

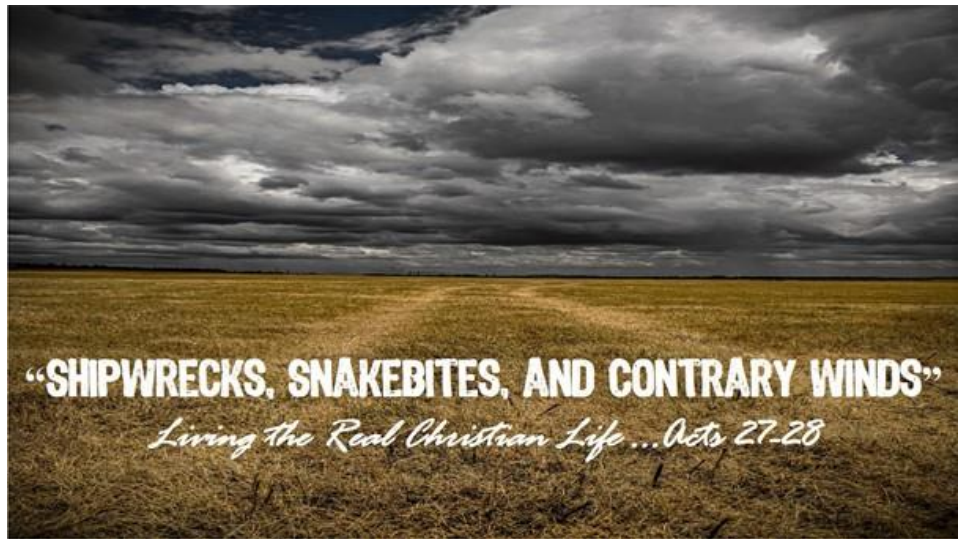
# “Shipwrecks, Snakebites, and Contrary Winds”

*Living the Real Christian Life*  
- Acts 27-28 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
at JF Believers Church  
in Menomonie, Wisc  
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Acts 27:1 *And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. 2 So,*

*entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. 3 And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care. 4 When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. 5 And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. 6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board. 7 When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. 8 Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. 9 Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, 10 saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." 11 Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. 12 And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there. 13 When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. 14 But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. 15 So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive. 16 And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. 17 When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven. 18 And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. 19 On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. 20 Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up. 21 But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. 22 "And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. 23 "For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, 24 "saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' 25 "Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. 26 "However, we must run aground on a certain island." 27 Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. 28 And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms. 29 Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. 30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off. 33 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. 34 "Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." 35 And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. 36 Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. 37 And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. 38 So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea. 39 When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible. 40 And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. 41 But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves. 42 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. 43 But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, 44 and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land. CH 28:1 Now when they had escaped, they*



then found out that the island was called Malta. 2 And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. 3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4 So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live." 5 But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. 7 In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. 8 And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. 9 So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. 10 They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary. 11 After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. 12 And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. 13 From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, 14 where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. 15 And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. 16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him. 17 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, 18 "who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. 19 "But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. 20 "For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." 21 Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. 22 "But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere." 23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, 26 "saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; 27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'" 28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

## Chapter 27

There are many storms that a man will pass through in life. There are storms of correction because of rebellion, as in the case of Jonah. There are storms of perfection, like that which the disciples endured on the Sea of Galilee. There are storms of protection in order to get us through a difficult situation...as in the case with Noah, and lastly, there are storms of direction. In chapter 27, we find Paul moving into just such a storm...*a storm of direction.*

All the debate over the right or wrong of Paul's recent decisions and actions, and thus his subsequent imprisonment are at this point, *a moot subject*. For this great apostle's destiny was now set. He was in a way beginning his fourth and last missionary journey, *but this one he is doing in chains*. Paul was now heading to Rome, and would, according to Scripture, never see his homeland again. It is the last chapters of Acts and the last chapters of Paul's life. He **wanted** to finish well. How **will** he finish?

Acts 1:8 says "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Paul was now going to fulfill the last part of that promise as he headed off to the "uttermost parts of the earth."

**27:1-8** Paul was now delivered into the hands of a centurion by the name of Julius. A centurion was the head over 100 soldiers. The New Testament introduces several of these Roman centurions, all of which played important commendable roles in Christianity: *It was a centurion who came to Jesus to get healing for his servant. Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, was a centurion. And it was the centurion in charge at the cross who murmured those immortal words: "surely this was the Son of God."*

As the journey toward Rome progressed, this centurion obviously grew to trust Paul to some degree. When the ship arrived in Sidon, he allowed Paul to freely go and visit his friends, apparently trusting him to return after. That may not seem like a big deal, but had Paul not returned to the ship, it would have cost the centurion his life, for those were the rules!

