



A Five-Day Devotional Journey

January 13 - 19, 2008

Acts 1:12-26

Selling Out or Pressing On...

1 Constantly united in prayer

Read. Acts 1:12-14 NLT

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile. When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying. Here are the names of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Zealot), and Judas (son of James). They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

Read. Ephesians 6:18-19 Message

Prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out.

Think.

- Who was present in this upper room? What surprises do you find on the list?
- What does Luke say they were doing during their time together?
- What has your typical experience been of group prayer? Has group prayer compared with times of personal prayer? How have you been blessed through each format? What is the importance of each?
- "Pray hard and long." What challenges you most in following Paul's admonition in Ephesians 6:18-19?

Pray.

Father, lead me into a fuller, more fruitful experience of prayer — both when alone and with others. Help me to more effectively connect with your heart!

Live.

Spend time in prayer with other believers today.

If we give up and turn our backs on all we've learned, all we've been given, all the truth we now know, we repudiate Christ's sacrifice and are left on our own to face the Judgment—and a mighty fierce judgment it will be!

Hebrews 10:26-27 *Message*

His feet swung gently in the wind.

The ground below was cracked and dry. Barren and unclaimed, the land would now forever be marked by him. With a "snap," the rope broke and his bloated body fell — a sickening splat as the corpse burst open, creating trickling eddies of gore.

Who would have imagined this as the final end of one the favored disciples of Jesus? He carried the bag and along with it great trust, but in his heart he was a thief. None of the others suspected a thing; none saw it coming. None witnessed the silent daily transactions, the inner auctioning away of his soul.

Though revisionist history tries to paint a gentler, more intriguing picture, the biblical, all-too-human portrait of Judas Iscariot remains. Perhaps hitting us all just a bit too close to home, even as, with the other disciples, we eagerly affirm our fealty and love for the Master. For in the contrasted paths of Judas and Matthias we are all faced with our own choices. Are we moving towards our own dead-end Akeldama as we silently auction our own souls, nodding our heads to the world's latest offers or are we pressing ever deeper into the reality of Jesus, the reality of the kingdom and of the powers of the age to come? Matthias, quiet and unheralded, had followed along with Jesus from the beginning. Through rejection and passion and death — and on into the morning of resurrection, Matthias was still there. And with the seemingly fickle throw of the die, he stood up and embraced the Lord's call. Rather than dry church history to recall as trivia, the record of Matthias stepping into the place of Judas invites us all to search our own hearts, and unlike Judas, to press on with Jesus and to engage the Spirit-filled advent-ure.

2) Judas bought a field

Read. Acts 1:15-19 NLT

During this time, when about 120 believers were together in one place, Peter stood up and addressed them. "Brothers," he said, "the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. Judas was one of us and shared in the ministry with us." (Judas had bought a field with the money he received for his treachery. Falling headfirst there, his body split open, spilling out all his intestines. The news of his death spread to all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means "Field of Blood.")

Think.

- How do you account for the fall of Judas?
- Considering the fact that God foretold it and that Satan manipulated him (see John 13:2), what would you say was God's part, the devil's part, and Judas' part in his betrayal of Jesus?
- What manipulations of the enemy do you need to shake off your life? What new direction would you like to see your life take? What new choices is the Lord calling upon you to make?
- What bottom line personal message do you see in the life and death of Judas?

Pray.

Lord, make me sensitive to any leaning towards betrayal and self-seeking in me. Keep me free of all roots of bitterness and greed!

Live.

Take time to be still before the Lord today.

4) Let someone else take his position

Read. Acts 1:20-22 NLT

Peter continued, "This was written in the book of Psalms, where it says, 'Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.' It also says, 'Let someone else take his position.' So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection."

Read. Hebrews 12:15-17 Message

Keep a sharp eye out for weeds of bitter discontent. A thistle or two gone to seed can ruin a whole garden in no time. Watch out for the Esau syndrome: trading away God's lifelong gift in order to satisfy a short-term appetite. You well know how Esau later regretted that impulsive act and wanted God's blessing—but by then it was too late, tears or no tears.

Think.

- What "short term appetites" do you being called on to set aside now so you may experience God's "lifelong gift"? What does that gift look like for you? What would you say is the key to not being diverted from God's purpose for your life by short term appetites?
- What was the qualification for someone to take the place of Judas? What significance do you see in this?

Pray.

Lord, help me to pass by Esau's soup and embrace the real feast you offer! Keep me weed free and rooted deeply in the reality of you and your kingdom.

Live.

Make a list of some specific weeds that need to be divinely "nuked" in your life. Take the first step.

3) God helping us, we'll stay true

Read. Hebrews 6:1-8 Message

So come on, let's leave the preschool finger-painting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ. The basic foundational truths are in place: turning your back on "salvation by self-help" and turning in trust toward God; baptismal instructions; laying on of hands; resurrection of the dead; eternal judgment. God helping us, we'll stay true to all that. But there's so much more. Let's get on with it! Once people have seen the light, gotten a taste of heaven and been part of the work of the Holy Spirit, once they've personally experienced the sheer goodness of God's Word and the powers breaking in on us—if then they turn their backs on it, washing their hands of the whole thing, well, they can't start over as if nothing happened. That's impossible. Why, they've re-crucified Jesus! They've repudiated him in public! Parched ground that soaks up the rain and then produces an abundance of carrots and corn for its gardener gets God's "Well done!" But if it produces weeds and thistles, it's more likely to get cussed out. Fields like that are burned, not harvested.

Think.

- What effect does the warning of this passage have on you? What questions does it raise? What assurance does it provide? What steps can you take now to ensure you don't end up on the negative side of this passage?

Pray.

Lord, break my wandering ways — keep me close to your heart!

Live.

Pray the above prayer throughout the day.

5) I have better things in mind for you

Read. Acts 1:23-25 NLT

So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they all prayed, "O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven.

Read. Hebrews 6:9-12 Message

I'm sure that won't happen to you, friends. I have better things in mind for you—salvation things! God doesn't miss anything. He knows perfectly well all the love you've shown him by helping needy Christians, and that you keep at it. And now I want each of you to extend that same intensity toward a full-bodied hope, and keep at it till the finish. Don't drag your feet. Be like those who stay the course with committed faith and then get everything promised to them.

Think.

- What do you think of the selection method used by these early followers of Jesus? How do you go about making the major decisions in your life?
- To what new work or ministry might you sense the Lord calling you at this time?
- Like Joseph, when have you been passed over for someone else? How did you handle it?
- How well are you doing at "staying the course with committed faith"? In what ways would you like to see your faith and commitment renewed?

Pray.

Lord, sustain me by your grace to not only stay the course with you, but to finish it, and to finish it well.

Live.

Pursue a new ministry opportunity you have been putting off.