


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
July 20 - 26, 2008

Acts 15:36-16:15

No one can control the wind or lock it in a box.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 Message

The Fine Art of Catching the Wind

1 Sharp disagreement

Read. Acts 15:36-41 NLT

After some time Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing." Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas, and as he left, the believers entrusted him to the Lord's gracious care. Then he traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there.

Read. Philippians 4:1-3 Message

My dear, dear friends! I love you so much. I do want the very best for you. You make me feel such joy, fill me with such pride. Don't waver. Stay on track, steady in God. I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn't want his children holding grudges. And, oh, yes, Syzygus, since you're right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message—worked as hard as any of us. Remember, their names are also in the Book of Life.

Think.

- What was the source of the argument between Barnabas and Paul? What reasons might Paul have used for not taking John Mark? What reasons have Barnabas given for taking him? Which viewpoint do you tend to agree with?
- From what you can see, do you think they handled their dispute well or poorly? Why? What was the ultimate outcome of this argument?
- What principles for settling arguments do you see from an older and wiser Paul as he discusses the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche? Is there a conflict in any of your relationships in which you need to apply any of these principles?

Pray.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, especially when tempers are flaring and voices are raised. Help me to see the larger picture in the conflicts I encounter today.

Live. Prayerfully move towards settling an unresolved dispute.

"What am I doing here?"

"I didn't sign up for this! Is this why I left family and home, why I went through the pain of circumcision...just to walk mile after mile seemingly to no end?"

Some such thoughts may have gone through young Timothy's mind as he trudged along with Paul and Silas through the center what we know today as Turkey.

Paul's initial vision was to revisit these little fledgling communities of faith he had left in the wake of his first journey. Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch. But what then? It seemed natural that they head southwest down the Lycus Valley past Laodicea and the other towns there, emerging on the coast at Ephesus. But "no" was the clear answer from the Lord to that perfectly logically sounding idea. The Holy Spirit was forbidding — hindering, preventing, stopping — them from any ministry at all in Asia. Exactly how he communicated this, Luke doesn't say. But they got the message. There's also no indication they were told where else to go at this point. Their options where to go back, or to head northwest and move forward.

They moved forward — but only to run into another barrier — one more Holy Spirit roadblock. Which meant they now faced the sea at the port city of Troas — in Asia, where they were told not to preach.

It had been a whole lot of traveling with very little action or fruit, evidently. Timothy was no doubt waiting for the fireworks — but everything seemed to fizzle out as they just kept on walking.

What a picture of life as a Jesus follower. A long journey with dust and sweat, frustrations and delayed expectations, unexpected delays and barriers, and incomplete, piecemeal instructions delivered while en route to who knows where. If we thought it would be easy and uncomplicated, this bold print in our travel brochure tells us otherwise, if we will see and hear. We don't control or box the Wind — nor do we make our own. It's walking and waiting, sometimes painfully, to catch it.

2) A young disciple named Timothy

Read. Acts 16:1-5 NLT

Paul went first to Derbe and then to Lystra, where there was a young disciple named Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek. Timothy was well thought of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium, so Paul wanted him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek. Then they went from town to town, instructing the believers to follow the decisions made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in their faith and grew larger every day.

Read. 2 Timothy 1:5-7 Message

That precious memory triggers another: your honest faith—and what a rich faith it is, handed down from your grandmother Lois to your mother Eunice, and now to you! And the special gift of ministry you received when I laid hands on you and prayed—keep that ablaze! God doesn't want us to be shy with his gifts, but bold and loving and sensible.

Think.

- Do a quick profile of Timothy. How would you describe him? His character and abilities? His heritage? What liability did some see in him? How did Paul address this issue?
- Why did he have Timothy circumcised after just making such a big deal about Gentiles not being circumcised?
- Who in your life has been like a Lois or Eunice, handing down the faith to you? To whom are you passing on your own faith?

Pray.

Lord, give me the willing heart of a Timothy that will go where and when you call me, making whatever sacrifice is needed.

Live. Mentor a younger believer — share your life and your faith.

4) Come over to Macedonia and help us!

Read. Acts 16:9-12 NLT

That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there. We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.

Think.

- What was Paul's vision in the night? How did he and his company interpret it? What did they do?
- Considering the change from "they" to "we" in this section, who has evidently joined Paul's company?
- Has God ever communicated his direction for your life through a dream or vision? What happened?
- What are some practical ways of discerning whether or not a dream is really from the Lord and not just last night's dinner?
- What are some other ways in which the Lord has spoken to you?
- Whose cry for help might you be hearing right now? How can you move to meet that cry?

Pray.

Lord, whether through dream or sanctified "gut feeling" let me hear your call on me in this season of my life — and the cry of need to which you would have me move.

Live.

Listen for your own "Macedonian cry" this week — and take some practical steps to answer the call.

3) The Holy Spirit stopped them

Read. Acts 16:6-8 NLT

Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas.

Read. Galatians 5:24-25 NLT

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

Think.

- Why do you think Paul and his team kept hitting these barriers? How did they respond to them? After being blocked north and south, where does the team end up? How do you think they felt at this point?
- How do you typically respond to barriers and delays and redirection? Do you usually see barriers in life as from the devil (to be prayed against) or from God (to be trustingly accepted)? How do you tell the difference?
- What key do you see in the Galatians passage for finding the Spirit's direction in our lives?

Pray.

Holy Spirit, help me to more sensitive to your movements. Block my path when I need to wait; keep me from rushing headlong in a direction that would not accomplish your purposes.

Live.

Submit to the Lord any barriers you may be experiencing in your life. Share these with one or two others who can listen and pray with you over the Lord's direction in your life.

5) The Lord opened her heart

Read. Acts 16:13-15 NLT

On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She was baptized along with other members of her household, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed.

Think.

- Where did Paul go upon arriving in Philippi? Whom did he find there? What did he do?
- How would you describe Lydia? What kind of woman was she? How does she respond to Paul's message and why? What do you make of her being so adamant that Paul and his company stay with her?
- A journey that started with an argument has now landed Paul on a riverbank on another continent, speaking to a group of humble women about Jesus. Review your own journey over that past year or two. What unexpected turns have you taken? What opportunities and obstacles have you faced?
- How well would you say you have been "catching the wind" of the Holy Spirit in your life? Do you feel like you've been in the doldrums lately? Catching a gentle breeze? Borne along by a rushing torrent? Explain.

Pray.

Holy Spirit, make me as hospitable to your presence & direction in my life as Lydia was to Paul. Let me not fear where you would lead.

Live. Practice some outrageous hospitality this week.