

FLYING CLOSER TO THE FLAME

STUDY ELEVEN

When the Spirit Brings a Slow Recovery

Acts 28:1–10

I would like to dedicate this message to you who are in the process of healing, and you can't explain why it's taking so long. The counsel you've heard sounds like clichés. You don't need more verses; you just need time.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

INSTANT, miraculous healing is rare. Usually, healing takes time . . . sometimes, a *long* time.

When lingering pain and discouraging setbacks mark the journey, lengthy recoveries can seem like a trek through a deep cavern filled with confusing turns, dead ends, and fears of never finding the way out. Promising therapies fall short. Medical treatments fail to bring results. At these times, depression sets in. Domestic conflict can even erupt as those close to us secretly wonder if we even want to get better.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll admits,

We much prefer hearing accounts of miracles as opposed to long, nonsensational stories of slow recoveries. In fact, we tend to be impatient with those who can't seem to take our advice and “snap out of it” or “get well soon,” like the greeting card urges them to do. But like it or not, the wise words of Hippocrates are true: “Healing is a matter of time.”¹

What do we do when the Spirit brings a slow recovery? How do we navigate this dark tunnel?

Such an extended period of healing came at a crucial hour in Paul's life when he was shipwrecked on a small island. Acts 28:1–10 gives us a brief account of this unique season for Paul and those near him, and it offers vital spiritual lessons for our own slow recovery.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Have you or has someone you love entered a season of slow recovery? An accident may have caused the injury, maybe disease was at the root, or the wounds may be from emotional trauma. Recovery has included a string of hospital stays and appointments with more specialists than you can count.

Consider God's Word as your road map and the Holy Spirit as your ever-present companion. In prayer, ask the Lord for wisdom and encouragement as you open the Bible and take the next step toward healing. Express your prayer here.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul's shipwreck occurred on his trip to face his trial in Rome. His ship was caught in a violent storm and driven into open waters. Finally, after fourteen days lost at sea, the crew sighted land and made for shore. The battered ship hit a shoal, and when the vessel started breaking apart, the exhausted passengers spilled over the rails into the treacherous shallows. Some swam desperately while others clung to the ship's debris like life rafts. All 276 people made it to land alive but soaking wet and with all their belongings gone (Acts 27:13–44).

The ordeal had taken a tremendous physical and emotional toll on everyone. They were going to need time to heal on their unplanned stop at this island of refuge.



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Observation: What Happened on Malta

As you read the account, you'll observe the pronouns, *we* and *us*. Luke, the author of Acts and Paul's "beloved doctor" (Colossians 4:14), included himself as Paul's traveling companion, fellow missionary, and personal physician.

Recalling the incident, Luke wrote, "Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta" (Acts 28:1). To get your bearings, look up Malta in your Bible atlas or on the map, "*Paul's Journey to Rome*," at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org). The island is about 60 miles south of Sicily, eighteen miles long and eight miles wide.² What do you observe about the storm-driven path the ship took on its voyage and the remote location of Malta?

Paul's unexpected detour to Malta proved to be a God-ordained respite for healing. Read *Acts 28:1–10* and list the ways the people of Malta applied the therapeutic balm of kindness to Paul and the other passengers.

The islanders could have turned a blind eye to the plight of the passengers or, worse, exploited their misfortune. Instead, they extended welcoming hands. How refreshing are acts of kindness when we're healing!



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People can be fickle, however, even when their hearts are in the right place. How did the islanders illustrate their fickle nature toward Paul in [Acts 28:3–6](#)?

How did Paul return their goodwill toward him with goodwill of his own in [28:7–9](#)? How did Paul's actions follow Jesus' instructions when He sent out His disciples in [Luke 10:5–9](#)?

In the process of healing, Paul ministered to someone else. Helping others is part of recovery . . . not early on, but eventually. You are being prepared for such.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Two Kinds of Healing

Publius' father was sick with a potentially fatal island illness, fever and dysentery. How was Paul's healing of Publius' father similar to Jesus' healing in [Matthew 8:14–15](#) and [Luke 13:10–13](#)?



