And then, there are those sudden storms—sometimes small, sometimes overwhelming—that can hit without warning. Whether they're big or small, those storms can make us feel like we're drifting, lost, and in despair. In those moments, we might even feel like giving up the dreams God has given us. One of the weapons Satan often uses to attack us is fear. But remember, what the Bible says in 2 Timothy 1:7, God has not given us "a spirit of timidity" but "a spirit of power, love and self-discipline." When we turn to God in the middle of a storm, we can experience His power to overcome our fears.

Second, don't discard. In verse 18, when the ship was stuck in a terrible storm, the sailors began throwing the cargo overboard the next day. They kept lightening the ship, tossing their resources aside just to keep it afloat. At one point, they even considered abandoning the prisoners. Eventually, the sailors tried to escape the storm by using a lifeboat. But here is the thing: the cargo, the tackle, the prisoners, and the ship itself were all essential elements for completing the mission. Yet, when they were in trouble, they were tempted to throw everything overboard. Paul, however, urged them to "stay with the ship" (Acts 27:31). And following his advice, the soldiers cut the ropes holding the lifeboat, making sure they stayed with the ship, no matter how difficult the circumstances. Like the sailors in this story, we may be tempted to discard the things that matter most when we face challenges. We might feel like abandoning our devotion to God, our relationships, our commitments to the church, our identity in Christ, or even our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. When the storm is fierce, it might seem easier to throw everything away just to save ourselves from the difficulty. But Jesus reminds us in Matthew 16:25-26: "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" In the face of difficulty, God calls us to stay on the course—the sacred course. He doesn't want us to turn to worldly strategies or abandon what really matters. Despite the challenges, God wants us to stay in the ship and seek His guidance and strength along the way.

Now, I want us to look at the two right things we need to do when we are facing difficulty.

First, we need to confess our part. There are four reasons why we face challenges. The first is that we are the cause of our own difficulties. In today's story, Julius, the centurion in charge of the voyage, was the one who initially caused the ship to get stuck in the storm. Even though Paul warned him not to set sail, Julius chose to listen to the bad advice of the pilot and the ship's owner. Like Julius, sometimes we are the ones who create our problems. We can be our own worst enemy. The second reason challenges come is from other people. Sometimes, whether intentionally or unintentionally, others can create problems for us. The third reason is spiritual forces. As Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12, our battle is "not against flesh and blood," but "against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Sometimes, the storms we face are stirred up by spiritual enemies. And finally, the fourth reason challenges come is that God allows them. We know that God uses delays and difficulties to shape us, to develop His divine characters in us, and to teach us how to fully rely on Him for His presence, protection, and provision. Regardless of the source of our struggles, the first step we need to take is to admit that we are powerless over them. That is where we begin to respond the right way. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). This means we need to recognize our spiritual poverty—our helplessness before God. Even though we may put a lot of effort into helping others, especially our loved ones, we need to acknowledge that there are things only God can do. So, we need to ask for His supernatural strength and wisdom while confessing our powerlessness and repenting of our mistakes, failures, and sins before the Lord.

Second, we need to confront our difficulties and claim God's promises. In the passage we're studying today, Paul, by faith, declared God's assurance through an angel of the Lord to everyone on the ship. He said, "Now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost... 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. So keep up your courage, men, for I have

faith in God that it will happen just as he told me” (Acts 27:24-25). What a powerful declaration Paul shared with those around him! Ten or eleven days later, Paul reminded them again of God’s promise: “Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head” (Acts 27:34), while encouraging them to eat food and regain strength for the continued journey through the storm. Paul prepared them for what was coming—both physically and spiritually.

Just like many things in nature that fall apart over time, we as human beings grow weary. Our situations often don’t cooperate with the things we hold on to, and even the strongest foundations we’ve built can shake. In this scripture, the mighty centurion and his soldiers grew faint. The sailors’ expertise didn’t work. The weather didn’t cooperate. The ship was breaking apart. Even Paul’s conviction was tested. Yet, amidst it all, one thing remains unchanged: the promises of God. There are over 7,000 promises in the Bible, and they stand firm, unshaken by the storms we face. As the prophet Isaiah says, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God endures forever” (Isaiah 40:8). The real question we need to ask ourselves is this: Will we, by faith, claim these divine promises for ourselves, our loved ones, our church, and our communities, especially in times of difficulty?

