

CONVICTIONS OF STEEL

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“God not only loves you very much but has also put His hand on you for something special. When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn’t just words. Something happened in you.

The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions.”

1Thessalonians 1:4-5 (The Message)

Paul’s words above from 1Thessalonians are so powerful because he did more than say them; he lived them. After modeling convictions of steel throughout a nor’easter that lasted more than two weeks (see Acts 27), Paul continues to display his devotion to Christ as he is met with a storm of a different sort in Acts 28.

Please read Acts 28:1-6 and record what happened here: _____

Keep in mind that though Paul finds himself safely on shore (Acts 28:1), his body had taken quite a beating. He’s hungry, cold, exhausted – soaked to the bone from his time in the sea. To top it all off, what are the weather conditions in Malta on the day of Paul’s rescue (verse 2)? _____

Seems poor Paul couldn’t catch a break. Surely he appreciated the “unusual kindness” shown by the natives (verse 2). Is there someone in your life who’s been struggling lately and, if so, what could you do to show that person “unusual kindness” in this time of need? _____

The natives of Malta built a fire to warm Paul and the ship’s crew. According to verse 3, what was Paul doing while the natives were working? _____

Paul’s ship is gone, but he’s still alive, and it’s time to get on with the business of living, so Paul – prisoner turned leader in this case – pitches in and gathers firewood right alongside the island natives. He made a choice. How do you think his choice *to help* influenced and encouraged those around him? _____

Even though most people would agree that Paul had earned the right to sit back and relax after his battle with a raging nor'easter, he chooses to gather fuel for the fire, knowing that his actions would not only speed up progress, they'd also motivate those around him. How do you imagine the ship's crew, or the natives themselves, might have reacted if Paul had chosen *to be served* rather than *to serve*? _____

The choices we make impact others. Just like this scene in Acts 28, there will be times when we could choose to insist upon being justified, but it would be more beneficial for everyone involved if we instead chose to be God's servant. There will be times when the high road means focusing on consoling others, rather than focusing on ourselves being consoled. Have you ever faced such a season in your life and, if so, what did it look like? _____

When times are tough we can take on the attitude of Paul, which picks up a stick to stoke God's holy fire, or we can let an ice-cold mood douse other's flames of comfort and joy. Write your prayer to God here, telling Him what choice you'd like to make, and asking Him for the strength to follow through when the time comes: _____

Conflict can come even when we make the right choice, as we see in Acts 28:3. What happens to Paul while he's feeding the fire? _____

How was the viper driven out of hiding? _____

Vipers tend to stay hidden unless they're hungry or disturbed. In this scene, the heat of Paul's fire drives this poisonous snake out into the light where it instinctively fastens itself onto Paul's hand. Paul's now dealing with a stronghold.

Have you ever experienced a time when some secret stronghold was driven out into the open by the heat of a crisis? _____

Sinful attitudes, prejudices and addictions often surface when our peace is disturbed. If we choose to feed these things, they will remain strongholds in our lives – overpowering us and preventing us from fulfilling our destiny.

The good news is that the very fire that causes sin to surface can be used by God to purge our strongholds and purify our hearts. We should not be surprised, then, when these fiery trials arise.

Read 1Peter 4:12-14 and record what it says here: _____

When we find ourselves suffering according to God's will (see 1Peter 4:19), we must be willing to place our strongholds on God's altar and submit to His holy fire so that through the burning and purification process our sinful desires would be eliminated.

What will we receive once we've gone through this refining fire, according to Hebrews 12:28-29? _____

Paul knew he would receive a kingdom that could not be shaken, and he acted accordingly.

How did the islanders react to seeing a viper attached to Paul's hand in Acts 28:4? _____

On the contrary, what was Paul's response to the serpent's attack as noted in Acts 28:5? _____

Oh, that we could ignore the criticisms around us, shake off our strongholds and move forward with God! To be able to go through God's consuming fire and – once on the other side – realize that things cannot touch us as they used to!

Have you experienced a time such as this when you walked through a season of suffering only to realize that God strengthened you as a result? If so, describe it here: _____

Still trapped in the vice of a stronghold? It's time to shake that thing off! Throw it into the fire so it may be consumed as a sacrifice and you might be set free. Is there a viper fastened to your hand? Confess it here in a prayer to God, asking the Holy Spirit to set you free from its grip: _____

Jesus knows what you're going through and wants to set you free from sin and from sorrow. What is His goal for you as found in Job 23:10?_____

This time of testing will come to an end, and if you closely follow Christ's steps (see Job 23:11), you will come forth as gold, none the worse for wear.

Once Paul shook that snake off into the fire, he suffered no ill effects. He had been set completely free, yet the people around him had a hard time believing that. What did they expect, according to Acts 28:6?_____

Your time of suffering need not defeat you. You don't have to cycle back into sin, and you don't have to be defined by a snake bite from your past anymore. What piece of your past are you ready to leave behind?_____

Read Paul's words in 2Corinthians 5:16-21 and record verse 17 here:_____

You are a new creation in Christ! No need to carry around those scars anymore. In fact, rather than focus on our old wounds what should we fix our gaze upon and be committed to, according to 2Corinthians 5:19?_____

We are Christ's ambassadors, and He has committed to us His message of reconciliation. Paul took on this charge with steely conviction. He used his own colorful past to point people to Jesus. In Acts 28:6, what did the people suspect about Paul?_____

Paul, however, never let anyone elevate his status to that of the One True God. Instead, he dedicated his life to exalting Christ and Christ alone. Record his convictions of steel from Philipians 1:21 here:_____

God has His hand on you for something special, too. How can your life point others to Christ? What conviction is the Holy Spirit placing within you?_____

Arise and shine! Time to shake off the dust and make Jesus Christ visible to those around you. Time to follow through on your convictions of steel.