The text herein steps us through the journey with great historical accuracy. Port by port, Paul moves closer to Rome.

**27:9-13** While this centurion trusted Paul to a degree, he wasn't going to take sailing advice from him! Paul warned those in charge that if they continued on, the journey was going to have an "unintended end." However, it seemed no one was looking to this little rabbi for professional sailing council. Those who controlled the ship evidently did not want to be stranded for the winter in the small town of Fair Havens. They no doubt desired to spend the winter in a town big enough to have some action and nightlife. And perhaps the owner of the ship wanted to get his grain to a port where he could sell it. But it seems that greed and fleshly desire would ultimately be their downfall.

NOTE:

How to *not* find God's will:

- 1) Be Impatient: *Isa 28:16 "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily."*
  - 2) Take a vote: *God and His Kingdom is not part of the democratic process.* (Note Moses and the children of Israel in the desert.)
  - 3) Go whichever direction the wind blows: *circumstances cannot dictate God's will.* God will sometimes use circumstances as part of the execution of His plan, but it will never be His soul method or even His primary one.
  - 4) *Do whatever is easy and comfortable or exciting.*
  - 5) *Fail to listen to council.* It's easy to hear those around us when the issue is minor or benign. It's harder when we are passionate about an issue and emotions are running high. We need...*we must*, be willing to hear the warnings, and God often uses the council of those around us that we have trusted to lead us.
- I'm not talking about asking your single buddy for marriage advice, your close friend to tell you the critical truth about a potentially damaging behavior, or the guy in church that has been financially broke for as long as you can remember about how to deal with your money issues. I'm talking about those who you have allowed to be in authority and council in your life in the past...the ones you are afraid will actually tell you the truth you don't want to hear!
- 6) *Be unwilling to let go of things.* When we staunchly cling to possessions, positions, and desires, then they become our God...or 'idols.' They can become the oil in the water...unable to mix with the plan and direction that God has for you, no matter how we might try to have both.

**27:14-20** Things went bad very quickly as can often happen on the open sea that time of year. Paul's discernment and council had gone unheeded by these men. They should have listened to Paul. Not just because he was a man of God and one filled with the Holy Spirit, but moreover scripture tells us that Paul had already been shipwrecked two times! That makes him a veteran! Maybe even a professional!

After literally strapping the ship together with "duct tape," they came upon the "Syrtis Sand," a graveyard of many ships on the north African coast. Fearing they too would be shipwrecked there with many from the past, they opened the sails and let the ship be driven by the wind. The storm threatened the ship to such a degree that everything that was non-essential was finally thrown overboard in an attempt to lighten the ship. All that was earthly valuable...that which was so important before to keep them pushing ahead outside of council and God's will, now are lost. When it is all 'hitting the fan' we finally bail out and loose everything that we clung to so tightly that it brought us to that place of chaos in the first place. Such is a vivid example of man's desperate attempts to save a situation that was never blessed by God in the first place! When everything eventually failed, all hope was abandoned.

**27:21-26** Suddenly, Paul had their attention! As is often the case when everything is collapsing, men turn to God. Paul finally had their ears. You have to love his incredulous response! "*Guys, you should have listened!*" For many folks, these are words that will be heard at their eternal judgment! So many of us are quite unwilling to hear the warnings we are given. I have wanted a thousand times to say those same words that Paul said! But pride, worldly desire, and heightened emotions wouldn't allow them to hear it, and so like children they did what they wanted and they "reaped the harvest" of their decision. The greatest irony of such, is so very often those very individuals will then actually seek to blame the very individual that warned them against such action for its catastrophic outcome!

