

# Finding Purpose In Your Storm

by Carter Conlon

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of living beyond self-concerns and seeking God's will, caring for those who are perishing, and finding purpose in the midst of life's storms. It draws parallels between the storms faced by the apostle Paul in Acts 27 and the disciples with Jesus in Mark 4, highlighting the need to pray, fast, and trust in God's word for guidance and hope. The message calls for a deeper commitment to serving others and being a light in a society moving towards darkness.*

**Duration:** 33:34

**Scripture:** Acts 27:20, Mark 4:35, Luke 22:32, John 6:13, Luke 22:42, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:16

**Topics:** "Serving Others", "Trusting God in Trials"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Father, thank you so much, God, for the touch of heaven this morning in this sanctuary. Thank you, Lord, for meeting us powerfully in our time of worship. Thank you for bearing witness, Lord, to the word that you placed on my heart.

God Almighty, prepare us for the days that are just before us. Help those, Lord, today that are already in a storm. The coming storm means nothing to them.

They're already in a storm. Help them to find purpose in the middle of it and show us how that is found. God, it's important to know how.

I pray for clarity in my thinking. I pray for open hearts. For those that are gathered, Lord, teach us, guide us.

Let it not just be an accumulation of knowledge, but God, let the knowledge bring us to the place of your power. Father, we thank you for it with all our heart this morning in Jesus' name. Acts chapter 27, beginning in verse 20.

Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up. This, of course, happened because they embarked on a journey at that time that they were warned by the Spirit of God not to undertake. God used the apostle Paul, gave him a word.

He warned them they wouldn't listen. Very similar to this generation. Word of God clearly warns that the direction we're taking as a nation is fraught with peril.

But inasmuch as they didn't listen and ended up in a storm, you can almost set your watch by the reality that not listening to the Spirit of God will bring us to a terrible storm in the not-too-distant future. But after a long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, men, you should have listened to me and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

For there stood by me this night an angel of God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, do not be afraid, Paul, you must be brought before Caesar. And indeed, God has granted you all those who sail with you. Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.

Now there's a lot of instances of storms in the Bible. This is not the first storm, but there's something of God in this storm that is a lesson. It speaks to you and I today.

It talks about God's ability to bring us to a place, as we sang earlier, where we walk above the storm. The storm does not dominate our life. It doesn't dominate our thinking.

It doesn't take away our purpose. It doesn't steal the word of God from us. It doesn't cause us to run around in fear or hopelessness like so many were at that time and may be in a circumstance even you're facing now or might be facing in the future.

Now on another occasion, in Mark chapter four, there was also a storm on a lake in a place of water. And beginning at verse 35, it says, on the same day, when evening had come, he, that's Jesus, said to them, let us cross over to the other side. Now when they had left the multitudes, they took him along in the boat as he was.

And other little boats were also with him. And a great windstorm arose and the waves beat into the boat so that it was already filling. I want you to just think of the storm in contrast to Acts 27 with the apostle Paul.

So they're, they've got Jesus in the boat. Presence of God is there. They're going on a journey to another place.

They're not traveling alone. There are other little boats trying to make the same journey alongside of them. Maybe some in front, some behind.

We don't know where they were, but they were all out there. And in the midst of it all, a great windstorm arose and the waves beat into the boat so that it was already filling. You ever been there? Are you there now in a place you're trying to get to somewhere that even you feel that God's called you to go to, but the storm is beating so viciously against you.

It's beating against your home, your mind, your family. But he was in the stern asleep on a pillow and they woke him and said to him, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? Then he arose and rebuked the

wind and said to the sea, peace, be still. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

And he said to them, why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith? And they feared exceedingly and said to one another, who can this be? That even the wind and the sea obey him. Now at this point in Mark chapter four, I think you and I can safely say from the testimony of scripture that the following of Christ for these disciples was largely about the initial, let me call it the initial things, the initial reasons why we begin to follow Jesus. Most of us who come to Christ, we come because we're empty, we're hurting, we're in trouble.

We are longing for something deeper than what we have known in life. And I think it's safe to say that their following of him was largely about miracles. Imagine Mark chapter four, verse 41, it says, who can this be that even the wind and the sea obey him? And so they're following him because they see the miraculous power that he has.

They're following him also for power. Acts chapter one, verse six, Lord, will you at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel? They knew he had the power to push back darkness. They knew he had the power to push back an encroaching ideology that was beginning to swallow their borders, the nation of Israel.

The culture of Rome was marginalizing the people of God, ridiculing their faith, corralling and controlling them. And they knew that this man had the power to push that whole influence back. They followed him for excitement, no doubt.

