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**Unified.
Empowered.
Missional.**

WEEK 11: ACTS 27-28:30

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe what is happening in your own words.
2. What stood out to you as you read?
3. Did these verses raise any questions as you read?
4. What can we observe from this story about God the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit?
5. What can we observe from this story about people?
6. What can we learn from this story about who we should be as believers and who we should be as a church?
7. Why is this passage in this particular book of the Bible? What might the Bible lose if this passage was left out?
8. What is something you sense the Spirit leading you to do in obedience to this text?

GOING DEEPER:

We end our time in Acts with Paul shipwrecked, attacked by a viper and then ultimately landing in Rome as a prisoner. This isn't quite the happy ending we might have hoped for and yet, throughout our study, we have seen time and time again that God is in the business of taking difficult circumstances and hardships and producing fruit. Despite Paul being forced to remain homebound for two years, his ministry wasn't diminished - it was just adjusted. Many scholars believe that during this time, Paul penned four letters (called the Prison Epistles) that would ultimately encourage believers for centuries to come: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and a personal letter to his friend Philemon.

While we have not been physically shipwrecked, in this season most of us can relate to the feeling of something being incredibly broken. While there might not be a physical viper dangling from our hand, we can recognize the sting of the enemy. And, while we are not imprisoned, we can relate to the limitations of life and ministry needing to look different than it did before. Many of us have experienced significant hurt and loss this year - maybe even as we've walked through this study.

Regarding grief, Andrew Baumen of the Allendar Center writes, "God is here, in this aching darkness. I am not in fear that my grief will overtake me. I have found that the more I enter it the less power it has. The more authentic I am with the sadness, despite cultural expectations, the more my soul is unrestricted. Not liberated from the grief, but liberated within the grief. Meaning, I still feel deeply sad, an ache within my heart, but the ache becomes deeply integrated with my joy. May we all give ourselves permission to follow our mourning and allow the goodness of grief to baptize us into new life."

Paul, deeply familiar with grief, also finds joy in the midst of his suffering. He does not deny his struggles but accepts them while also finding encouragement in Christ.

Read Philippians 1:1 – 2:18 and 4:4-9. Remember Paul is writing this from prison.

Despite all Paul has suffered, he is able to remind the believers in Philippians that “the Lord is near” (4:5) and because of that, they can rejoice despite trials. Our hope is that through our time together walking through the book of Acts, you have been reminded that God is near. He is near in the joy but also in the pain.

Take some time to think through some examples of God’s presence with people throughout the book of Acts. Make a list.

Then take some time to consider how you have experienced God’s nearness to you personally this fall. Add these memories to the list.

Spend some time in prayer. Be honest with God about any grief you might be feeling. Thank God that He is with us and that the story is not over yet.