I decided to approach this last sermon in my sermon series on marriage in a different way than I originally planned. I want to speak today about hope, hope as it relates to marriage. You might be enduring some tough times in your marriage and I want to encourage you today! God can help you survive the tough times in your marriage! We survive the tough times in marriage and in life by holding on to our faith in Jesus tightly. Keep trusting Jesus when difficulties occur!

We learn from our scripture lesson today, from the Apostle Paul’s experience, that we should keep trusting God when difficulties occur in your life! Keep trusting God when difficulties occur in your life! Please turn your bulletin over to the back and you will see the sermon outline.

You might be experiencing some kind of hardship or difficulty in your life today. Perhaps you’ve been having financial problems that seem absolutely overwhelming and you don’t know how you’re going to make it; or you’ve suffered the loss of a loved one recently and you find yourself struggling to get just get up in the morning; or you’ve been fighting a lot recently with your spouse, or you have a personal health issue or someone at work has caused you a lot of anguish and heartache. Whatever your difficulty or hardship, keep trusting God in the midst of it! Why?

God wants to help us. God wants to help you with your difficulties and hardships. Jesus told us in Matthew 11:28-30, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”. The Lord will help you hold on; He will give you his Holy Spirit’s presence, strength, perseverance, and hope!

I love these verses from Isaiah 43:2-3 “When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior”.

In our scripture lesson today from Acts, the Apostle Paul sailed for Rome under guard. While appearing before a Roman governor in Caesarea, Paul appealed to Caesar. Before being shipped off to Rome, Paul appeared before King Herod Agrippa. After hearing his testimony, King Herod told the Roman governor that Paul could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. But, since Paul appealed to Caesar, he had to be taken to Rome.

In the early verses of chapter 27, Luke introduces us to a centurion by the name of Julius. Luke proceeded to provide details of their treacherous, maritime adventure. Let’s put our map on the board so you can see the course of Paul’s journey. Note the location of Fair Havens, on the island of Crete. Look in your Bible in:
Acts 27:9 Luke, who accompanied Paul on this journey, notes how dangerous sailing had become due to the time of year. “after the Fast” refers to the Day of Atonement, a very holy day in which the High Priest would give a special sacrifice for the sins of the people. This date usually occurred in late September or early October. Unsafe winds and cloudy weather made travelling dangerous at this time of year. Remember, the ancients would use the sun and stars for navigation and if they couldn’t see them, they had real problems!

Vs.10-12 Paul warned the Romans about continuing the journey. But the centurion listened to the advice of the pilot instead. So, they continued on their way, hoping to reach Phoenix. Phoenix doesn’t appear on the map I have for you but it does appear on other ancient maps. So, the group left Fair Haven intending to reach Phoenix and spend the winter there. But this didn’t happen! What kind of sailing vessel did they have anyway? This ship had 276 men on board, according to Acts 27:37. Historical scholars believe this ship was about 140 feet long and 36 feet wide. In addition to prisoners, it carried grain. The ship didn’t have a rudder but two large paddles coming from each side of the boat served to steer the ship.

Vs.13-15 A wind of hurricane force struck. The men on board ship were completely surprised! Isn’t the way many of our difficulties and hardships occur in life? They catch us by surprise! Your elderly mother falls at home and breaks her hip and has to be hospitalized; or your husband suddenly resumes his excessive drinking habit; or your wife informs you one day out of the blue that she’s leaving you. Difficulties and hardships often occur suddenly! When these hardships suddenly strike what can we do to hold on to our faith, to keep trusting God? Let’s see what Paul did to survive:

1. Receive God’s guidance while using common sense.

Vs. 16-19 The sailors did everything they possibly could to keep the ship upright during the storm! They threw cargo overboard and passed ropes under the ship to keep the ship from being pulled apart by the powerful force of the wind. They later took soundings because they feared hitting rocks.

Vs.20-21 Luke describes their sense of hopelessness. Note how he uses the first person plural, “we” to describe their feelings. Everyone suffered due to the bouncing of the ship, the wind and waves and lack of food. Not that they would have kept the food down anyway, but they did need some nourishment.

Vs.22-24 Paul encouraged them to persevere, to keep up their courage because no one would lose their life. He explained how an angel of God told him that he didn’t need to fear anything because he would stand trial before Caesar and everyone on board the ship would be saved.

Paul watched the sailors throw cargo overboard, pass ropes under the ship and do everything they could to protect their ship and avoid disaster. The sailors used common sense! We too should use common sense as we battle life’s storms, problems and difficulties. But make sure at the same time you also remain open to God’s guidance! Don’t limit yourself to your own common sense! An angel visited Paul and Paul heard the angel’s message. He took his advice!