Luke 10, 17 says, then the 70 returned with joy saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. Miracles, power, excitement. They were following him for position.

Mark 10, 37, you remember James and John, when they said, grant to us that we may set one on your right hand and one on your left in your glory. They were following him for provision. John 6, 13, it says, therefore they gathered them up and filled 12 baskets.

They knew that the supply of food and necessary things for life were in his hands. And so we see the disciples in this early season were following him for the same reason that many people who are new to the faith also follow Christ. There's a time for this.

There's a time when we have to recognize that he has miracle power. There's a time that we have to understand that he can push back kingdoms of darkness and bring light. There's a time when we get excited about this new life in Christ, about going out and with spiritual authority to be part of a kingdom that cannot be conquered.

There's a time when we gravitate even to positions, even in the church, and we begin to aspire to serve God, maybe sometimes in a public way. We aspire to provision. We follow him because we begin to realize that God is the provider.

Thank God he is. And no matter how much we give, we can't outgive him. He gives back to us again, as the scripture says, pressed down, shaking together and running over.

Yet in spite of all this, which they had or were about to experience, when the storm came, they accused him of not caring about them. After all this, after everything that happens, they woke him up and said, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? Are you indifferent to our struggles? You know, when you and I are following him for only these previous reasons, when the storm comes, our prayers can actually

become an accusation. Some of you were on your knees last night saying, Lord, don't you care about me? Don't you see me? Don't you know the struggle I'm in? Don't you know the trials I'm enduring? Are you too busy to help me? And we end up praying exactly like they prayed.

Do you not care that we are perishing? And later on, when Jesus spoke of being given for the sake of others and asked some to pray with him in the garden, they fell asleep. That's why Jesus had to say to Peter in Luke 22, 32, when you are converted, strengthen your brethren. Peter was sincere.

He was sincere in his boasting in a sense of, I'm going to live for you. I'm going to die for you. I'm going to follow you.

Others may deny you, but I'm not going to deny you. Man, you can count on me. I'll be there.

And Jesus looks at this man and says, Satan has desired to sift you as wheat, but I've prayed for you that your faith does not fail. And when you are converted, that's quite a thought. He's already a believer in Christ.

Now, Christ has not died for him yet on the cross. We understand that, but he already fully believes in Christ. And what Jesus was saying to Peter is, Peter, you have good intentions, but without the new mind, without the new heart and the new spirit promised to you by God, you will eventually only live to preserve yourself.

In spite of all the reasons that Peter had followed the son of God, in fact, he walked on water. In spite of all of this, when it came down to actually giving him, actually following the son of God and being given for the sake of others who needed a savior, he drew back, warmed himself by the wrong fire and began to curse and deny that he'd ever met the man, because ultimately without the spirit of God, we will all live to preserve ourselves. That is the reality of the human condition.

But when the heart of God is in you, it's then you will find the strength to help others through the storm. That is the difference. The natural man has not the strength that is needed to care about anybody, but him or herself in the storm.

Those that are empowered by the spirit of God, when the spirit of God has finally gotten a hold of us, when the spirit of God has a hold of my heart and your heart, we are no longer serving God just for what we can get. We're serving him for the sake of others. We're serving him to be involved in his mission on the earth, that the lost should be saved, that those who have no helper might find help in God, that we might become a testimony of this incredible grace of God that sent his son to a cross to die for all people, that they might have eternal life.

At this early time of following Christ in Mark chapter four and verse 36, they cared little or nothing for the others trying to also make it to the other side. Remember it says they took him in the boat as he was, or maybe may I paraphrase it and say as they knew him, and there were other little boats also with him. And when the wind storm arose and the water began to beat in the boat, they awoke him and said, do you not care that we are perishing? The reality is they didn't care that they were perishing.

A self-focused church does not have the heart of God at its center core. When we are meeting in the house of God or opening our Bibles or praying or worshiping, and it's all just about me, it's about my provision, my power, my miracle that I need, my position, my excitement, then we're going to find ourselves in a storm one day without purpose. And you need to hear me on this because we are going into

a storm, my brother, my sister.

This society is degenerating very, very quickly around us. You have to know that by now. You have to see that by now.

We're moving into a storm. We're moving into difficulty, unparalleled perhaps except for the civil war in this country. We're moving into a season of difficulty in this nation.

A storm is going to affect you. It's going to affect me. In spite of the storm you might already be in, there's a bigger one coming.

And you and I have to learn to find purpose in the midst of the storm. As Paul did, Paul was not living to preserve himself. He had a higher purpose and he had a higher calling on his life.

