



# PART 1

# PAUL IN CHAINS:

# LEADERSHIP

# IN ACTION

## Chapter Four

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## TAKING CHARGE

### DAYBREAK

Whether those renegade sailors realized it or not, Paul was doing them a great favor. To abandon a ship in the pitch black of midnight, in a hurricane, and try to make it to shore in a dinghy was foolhardy in the extreme. They certainly could not have known what was on the shore, or if there were rocks between them and the shoreline. They were simply in a panic, and they figured their chances of survival were better if they got in trouble in a small dinghy, as opposed to hitting the rocks in that huge, lumbering cargo ship.

Like all good leaders, Paul was alert. He also knew how to follow the chain of command. Rather than trying to handle the crew on his own, he got Julius to order the soldiers to take action. Their action, cutting the ropes and letting the dinghy fall off, assured that the sailors remained on board. It also meant that in the end, everyone would have to swim for shore.

Finally, dawn drew near. Luke wrote:

**Acts 27:33-35 (NASB)**

<sup>33</sup> “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.”

<sup>34</sup> “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.”

<sup>35</sup> Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat.”

These words identify an eighth principle of leadership: *A leader focuses on objectives, not obstacles.*



## LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #8

### A LEADER FOCUSES ON OBJECTIVES, NOT OBSTACLES

Luke had already mentioned in [verse 21](#) the passengers' and crew's "long abstinence from food."

[Acts 27:21 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> "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."

Here we learn that for the entire two weeks of the storm, they continued battling the elements without eating any food. But now they had some hard work ahead of them, and they were going to need some strength. Paul, ever the clear-thinking leader, urged them to take some nourishment.

He looked right past the storm, beyond the urgency of the moment, and saw that they needed to prepare for the ordeal that lay ahead. While everyone else was still seeing the obstacles, Paul had his eyes fixed on the objective.

"This is for your survival," Paul told them, "since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you" ([v. 34](#)).

[Acts 27:34 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>34</sup> "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."

You're going to be saved; you won't even be injured. But you need a good breakfast! (Again we see the perfect balance of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.)

Paul was getting them to forget their fears, the threat of death in the storm, the challenge of a nearly impossible swim to shore, and rather partake of the necessary nourishment they would need to make it.

I remember, as a football player, how I would come into the huddle in a critical moment in the game, facing a last-down effort to score, and say, "After we score, we're going for two! So line up quickly after the touchdown to catch them in the defensive switch." The strategy was to get people past the fear of the moment.

Paul did that, giving words of encouragement that ignored the very formidable obstacles.

Then, Luke said, Paul took bread, gave thanks to God in everyone's presence (thus reinforcing once again the source of his authority and his hope), and he himself began to eat. Here's a truth any godly mother knows: Two keys to serving the Lord are prayer and a good breakfast. Paul did not neglect the crew's physical needs and lecture them about the spiritual needs of their souls. He balanced the spiritual and the physical. Then he himself began to eat, becoming an example for all.



This is, in fact, a ninth important principle of leadership: *A leader empowers by example.*

## **LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #9**

### **A LEADER EMPOWERS BY EXAMPLE**

#### **Notice the effect:**

**Acts 27:36 (NASB)**

**<sup>36</sup>“All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food.”**

Paul’s courage became infectious. Everyone partook of the overdue refreshment, and it had the desired effect. They all began to feel better, stronger, and more hopeful. And then all hands set to work.

Here Luke records a crucial detail he had not yet given:

**Acts 27:37 (NASB)**

**<sup>37</sup>“All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons.”**

Perhaps they did a head count during breakfast to verify the exact number of people on board. This would be essential later, when they regrouped onshore, to be sure that everyone had survived.

Then they set to work on one final task. The ship needed to be as light as possible when they ran it aground:

**Acts 27:38 (NASB)**

**<sup>38</sup>“When they had eaten enough, they *began* to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.”**

The remainder of the cargo, which had served as ballast until now, was dumped. Thus, for the owner and the crew of the ship, all hope of salvaging anything but their lives was gone. The prophecy was being fulfilled to the letter.

#### **Daylight finally broke:**

**Acts 27:39-40 (NASB)**

**<sup>39</sup>“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.**

**<sup>40</sup> 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.”**

Here we see why it was essential for the crew to remain on board. Only experienced sailors would know how to do these things. The rudder had been tied down because of the storm. In heavy winds like that, the rudder would be impossible to hold for long, and the ship would have steered itself in circles. So it had been fastened with taut, heavy ropes to set as straight a course



as possible in the storm. Now it needed to be free so the pilot could maneuver the ship right to the beach.