Despite their foolish decision, Paul actually brings a message of *grace* to these sailors. An angel had appeared to Paul to assure him that God was in control and that Paul, *for good or bad*, had an appointment with Caesar. It seemed that at this point God intended on him making that appointment! Note this: Whenever the Lord is involved, the words "*do not be afraid*," are sure to be uttered. With those words backing us up, mere mortal man can "*take heart and believe God*." But that does not mean that the battle was over just yet. For such does not mean that every intervention by God is a rescue out of the peril and discomfort! Paul says...almost in passing or as a secondary thought, "*However, we must run aground...*" The fact again is that storms are a very real part of the Christian life. When we pray in times of such crisis, what we want, *what we expect*, is for God to rescue us *out* of the situation. You know...to stop the wind and the waves...to send a helicopter to pull us out of the crisis...to send the coast guard to the rescue. But the truth is, God often does not work that way. He often allows us to go through the storm. Why would He do that if He loves us as He says He does? Because such storms will make us cement our faith or to lose it. We will grow stronger and more mature in our faith, or we will be exposed *at best* as spiritual children, or *worse* as faith frauds. But the storms will indeed open our eyes, one way or another. And the fact is, it will be insight that would never be garnered without that storm.

Yet while God did not take Paul *out* of the crisis, He did go *through it* with Paul! An angel had appeared to Paul and reassured him that God was with Him and he would get through this storm. It wasn't the first time that Paul was dealt with in that manner, nor was it a strange occurrence to many scriptural players. Certainly many of us here today have known such an experience personally. Psalms 23 says "...though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; **For You are with me**; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." Oh, you and I are going to make that walk, but if you are a true child of God, *He will walk it with you*.

Times such as these are the toughest times to trust God! That truth has not been lost in the ages! We are corporately enduring such a period as I speak. It can be extremely hard to stand strong and not run when it appears all hell is breaking loose and God is telling you to “*relax and trust Him!*” Let me ask you this: Do we trust Him even when He intends to “run us aground?”

**27:27-32** There are always those who aren’t able to take the pressure. These are those who bail out when they need to sit tight. We call them “runners.” Giving God control of our lives can often be a nail-biting experience! There will always be some folks who will be unwilling to surrender control of their lives, even *control of the moment*, to the God of all! That’s been the real test during this pandemic...we feel so powerless, and since we can’t control or run away from the virus, we appoint a scapegoat and attempt to control or run away from that. The bible says that it is impossible to please God without faith. And in that, it is clear that many of us indeed are *not* pleasing God.

Let me ask you honestly, how much do you trust the Lord, really? Are you willing to trust Him even when things seem out of control? When effectively and practically they *are* out of control? We must misunderstand this principle truth as it pertains to a real Christian life. *To trust God means to obey Him!* And no “*unless*” is allowed into the equation. Don’t say that you trust Him if are not willing to do what He tells you to do and not to do!

Some of the men on the boat attempted to run, but Paul put a stop to it. At this point, the majority were siding with Paul.

**27:33-37** Paul encouraged his shipmates to essentially “get on with it.” His attitude was “let’s eat!” And why not? If God says He has you, then God has you! Things may not work out just as we would have planned it, but then again, we are...*at least theoretically*, trusting in *Him* to run the show, are we not?

In the exercise of what seems to be their new faith, those on the ship gave God thanks and began to eat together. Now *that* is real communion! Just like those trepid moments in the upper room as Jesus was marching toward the crucifixion. Could things have looked any worse that day? And yet they broke bread, gave thanks, and ate together, ...Jesus *was* crucified, and the world was profoundly and forever changed.

I know what is being said. *Is this some sort sadistic fatalism?* To the world, yes. But to the believer, it is the “*peace of God that passes all understanding.*”

**27:38-44** The attempts to fulfill the lusts of flesh and greed had failed, but the Word of God stood the test. Despite the adversity and fear, Paul trusted the Lord and he saved the day. Because the truth is, sometimes storms come even when we are exactly in God’s will and plan.

Paul gave thanks and moved in God’s will despite what was happening. Paul understood that the storms of life *must come* and they will test the faith of each of us when they do. Each of us, as we pass through such times in our lives, will either stand in faith or we will jump ship. That choice rests in each one of us.

## Chapter 28

**28:1-2** Paul just had an “edge-of-your-seat” adventure, as well as a test of his spirit and commitment. Through his guidance, those aboard the ship had been saved from certain death. The text says they “escaped” and found their way to the island of Melita, now known as “Malta.” On the island, they found some locals who were anything but Jewish! But what they lacked in culture, they made up for in kindness. They built a fire and took the people of the boat in and cared for them.

**28:3-6** At this point, after the events upon the boat, Paul could have started his TV ministry! But he had not forgotten his humility. We find him not basking in his recent fame, but actually out gathering firewood! It may seem like a small thing, but it casts a bit of light upon the character of this man Paul!