Many years ago before our family moved to the Rogue valley I interviewed with several other churches on the west coast who needed a Pastor. One church I interviewed with was the Brookings Presbyterian Church. At that time I worked on the staff of a large Presbyterian church in Sacramento. The Pastor I worked with had very high expectations for work load and time...
devoted to ministry. Consequently I had very little time with my young family. So, after several years I felt that we needed to move. The Brookings church seemed to be my source of relief and deliverance from the demanding situation in Sacramento. So, when Sally balked at moving to Brookings we had several fights over it. Sally argued that she would not be able to continue working as a hospital nurse if we were to move to Brookings since Brookings did not have a hospital and further, our son who had started kindergarten in Sacramento would not be able to continue since at that time Brookings did not offer kindergarten. Still, I argued we could figure out a way to make it work. We continued to pray and ask the Lord for guidance. He gave clear guidance to us when we tried to negotiate the terms of call with the Brookings committee and they refused the terms we thought we needed to live in Brookings. In retrospect I know we made the correct decision, though at the time I struggled greatly!

We often discuss our problem or hardship with our spouse if we’re married, and/or with family members, friends, people we admire and trust. We mull it over in our heads; we do everything we can to come up with a solution or means of solving our problem or hardship! There’s nothing wrong with thinking about our hardships and ways to resolve them, with talking them over with people we love and trust. But be sure that you receive God’s guidance and direction and ask for it in prayer!

2. Keep up courage and good cheer!

Look in the text in vs.20 where Luke notes the desperate, fatalistic attitude of the men on board the ship: “we finally gave up all hope of being saved”. Paul, however, refused to accept these bleak, dark feelings of hopelessness and despair! Paul hadn’t done anything wrong to deserve this hardship. Notice how Paul managed to keep his courage and good cheer in spite of what seemed to be a desperate and hopeless situation.

Paul told the men in vs.22 “But now I urge you to keep up your courage because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed” and then in vs.25 “So keep up your courage, men for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me”. The original word for “courage” is the word euthomos, which means literally, “good cheer”.

Paul’s words of encouragement were not based on wishful thinking but a personal, angelic visit to him. The angel promised deliverance from certain death. Look in vs.23 where Paul described the angelic visit: “Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, “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”.

An angel visited Paul on board the ship, assured him he would be standing trial in Rome before Caesar and told him all the men aboard the ship would be saved! This angelic message gave Paul great hope! Inspired by the angelic message and visitation, Paul told the men to keep up their courage and be of good cheer!

You might find yourself this morning dealing with a hardship or difficulty that doesn’t seem fair or right. Life’s full of injustices and unfairness because we live in a broken, fallen, and sinful world. You might not have done anything wrong to deserve your hardship! Your marriage might be suffering greatly; or you might be fighting a chronic illness, or your employer decided
to let you go, or you have a relative who won’t speak to you, though you’ve never done anything to hurt them. Are you struggling with a difficult situation like this?

Paul serves as a wonderful model for us! Caught in a great storm on the Mediterranean Sea, he kept his courage and good cheer. God help us to do likewise in the midst of our storms in life!

You might remember the biblical story of Hannah and her husband, Elkanah. Hannah was barren; she could not have children and to the ancient Jews this was catastrophic! Hannah prayed fervently for God to give her children. Finally, after Eli the priest saw her praying so intensely he thought she was drunk, Eli offered a blessing for her and we read this in 1st Samuel 1:18 “Then she went her way and ate something and her face was no longer downcast”. Though still not pregnant, Hannah’s whole demeanor, her whole attitude changed from sadness to joy! Through prayer and the encouragement of the priest, Hannah experienced joy! She kept up her courage and cheer! Shortly this happened, Hannah became pregnant with Samuel.

There’s another step we can take to help us keep trusting God when difficulties occur:

3. Exercise faith in God!
Look in your text in vs.25, where Paul tells the sailors and fellow prisoners, “So keep up your courage men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me”. Paul truly believed in the truth of the angelic message! Paul believed, he exercised faith as the angel told him, that no one on board the ship would die.

The story ends by Luke describing the ship hitting a sandbar and running aground. The centurion ordered all those who could swim to do so, and then we read in vs.44 “The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety”. Did you hear that? “Everyone reached land in safety!” Later we read that they had landed on the island of Malta. So, the angelic message was correct! Everyone was saved!

When you experience hardships and difficulties in your marriage, exercise faith in God, believe in him, trust him to help you endure and survive! God will help you; He will give you hope and courage! When you wonder if you will be able to even survive your hardship, remember that Paul survived his hardships by exercising faith in God! Paul described in 2nd Corinthians 11 how he had been beaten, stoned, shipwrecked three times, spent a night and day in the sea and lived in constant danger for his life. He managed to survive all these hardships by exercising faith in God!

So, keep trusting God when difficulties arise! As God gave Paul the strength, grace and courage to survive this shipwreck, God can give you the strength, grace and courage to survive your difficulties! We worship and serve a God of grace and hope! Cling to the blessed hope you have in Christ! He will not disappoint you! I love Paul’s words to the church in Rome. These Christians were struggling with heartache, disappointment, trials and problems. Paul wrote to them in Romans 12:12 “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer”.

As I close my message, I’d like to invite our elders and prayer team leaders to get up and be available for prayer today. You might be enduring some difficulty in your life or in your marriage or a loved one might be struggling with something that needs prayer. Please, come up and be prayed for!!