The late Rev. David Yonggi Cho, senior pastor at Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea provides a great example. When he started his church in 1958, he needed tables, chairs, and a bicycle for his ministry. For a while, he prayed about these needs; but had not received any answers from God. One day, he read Hebrews 11:1 and understood the true meaning of faith, just like Florence Chadwick did—“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” ...From that point on, Rev. Cho “became pregnant” with even bigger dreams—a new church building with space for 300 members. He kept “being pregnant” with greater visions and encouraged his congregation to boldly declare what they were asking God for in prayer. Eventually, God abundantly blessed his ministry, and Yoido Full Gospel Church became the world’s largest congregation, reaching 830,000 members by 2007. This story illustrates a powerful correlation between what we claim in faith and what God does. When we trust in Him and declare His promises over our lives, God moves. Are we declaring the favor of the Lord in our prayers and in our daily conversations? Remember, our tongue holds the power of life and death. Someone once said that what we say—what we prophesy—is what we are becoming...

One of the favorite lies our spiritual enemy, Satan, uses against us is the word “never.” We might hear phrases like: “You will never make it. Your loved one will never change. You or those you care about will never get through this. The dream you’ve had—or the ones you love most—will never come true.” These negative thoughts are meant to cause us to doubt God’s love and power. The devil is an expert at making our challenges appear much bigger than they really are. It is like a small snowball at the top of a hill: if we allow ourselves to be deceived, it can quickly turn into something massive. But when we focus on how big our God is, our problems shrink. With God’s perspective, we can confront our difficulties with courage. To achieve our God-given dreams and help our loved ones fulfill their God-given visions, we need to, like Paul, keep kneeling before God—asking for His strength and guidance for their faith journeys as well as our own spiritual race. If we want to see God’s best unfold in our lives, and the lives of our loved ones, we must speak words of victory in faith. Some of us, or our loved ones, may feel like they’re going through overwhelming challenges. And time and time again, we come to realize how little control we have over them. But we can still pray and cry out to God to help them overcome their difficulties.

Do you remember the story of the two blind men in Matthew 9? When they cried out to Jesus for healing, Jesus asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” (Matthew 9:28). And how did they respond? They spoke out their faith with positive words: “Yes, Lord” (Matthew 9:28). Then, Jesus touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be done to you” (Matthew 9:29). And their sight was restored—their God-given vision was realized. It's important to understand that repeated requests to God are not a sign of weak faith; but a demonstration of our absolute trust in Him. He is always willing to hear and answer our prayers—no matter how many times we come to Him. When we consistently claim our God-given dreams and visions over our lives, He will bring us victory. So, despite the difficulties, we must hold fast to God assurances and declare His promises—just like Paul did. Let's speak them aloud, to our community, our church, our loved ones, and to ourselves. Friends, do we claim God's promises in our faith journey, or do we spend more time complaining to God about our problems?

As we reflect on Paul's example, we are encouraged to always move forward in God's direction. Paul's God-given vision was to go to Rome and share the Gospel. Even as a prisoner, Paul was willing to endure chains for the mission God had placed in his heart. In those days, Rome was the world's most powerful empire. Paul knew that by teaching the Kingdom of God there, the message would spread to many places. Despite the aggressive storm, Paul continually reminded the centurion and the sailors that God was in control. By faith, he convinced them, again and again, to press on and trust in God's power to bring them safely to their destination. In life, we often find ourselves spiritually swimming through difficulties that seem endless. But in those moments, like Paul, we must focus on God's promise—that our divine visions will be realized in His timing.

Friends, what storm are we facing right now? Do we know the enemy's ultimate goal in attacking us as God's children? The devil wants us to give up on our God-given visions. He wants us to drift, discard, and despair—rather than press forward into the destination God has promised us. But remember, some of the difficulties we face are simply stages in our growth—places where must rely more on God and trust His perfect plan. When we face challenges, we must always remember that God is the One who placed these dreams in our hearts. He is the Creator God—who was with us in the past, is with us in the present, and will be with us in the future. He is always at work—even when we can't see it. We live in a world filled with uncertainty, and it's easy to forget the promises God has passed down to us through generations of faithful followers. Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” God wants each of us to have a God-given dream. Every day, obstacles will try to steal that vision. But when we face these challenges with faith, we will realize that what seems impossible is actually an opportunity for God to reveal His power. So let us be reminded today of what God is saying to us. Our Way Maker will make a way—even when there seems to be no way. Our Promise Keeper will fulfill His Word. Our Miracle Worker will work miracles for us and for our loved ones. Despite the challenges we face, we will make it through if we don't drift, despair, or discard; if we confess our helpless situation, confront our difficulties, and claim God's promises. When we look at our situation through the eyes of faith and challenge ourselves to fulfill our God-given vision, the Lord—our Captain, Christ—will help us see those dreams become a reality in the days to come. He will lead us to our promised land—both here on earth and in Heaven.

**In preparing this sermon, I've been inspired by various sermons series, including Rick Warren's teachings on God's Dream and David Jeremiah's book, Forward, drawing from texts like Acts 27:13-37.*