When Paul was gathering wood, he inadvertently had picked up a snake which proceeded to latch onto his hand. Now what would you and I have done at this point? Let's review...falsely arrested, jailed and mistreated, kept imprisoned without charges for two years, shipped to Rome 3<sup>rd</sup> class, passed through a terrible hurricane, seasick and without food for two weeks on a cargo ship, the ship runs aground and breaks apart, he has to jump ship and swim for it, but he's still alive...and now *this*? Wouldn't we be like... "*Oh, come on!*" Because of this, the locals quickly extrapolated that Paul was no doubt a terrible man and God was now going to take his life.

But Paul had survived far worse than this snake. God had other plans for Paul! When the locals saw that he didn't fall over dead, they decided instead that he must be a god!

**28:7-10** It seems that God can always take the craziest and most difficult situations and turn them around for His glory. Paul could have naturally been very self-absorbed after all that had happened to him, but that was not the case. Because they suspected that Paul was "something special," they took him to the "island mayor," who took Paul in and cared for him for three days.

Soon however, Paul found out what God had in store for him. There is never a real vacation for any servant of God! No matter where he goes and what he does, a man or woman of God is always ready and watching for the opportunity to glorify the Father and further the Kingdom! 1Corinthians 15:8 "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" The father of his host was sick. Dysentery and fever was common on this island, even up until recent days. Paul simply did what came naturally! He jumped into the situation and laid hands on the man and healed him.

Note that Luke the physician was there by Paul's side, faithfully recording the events that made up this book of Acts. But God did not use him in the medical work this time. He instead chose to supernaturally work through the hands of Paul. Paul acted because he believed in the power of God, not because he thought anything of himself. He discerned that God was willing and wanting to manifest His power in this situation. Others came to Paul also, and were healed of their sicknesses.

What started with a shipwreck turned out to be something quite different. But when God is present in a situation, things have a way of turning out much differently than we thought they would.

**28:11-16** The historical details of the journey to Rome continued. "Some Christians from Rome traveled 33 miles south to a place called Three Inns to meet Paul. Others traveled ten miles farther south to meet Paul at Appii Forum. Three years earlier in his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul had expressed his deep desire to see them someday (see Rom. 15:24). That day had come..." (The Nelson Study Bible)

Once the gang finally arrived in Rome, Paul was given special consideration, even as a prisoner, to be housed under "special circumstances."

**28:17-22** Paul geared up to deliver his last speech in the book of Acts. True to the end, Paul goes for his Jewish brethren first. Gathering together the Jewish "powers that be," Paul begins a personal defense concerning the actions of his life.

These Jews hadn't been a part of the grand scheme against Paul. They knew about this whole "Christian thing," and they weren't too happy about it, but they really didn't have a "beef" with Paul. In fact, they appeared to be a bit curious.

**28:23-24** What's wrong with this picture? Paul seemed to be oblivious to the fact that he was a prisoner! Even in such a situation as this, Paul was still "doin' the work." This from the guy who, years earlier, had a brief trip to the heavens: "*caught up to the eternal...and saw unspeakable things...*" I guess such a view of life and death has a way of making a man fearless. Do you have such a view?

“...and some believed the things which were spoken.” And isn’t that the point of all of this? When all the shipwrecks, beatings, stonings, persecution, and difficulties are over, when all the miles are behind us, is this not the “bottom line” of it all? What else could matter at that point in our lives?

**28:25-29** Paul gives one final shot as these men are departing his company. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, he tells them that the prophet was correct so many years prior. Isaiah warned his Jewish nation that although they were God’s chosen, God was also sending his salvation to us, the Gentiles. To us: “and we would hear it.” Have you heard it?

**28:30-31** For two more years Paul was held under house arrest. Everyday could have been his last, and yet he kept teaching, he kept preaching. His life was in his Lord’s hands, and he knew it. It was from here that Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon.

Look at the last verse. He “preached the kingdom of God,” taught “the things of Jesus Christ.” He did it “*with all confidence.*” And “no one forbid him.” “No man tried to stop him...” *Oh, really Paul? Yet in Paul’s mind, I’m sure that that was no doubt the way he remembered his ministry... As Job once said... “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him...”*

As the book of Acts comes to a close, what can we gather from it? So much to hold on to, so much to absorb. But let us through it all garner this one truth. The Spirit of God came and filled some folks who went on...despite all that came at them and all that tried to stop them, and they lived large. They lived bold lives that mattered. It was a crazy and wild ride. It was a ***Real Christian Life...***