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In 1 Samuel 4:3, the people of Israel, because of fear and lack of trust, put the Ark of the Covenant in a vulnerable position. They were at war. They were losing the battle. And in that moment, they doubted God’s ability to care for them. Amid their battle, they asked a universal question: “Why did the Lord bring defeat on us today before the Philistines?” (NIV).¹ Today, many of us ask the same question: “How could this have happened?” Why did God not protect us from disease, disaster, despair, etc.?

The people of Israel did what we sometimes do—they crafted a plan to solve their problem. While this is not a horrible thing—after all, God created us with the power to think and act—sometimes the outcome is less than desirable. Like the people of Israel, we sometimes decide how we think God should help us. And, instead of anchoring ourselves until the storm passes, preserving what is essential to our survival, we begin charting a course in the middle of the storm. We rush to solve our problems ourselves, resorting to our own devices, sometimes sacrificing what is most valuable to us. We, too, say, “Let us do this/that/or the other. . . .”

Anchor Types

Several years ago, I found an article about the Blue Water Sailing School in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Blue Water teaches individuals how to sail 35- to 50-foot vessels.² It offers lessons in sailing, navigation, and anchoring. In another article on how anchors work,³ I learned that there are several types of anchors, and each works differently—no one anchor is suitable for all situations, and most boats and ships carry more than one type.

For example, lightweight anchors dig into the bottom rather than being held steady by immovable weight. They have flukes (broad triangular plates that look like prongs) that dig into softer surfaces or can be dragged along the

bottom to find a crevice on a hard surface. Some anchors that work on soft surfaces are also effective in hard mud or weeds and on rocky surfaces. These anchors have a pivot at the crown of the shank (or the main arm of the anchor) that allows the shank to swing from side to side as the sailing vessel moves in the wind. Decisions about

which anchor to use depend on factors such as the composition of the bottom surface, whether soft sand, mud, or rocks. Other considerations include the depth of the body of water, whether

a lake, river, or ocean, and the current, tide, and wind direction. Possible obstructions such as debris, fissures in the surface, and sea creatures that live on the bottom surface (e.g., coral reefs, oysters,

clams, etc.) also factor into decision-making.⁴ Interestingly, each type of anchor clings in a different way. Lightweight anchors “dig in” or “find a crevice” to hook themselves. Heavyweight anchors pivot, allowing the vessel to roll with the waves while they dig into the surface.

Similar to how the captain of a vessel decides which anchor to use, throughout our lives, we will need to decide what type of anchor we will need in a given situation. Do we need to cling? Do we need to pivot? Is the surface soft and flexible or rigid and immovable? And, as the old hymn says, “Will our anchor hold in the storms of life, when the clouds unfold their wings of strife? When the strong tides life, and the cables strain, will your anchor drift, or firm remain?”⁵

We Need an Anchor That Holds

By 1 Samuel 7:2 to 5, the people of Israel recognized that only God, not their best-laid plans, could deliver them: “Then all the people of Israel turned back to the Lord. . . . the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.” When Israel realized their need for an anchor, they “dug in.” In verse 5, we

Anchored in a Covenant

Continued on page 45