And in the midst of the storm, in Acts 27, while chaos was gaining momentum all around, verse 21, it says, after long abstinence from food, Paul stood in the midst of them. While everybody's running around, they're throwing the tackling over the ship. They're blaming one another.

They're cutting off their own supply. They're doing all kinds of things to try to figure their way out of the storm. There is a man in the midst of all of this who's fasting and praying and asking God for a word.

That's where you and I need to be right now. By the grace of God, whether you're in a storm or whether you're going to be in a storm in the days ahead, we need to start fasting. And don't wait for the church to lead you into a fasting time.

You fast. You seek God on it. You begin to pray as Paul did.

God had one man there that was able to defeat the power of death that wanted to swallow 276 people on that ship. There was one person there. You think of the people in your office.

You think of the people where you work, the people in your community, your apartment building, where you live. They are in a crisis. Many of them are going down.

They don't know how to get through tomorrow. But all would be to God, there would be one person in the midst of that whole mass that's fasting and praying and seeking a word from God. As Paul began to pray, when all hope was gone in verse 20, it says, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.

And in verse 25, it tells us that Paul said, therefore take heart men, for I believe God it will be just as it was told me. When all hope was gone, he had a message of hope for others in the storm. That's what God will do.

It doesn't mean you're not in the storm. Paul was also in the storm. Do you understand? But he was praying, he was fasting and God gave him a word, not just for himself, but for others.

God gave him a word and you don't need to tell the people you work with the whole Bible. Sometimes you just lean over and say, I just want you to know God spoke to my heart. If you trust him, you're going to make it through.

If you trust him, he's going to be with you. If you do it God's way, you're going to get to that place of safety. And this is the word that Paul had for those that were on this ship.

And he had a word, not just for the present storm, but also far into God's purpose for his own life and for his own future. He was praying in the storm. Now some of you today are in the storm and you're asking God, do you not care? The Lord says, no, I want to draw you deeper by the spirit of God.

I want to show you something way beyond just your circumstance, your trial, your difficulty that you're going through right now. He says, now I urge you to take heart. In verse 22, there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

For there stood by me this night, an angel of God to whom I belong and whom I serve saying, do not be afraid, Paul, you must be brought before Caesar. And indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you. He had a word for his future.

You see, one of the ways you get through the storm is God speaks to you about your future. You remember Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, when he comes, he will take what is mine and he will show you things to come. I have a word in my heart about my future.

Do you know that? So I'm not afraid of the storm today. I'm not afraid of the trial that might face me next week because I have a word from God about my own future. I know that my life is not over until this thing is fulfilled that God said he's going to do.

And when you are living for something a little higher than comfort, when you're living something for a little bit higher than just the excitement of that initial following of Christ and the miracles and the power and the provision and all of these things, when you begin in a sense to follow Christ and you start to live for the sake of people all around you, that's when heaven begins to open. That's when fear loses its grip on your heart. That's when faith starts to take over.

Why is it he said to his early disciples that you have no faith? I told you, you're going to the other side. I already said it. I don't need to repeat it.

At what point are you going to believe it and follow me on this journey, which is not about you. And why didn't, if you were going to pray, why weren't you crying out for these other people in these other little boats that are trying to make the same journey, but they don't have the son of God with them. Call out for them.

Call out for those that are going to perish. Call out for those that don't have a voice. Call out for those that don't know there's a God.

Call out for them. Let that be the source of your prayer and God will begin to show you your own future. Begin to speak a word into your heart of something he's going to do through your life.

Amazing. And the Lord said to Paul, not only are you going to appear before Caesar, but I've given you, I've given you all those who sail with you. Isn't that amazing? Wouldn't that be great to be your testimony and mine.

You walk into your office on Monday morning and yes, it might be a storm in that place. It might be tough. You might be relegated to the belly of the ship.

They might not be listening to your words and rumors even might be abounding about the powerlessness of your God, but isn't it something that if you and I could walk through that place, wherever it is that you

have to go and God whispers and said, I've given you all those that sail with you. I'm taking you on a journey, but I'm commanding life. I'm commanding this blessing of life everywhere you go.

I'm going to give you such an influence in your community. I'm going to give you such an influence in your workplace. I'm going to give you an influence because you're the only one that's going to have a solution and a purpose in the midst of the storm.

You're the one who's going to know the voice of God. You're the one who's going to speak for God. Your words will not be condemning.

They will be encouraging. They will be filled with hope. I love the fact that I wrote about it in another book.

I wrote quite a while back that in one instance of time, because of the crisis, Paul is taken from captain to captain of the ship. He's down in the belly of the ship sloshing about with whatever was down there. And in just a moment of time, he's on the deck of the ship and he's giving all the orders and telling everybody what needs to be done that they might be safe.