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How do we interpret Paul's actions? As an apostle of Christ, what truth was he signaling through this instantaneous healing of Publius' father?

This was the only case in the New Testament outside the person of Jesus Christ in which any other person healed by laying on of hands. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

As news spread, other sick people came for help. Luke used a different term to describe their healing, *therapeuō*, from which we get our English word, “therapy.” The New American Standard Bible translates the word, “getting cured” (Acts 28:9). According to *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*,

It suggests not miraculous healings but medical treatment, probably at the hands of Luke the physician. Verses 10 and 11 suggest that this medical ministry lasted throughout the three months [sic] stay at Malta.³

So, it's possible that, while one person was healed instantly, the other sick people were cured over time. One thing was certain, the Holy Spirit was involved in both kinds of healing—whether by miracle or by medicine.

Through prolonged recovery, God does things in us, and cutting that process short is not the task of any individual. Sometimes it takes time. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Spirit's Ministry during Recovery

We all hope to sail through recovery. So, when problems drive our recovery process off course, we can feel like we've been shipwrecked on a remote island—stripped of everything we hold dear and wondering, *Where am I?*



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And yet, the Holy Spirit is with us on our “islands” and may have led us to these places to heal us in body and soul. The psalmist reflected on his afflictions,

*My suffering was good for me,
for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees.* (Psalm 119:71)

Recovery forces us to stop and listen to the Spirit in ways we wouldn't otherwise. What eternal perspectives does the Spirit teach us during recovery, according to [2 Corinthians 4:16–18](#)?

How does the Spirit deepen our character during our suffering, according to [Romans 5:3–5](#)?

Pastor Chuck Swindoll summarizes the Spirit's inner ministry during recovery:

A major benefit of taking time to heal occurs within you where the Spirit is doing some of His best work. Almost imperceptibly, you are becoming a person with keener sensitivity, a broader base of understanding, and a longer fuse! Patience is a by-product of pain. So is tolerance with others and obedience before God. It is difficult to know how to classify these characteristics, but for lack of a better title, let's call the whole package *Spirit-given wisdom*.⁴



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Application: Gleaning the Spirit's Wisdom

Through the healing process, the Spirit often helps us see what's truly important, the things of eternal value. If you are enduring a season of slow recovery, what wisdom is the Spirit giving you?

How has He opened your eyes to see God in a new light during your recovery?

How are you healing spiritually as well as physically?

If you know someone who is going through a slow recovery, remember the example of the kind people of Malta. When it was time to leave, the people showered “honors” on them, and supplied them with “everything [they] would need for the trip” (Acts 28:10).



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How can you act kindly, give honor, and show support to the recovering person you know?

People who feel stranded on an “island” of recovery may be grieving the loss of a loved one whose death was tragic and devastating, healing from an emotional trauma or mental illness, recovering from addiction, convalescing from illness, surgery, disease, or enduring a multitude of other afflictions.

If you’re one of these people, let Luke’s account of Paul on Malta encourage you. Receive people’s acts of kindness as refreshment from God. Accept their fickle nature with patience. As you’re able, find ways to help others who need God’s healing touch. When it’s time to leave, thank the Lord for the Spirit’s wisdom that only a slow recovery can bring.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the lessons I’ve learned during my period of recovery. Suffering makes me a “real” person, frayed at the edges and full of scars but also more patient and compassionate because of the ordeal. Help me to lean on You through the pain and draw closer to You. Give me eyes to see others who need my support in their recovery. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Flying Closer to the Flame* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 227.
2. Thomas Constable, “Acts 28:1,” *Constable’s Notes*, netbible.org.
3. George E. Ladd, “Acts,” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, 1990), 1176.
4. Swindoll, *Flying Closer to the Flame*, 228.

