

How to Keep Serving God When Life Bites Back: Lessons from Acts 28

Life has a way of knocking us down. Sometimes we find ourselves washed up, exhausted, with nothing left. But what happens when we pick ourselves back up and start serving again, only to get bitten by something unexpected? Acts 28 gives us a powerful picture of how to keep going when serving costs us something.

What Happens After a Shipwreck?

In Acts 27, the apostle Paul survived a devastating shipwreck. Everything was gone. Possessions, the ship, their plans. All they had were the clothes on their backs and their lives. Maybe you've been in a similar place, not literally at sea, but emotionally drained, spiritually exhausted, physically spent, holding onto whatever driftwood you can find.

Here is the encouragement from Acts 28: God is not done with you.

What looks like a disaster may actually be God's direction toward a new opportunity for ministry. The shipwreck wasn't the end of Paul's story. It was just the next doorway.

What Does It Mean to Serve Others Like Paul Did?

When Paul and the survivors landed on the island of Malta, the locals showed them what the Bible calls "unusual kindness." The Greek word used is *philanthropia*, the love of mankind. They built a fire, they welcomed the survivors, and they showed genuine hospitality.

Paul didn't sit back and wait to be served. He got up and started gathering sticks for the fire. No committee. No permission slip. He just saw a need and met it.

When God captures your heart, service becomes natural. The happiest people in life are those who find a way to serve others. That is simply how God made us.

Why Does Serving God Sometimes Lead to Getting Hurt?

Right in the middle of serving, a viper came out of the bundle of sticks and fastened itself to Paul's hand. He wasn't bitten before serving or after. He was bitten while serving. That is an important detail.

Here are four dangerous realities about serving the Lord:

1. Serving Doesn't Make You Immune from Hardship

There is a temptation to believe that if we are obeying God, nothing bad will happen to us. But Paul was doing exactly what God called Him to do when the viper struck. Faithfulness is not a shield from difficulty.

2. The Bites Often Come While You Are Serving

Those bites come from two sources. The first is from Satan himself, who whispers things like "no one appreciates what you're doing" or "you should just stop." He would love nothing more than to see you bow out of service.

The second source is the sins of people around us. As one pastor put it: if we are going to wash feet like Jesus did, expect to get kicked in the face every once in a while.

Those bite marks can look like misunderstood motives, false accusations, or harsh judgments from people who don't know your heart or your story.

3. Don't Let the Bite Become Your Identity

Some people carry the snake around long after it has bitten them. They show others the fang marks, collect sympathy, and begin to define themselves by what was done to them. There is no pride in being bitten while serving, but there is great danger in letting it define you.

It is one thing to remember what happened. It is another thing to still be living in it years later.

4. Don't Get Caught Up in People's Opinions

After the viper bit Paul, the locals went from calling him a murderer to calling him a God. Two extremes, both completely wrong. Paul hadn't changed. Their opinion had. People are quick to put others on a throne and quicker to tear them down. Don't build your identity on applause or criticism. Neither one should keep you from serving.

How Do You Shake Off Bitterness After Being Hurt?

Verse 5 says Paul simply shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. That is the model.

You don't hand the snake to someone else. You don't keep it as a pet. You shake it off into the fire.

In Numbers 21, the Israelites were bitten by fiery serpents and began to die. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent on a pole. Whoever looked at it by faith would live. Jesus later referenced this moment in John 3:

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."
- John 3:14-16

The cross is the antivenom for sin's poison. The one who was biting all of humanity was judged there. Time doesn't always heal. Getting even doesn't always heal. New circumstances don't always heal. What ultimately heals is fixing your eyes on what Jesus did at the cross and trusting Him with the wound.

The scars don't have to be a reminder of what someone did to you. They can become a reminder of how God heals.

What Happens When You Refuse to Quit?

Paul didn't get bitter. He kept serving. And because he did, the entire island of Malta experienced healing and the Gospel. Three months earlier, Paul had arrived with nothing. He left with friends, provisions, and a testimony of God's faithfulness.

When you lean into the Lord and keep your heart soft, He expands the ministry. But if Paul had quit at the moment of the bite, he would have missed everything that came next.

Paul eventually made it to Rome, where he spent two years under house arrest sharing the Gospel with everyone who came to him. Acts 28:31 closes the book with Paul "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding Him."

The Gospel is unchained. Persecution, shipwrecks, snake bites, rejection, none of it stopped it. And God is looking for people who will be vessels to carry it forward.

Life Application

This week, identify one area where you have been bitten while serving and have allowed that wound to slow you down or pull you out of ministry. Maybe it was a harsh comment, a false accusation, or a season of feeling unappreciated. Bring it to the cross. Shake it off into the fire. Ask God to heal the wound and restore your willingness to serve.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Is there a bite mark I am still carrying that has become part of my identity?
- Am I letting someone's opinion of me, whether praise or criticism, determine whether I serve?
- Have I truly brought my hurt to the cross, or am I still waiting for time, circumstances, or an apology to heal me?
- What is one practical step I can take this week to get back into serving, even if I am still healing?

God is not done with you. The shipwreck was not the end. The bite does not have to be the end either. Keep your eyes on Jesus, shake off what is holding you back, and trust that He will use your willingness to serve in ways you cannot yet see.