By the hand of God’s sovereign providence, their course had brought them to a propitious spot—one of the few places in that vast expanse of the Mediterranean where they could try to beach such a massive grain ship. It wasn’t a rocky cliff or a craggy shoreline, but **“a bay with a beach.”**

They **“casting off the anchors,”** meaning, most likely, that they simply cut the ropes. There was no point in wrestling four heavy anchors aboard. It was clear to all by now that the ship would be a total loss, as Paul had predicted. They raised a sail (the actual Greek word used suggests that it may have been the foresail rather than the mainsail), and they steered for the beach.

They had no idea what was to come. They were headed for a virtual wall:

**Acts 27:41 (NASB)**

**<sup>41</sup> “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.”**

St. Thomas, on the east side of Malta, perfectly fits the description of “a place where two seas met.” Ocean currents converge there at the Munxar Reef, a submerged peninsula protruding a mile and a half into the sea. Breakers from the two currents come together right over the reef, causing waves to form in a unique crisscross fashion. Especially in a storm, the waves crashing together give the distinct impression of two seas colliding. Immediately under that place, the hidden reef is shallow enough to ground a ship.

From the ship’s position coming into the bay, it would have appeared they had a clear path to shore, so they steered for it. But the ship ran aground on the shallow reef. **“The prow stuck fast,”** and the violent breakers continued battering the back of the ship until it finally could tolerate no more stress and began to break up.

The ship was thus stranded some distance from shore. The raging winds and waves continued battering until pieces of the disintegrating ship were floating everywhere. It was clear all on board had no option but to swim to safety.

## **ALL HANDS SAFE AT LAST**

At that point, the soldiers realized it was going to be every man for himself. They weren’t about to go into those raging waters chained to prisoners. And in such a chaotic life-or-death situation, it would be virtually impossible to keep track of prisoners swimming free. But as we noted in chapter 1, if a Roman soldier lost a prisoner, he paid with his life. So they devised a plan to slaughter Paul and the rest of the prisoners to guarantee they wouldn’t get away.



Luke wrote,

**Acts 27:42-44 (NASB)**

<sup>42</sup> “The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape;

<sup>43</sup> **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,

<sup>44</sup> **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.”**

Since Paul’s wise leadership had not only endeared him to Julius, but also made him indispensable, the centurion halted his soldiers’ plan to kill the prisoners. In different circumstances, he might well have authorized the slaughter. It was, after all, from the perspective of worldly wisdom, the prudent thing to do.

**“But the centurion, wanting to save Paul...”** Is it any wonder why? If there was one guy Julius did not want to lose, it was the man who had performed so admirably as a leader. So he ordered those who could swim to head for shore, and the rest grabbed boards, pieces of the disintegrating ship, floating debris—whatever they could find to keep them afloat, and they paddled for shore.

Imagine 276 people diving into waves powerful enough to destroy a huge cargo ship and every one of them making it safely to shore. The odds against it are astronomical. But that is exactly what happened. Two hundred seventy-six people jumped into the water, and two hundred seventy-six people met on the shore. In a maelstrom.

The first thought every one of them must have had was thankfulness to the God Paul worshiped. His promises are sure. His Word is true. God’s angel had told Paul this would happen, and it came to pass exactly as he said.

Paul’s triumph was the triumph of great leadership. Tested in the crucible of crisis, he stepped up and showed how a true leader acts. He was decisive. He was determined. He was clear thinking and levelheaded. He took control when things were otherwise out of control. And God honored his efforts with amazing success. He didn’t compromise the absolutes, nor was he distracted from his objective by the obstacles. And he led by example.

In circumstances when lesser men would have been passive or given up, Paul took charge and became an example to all who are called to be leaders. It was one of the outstanding episodes in the life of this noble Christian, who by God’s design has much to teach us all about the rigors and rewards of true leadership.

In the section that follows, we’ll turn to some of Paul’s own writings about the principles of godly leadership. There we find some wonderful insights into a true leader’s heart, as the apostle battles a different kind of adversity—the disappointments and personal hardships a leader suffers when his own people stray from the example he has set.