

WHEN LIFE GETS OFF COURSE

2 Corinthians 11:25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

Acts 27:9-15 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.

Paul had been in three shipwrecks when he wrote 2 Corinthians (3 years earlier – around Acts 20). No details are given – why is detail given here? Why would Luke devote such a long section of Acts to a voyage and a shipwreck? “First the natural, then the spiritual” (1 Corinthians 15:46) – there is a spiritual lesson here!

Paul was finally on his way to Rome – although he had never expected to go as a prisoner. They set out from Caesarea and began to sail along the coast of the Mediterranean. However, the voyage became difficult because of strong winds. They transferred to a large grain ship from Egypt, but strong winds again hindered (it took them “many days” to travel just 130 miles). Finally, they struggled into the port known as Fair Havens, on the south side of the island of Crete. It is here that the centurion makes his fateful decision.

The word of God is filled with the tragic record of men and women who began well but failed to survive spiritually ...

- The Spirit of the Lord came on Samson, but he squandered most of his life in sensuality.
- God chose Saul to be Israel’s first king, but had to cast him aside when pride ruined him.
- Solomon prayed for divine wisdom in his youth, but tolerated pagan evils in his old age.
- At one time Judas was an apostle!
- Even Paul said, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” (1 Corinthians 9:27)

Storms you could not dream of may have come into your life or family. Sooner or later, you will be tested – that’s the nature of life’s “voyage.”

You may be asking yourself, “How did I allow myself to become shipwrecked?”

People don’t drift into salvation, but they can drift very easily into storms they never expect!

WHAT HAPPENS TO A TYPICAL PERSON IN THE “STORMS OF LIFE”?

1. THEY CAUSE THEIR OWN PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF THE WRONG DECISIONS THEY MAKE.
 - Fair Havens was not the most comfortable place to spend the winter months, and a fair wind at the time of sailing made it look like they could quite easily get to the port of Phoenix.
 - Paul admonished them to stay in Fair Havens because sailing was dangerous at this time of year, but they listened to the majority rather than the man of God.
 - No one thinks their storm is going to be bad enough to shipwreck them!
2. THEY TRY TO RIDE OUT THE STORM, BUT THEY SIMPLY END UP WAY OFF COURSE.
 - If only they could have seen that their 50-mile journey around an island would take them 600 miles off-course across the Mediterranean Sea (like starting from Saint John for Digby, NS and landing in Chesapeake Bay by Washington, DC)!
 - They hoped to outrun the storm and eventually get back on course, but the moment they gave up resisting the wind they lost control. Very few storms simply blow over – so stay on course!
 - Sin will take you farther than you want to go!
3. THEY USE ALL THE “SELF-HELP” TECHNIQUES THEY CAN TO SURVIVE, BUT TO NO AVAIL.
 - They used ropes and chains to wrap around the ship to keep it together, trying to reinforce the beams and plug the leaks. They pulled in the sails and just concentrated on survival.
 - “Self-help” is a booming business today, but it only prolongs the inevitable.

4. THEY BEGIN “THROWING THINGS OUT” IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE THINGS BETTER.

- They cast out even the tackling of the ship – things they needed! Many people work so hard at being religious, because they want to be saved. But we can't save ourselves from the storm!
- God doesn't expect you to “throw out” your personality to please Him. He wants all of you! Christianity is more than just gritting your teeth in a joyless existence!

5. THEY FINALLY COME TO THE PLACE WHERE “ALL HOPE IS LOST” AND THEY FALL APART.

- But it was in that place of failure that the man of God stood forth with a message of hope:
- “Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.”
- Don't get offended at the preacher who tells you that you made a wrong decision; the only reason you are offended is that you know he is speaking the truth!
- The storm wasn't over, BUT FOR PAUL THE STORM WAS OVER BECAUSE HE HAD HEARD FROM THE LORD! There may still be damage to “the ship,” but my life is saved!
- You are closest to salvation when you have lost all hope in your own good works!

This is not the typical “happy ending” story! In fact, the worst is yet to come! That's why many people never survive the storm – they expect the sun to shine immediately, but instead the waves sweep higher and the winds intensify.

When the ship hit the rocks, Paul had to jump in the cold, stormy waters and swim for his life. BUT HE STILL HAD A HOLD OF GOD'S PROMISE! While the sailors mocked, the sails ripped off, and the boat fell apart around him, Paul paced the deck and encouraged the crew, “I believe God!” He even believed God while swimming for his life!

Paul said, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” (Philippians 4:11) It didn't matter what happened to him once he had heard from God. God had taken the sting out of the storm!

Ride out your storm! God is not about to let you go under if you will look to Him for salvation!