Oh, I'm telling you, I'm telling you folks, people might ridicule you now, but one day, one day soon, they'll be calling for you. They'll be calling for your voice. You and I are called, just as Paul was, to bring hope to others in theirs and our coming storm.

Let's not accuse Christ, as some once did of not caring, but let us celebrate in the storm, as Paul did, for the great privilege of being a testimony to others. This is what I just love so much about this story. It's crafted a picture in my spirit where Paul, it says, when everything now is finally falling apart, the ship is going down.

The word of God now has preeminence. A man who had touch with God through prayer and fasting is now the only voice. Other voices are all silent.

Everybody's now listening to this man of God. And he takes a loaf of bread and breaks it on the deck of a sinking ship. And the scripture says, he gave thanks.

Oh, you can't do that until you're living for something higher than yourself. You can't do that until you're lifting up this broken bread and saying, God, as the son of God was broken for me, that I might have eternal life. As his plans were yielded and he left the throne of heaven and came down to this world, not to do his own will, but the will of the one who had sent him.

Oh God, what a great privilege it is, Paul could say, that my life might be given for the sake of these 276 on this ship. And even one day to have the knowledge that I will stand before Caesar, a lunatic who thinks he's God, but I have the privilege of standing before him one day to advise him that he's not God. There is only one God.

To advise him with compassion, to hope that his heart will turn from its evil to the ways of God, but only a man given for the others, only a man living for the will of God and for the sake of other people could give thanks. Can you give thanks in the midst of your storm? Can you give thanks for the office that you're in right now? Can you give thanks for the family that God allowed you to be born into? Can you give thanks for your neighborhood instead of living to move out of it? Can you give thanks that God knew where you needed to be? Can you break that bread at home? Can you do that tonight when you get home? Can you buy yourself a loaf of unsliced bread, stand in your living room and break it in two and lift it up and say,

God, thank you for putting me in this neighborhood. Thank you Lord for letting me live through the storm so that I know in my heart how others are feeling.

Thank you for the power, not just to survive. Thank you God for a word that can give people hope and direction in my circumstance for the future. Thank you God for how faithful you are.

Thank you Lord that I'm going to get to the end of my journey. No devil of hell is going to cut it short. No storm is going to take it down.

No wave is going to cause me to drown. You numbered my days the day I was born. When I drew my first breath, you knew the day I would take my last.

And no weapon of hell can change that. No power of darkness can change that. I'm going through.

I'm going to the other side and I'm taking a multitude of people with me. I'm not going alone by the grace of God. My sons are going.

My daughters are going. My grandchildren are going. My wife is going.

Your husband is going. My family is going. We are all going.

I'm taking the people in my neighborhood. I'm taking the people in my workplace. I'm taking the people on my street.

They're not going. I'm not going without them. By the grace of God, we're all going together.

It can't be just Paul that God gives 276 to. These stories are not just stuck in the Bible just so to entertain us and let us gather knowledge without power. No, the clear thought is that when we're living now for the will of God and for the sake of those who are lost, and we're willing to say, God, wherever you have to take me, whatever you have to put me through.

Oh Lord, don't let me lose my perspective on life. Don't let it all be about me. Oh God, give me a word Lord for people who need you.

Give me a word for those who are crying out. My God, I'm tired of reading about people committing suicide every day in the news. I'm tired of it, Lord, when your people are everywhere.

God, let the redeemed of the Lord now begin to say so. Open our mouths. Deliver us God from self-focus and timidity and let us open our voices and our hearts as we begin to pray.

Lord, show us our future and give us those who are on this journey with us. Help me to escape living only for my own concerns and give me the courage I need and give me your heart. Praise be to God.

Praise. We sing the song so eloquently. If I'd never had a problem, I wouldn't know that God could solve them, but we'd rather not endure it, just sing it.

But God allows us. You see, if Paul hadn't been on that ship, 276 people would probably be in hell today. I don't know how many of them received Christ as Savior, but I do know they got a chance to know that Christ is real and alive.

They saw the power of God, not just in Paul's speech, but through his hand when they landed on that island and healing began to flow through his hand. Praise be to God. It's time, folks, for the church to pray.

It's time for us to be the church again. It's time for us to step beyond those initial days of just following Jesus for all that we can get for ourselves. And God allows it because we have to know who he is before we can actually take that final step of saying, Lord, not my will, but thine.

Help me, Lord, to take up my cross and follow you. And don't let me fall asleep when you need me. You see those disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, he was speaking about being given now.

He was speaking about dying for others. He was speaking about redemption for humanity, and suddenly there was nothing in it for them. Suddenly, everything was shifting to there's going to be a cost to this journey.

And he asked them to join with him and pray, and they fell asleep. And quite often when it's not about us, we can't pray. It takes a maturity.

It takes the spirit of God. It takes a fresh touch of heaven. So, Lord, I'm asking you today, God, with all my heart, I'm asking you for a fresh baptism of your Holy Spirit, God, for this church and this church age.

We so fell into the trap of self-seeking from coast to coast across the nation. So many churches are oblivious to the things that I've just been given of you to speak. Everything is about me, my comfort, my life, my power, my future.

God, there's so little of it that's about others now. And I'm asking, Father, God, that you would deliver your people, deliver us from childishness and infancy, and bring us into the work that you commissioned us to do on the earth. God, set us free from the timidity of seeking your will and the passionlessness of always being focused on our own struggles.

Thank you, Lord God, for every trial that you've ever allowed into my life, for it has worked something in me that nothing else could. Thank you for compassion, for the struggling. Thank you, God, for a fervency to see them find you a savior.

Thank you, Lord, for delivering all of us, God, at this time from just seeking our own comfort in the midst of the storm that we're all going to face. Help us, Lord, to be light and salt in this present society and in this soon to crumbling moment in history we're living in. God, I thank you.

Jesus, I pray, God, for the people of this church that you would open every one of our mouths, Lord, as you did Paul's. You would teach us how to fast and pray. You would guide us and lead us, Lord, into something deeper than living for our own comfort.

Father, I thank you for it, God, with all my heart, and praise you in Jesus' name. Here's my altar call, very simple this morning. Lord, give me courage and give me your heart.

God, I've heard the word. Give me the power to live outside of my own concerns. Give me courage to seek your will and give me a heart to care about those that are perishing around me.

That's the altar call. Father, in Jesus' name, God, I pray like Paul did, and I ask you, Lord, that none here in this church traveling on the same journey together through the same storm would end up drowning in their sin. I pray, God, that they would listen to your voice and turn from trusting in themselves and begin to

trust in you.

I pray, Lord Jesus Christ, as they did on that ship, that they would cut off all escape from truth and cast themselves wholly on your word and on your mercy. I ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, that wherever you take the voice of this church, collectively across the nation and around the world, through our prayer meeting, through the radio stations, that you would grant that multitudes to numerous to count would be saved from their sin and brought into the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We recognize, Lord, that it's not by might or by power, but by your spirit alone that this will happen.

Oh, God, have mercy on a wayward society. Have mercy on a wayward nation. Have mercy, oh God, as we are moving every day towards evil.

Have mercy, Lord. Have mercy. Have mercy, Lord.

God, you've shown us in scripture the patterns that when you find a praying people anywhere, you can turn everything that's evil to good in just a moment of time. Thank you, Lord. I pray that you'd raise up this church to be a voice, every person, every person, everyone speaking for you, everyone giving to your work, everyone praying for the sake of others, Lord, everyone seeking opportunities to do good.

God, let it be, Lord. Let it be that we'd be found doing your work, Lord, your way at this time. And again, Lord, we just ask for mercy.

Mercy, Lord. Mercy, God. Mercy on a wayward world, Lord, that is headed for hell and has no idea where they're going.

They have no idea what awaits them. God, help us to live for their sakes, Lord, so that they may find you as Lord and Savior. And again, I ask that you stretch out your hand of power as you did in the early church and begin to heal everywhere we travel, everywhere we go.

Heal with our words, our gestures, Lord. Just even the way we look at people, let healing begin to flow. When we walk through an office, if it's a place of weeping, make it a place of joy.

Change circumstances, God, and the directions of people because we choose to live for you and for their sakes. Deliver us, God, from immaturity, from all of our seeking of you just for our own benefit, Lord. Deliver us, God, and give us the grace.

Give us the grace not to fall asleep at this time. Lord, we thank you. I thank you for these men and women at this altar and what great good you will do through every one of their lives.

Thank you that you hear the hearts cry. You're not looking for a resume. You're not looking for any great strength in us.

Lord, you're the strength. You're the resume. You're everything, Lord.

It's all about you. It's all about you, Lord. We just offer ourselves to you as a sacrifice.

It's got to be your fire that takes this sacrifice, Lord, and uses it for your glory. So, God, we thank you. Protect this church, Lord, from complacency.

Protect us, Lord, from falling asleep at this time. Keep us alive. Keep us moving forward.

Keep us in prayer. God, we thank you for all of it and praise you for it. In Jesus' name, amen and amen.

Praise God.

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