


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
August 3 - 9, 2008

Acts 17:1-15

"Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

Ahab to Elijah, 1 Kings 18:17

Troublemakers

1 Steel in their convictions

Read. Acts 17:1-4 NLT

Paul and Silas then traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he used the Scriptures to reason with the people. He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah." Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women.

Read. 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5 Message

I, Paul, together here with Silas and Timothy, send greetings to the church at Thessalonica, Christians assembled by God the Father and by the Master, Jesus Christ. God's amazing grace be with you! God's robust peace! Every time we think of you, we thank God for you. Day and night you're in our prayers as we call to mind your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope in following our Master, Jesus Christ, before God our Father. It is clear to us, friends, that God not only loves you very much but also has put his hand on you for something special. When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions.

Think.

- What was Paul's initial experience as he shared Jesus in the synagogue at Thessalonica? What was the focus of his message? How did he make his points? Who was listening?
- In the opening remarks of his first letter to the Thessalonians, how does Paul describe and account for the change that he witnessed among these people?
- "Work of faith...labor of love...patience of hope..." To what extent are you seeing this kind of fruit in your life? What is the root of this kind of fruit?

Pray.

Spirit of God, put steel in my convictions. Move me beyond outward forms of Christianity to a deepening experience of the real fruit of being a radical Jesus follower.

Live.

Speak out about Jesus this week — find common ground & be bold without being religious or rude or condescending or weird.

"Wow. I think they're actually getting it."

I can't help but wonder if that thought wouldn't have gone through Paul's head when he heard the public charges brought against him.

Paul had been in Thessalonica for less than a month. Some good inroads had been made into both sides (Jewish and Greek) of the community during that time, as he honed his message and approach and watched the Holy Spirit go to work among them.

Then the fledgling faith community was hit by waves from both directions. Jewish reactions slam into pagan suspicions. The entire city is in turmoil as a mob forms carrying Paul's hapless host in its wake — Paul and his company are carefully hidden away. Zealous for tradition and law and Jewish heritage against that heathen Paul, they had recruited at the core of the mob "lewd fellows of the baser sort" from the heathen crowd to function as their mouthpiece.

"Paul and Silas are troublemakers — they are turning the world upside down, and now they are doing it to our city!" I can see Paul nodding his head. "Not bad. Although it would be better put that we are turning the world right side up."

"They profess allegiance to another king, Jesus." Again I see Paul smile. "They do understand."

I believe Paul through his experience clearly understood what we all too often miss: Jesus didn't come as an addendum, an insert, or a corrective patch on the current system like a smiley face patch on a worn out pair of old jeans. He's brought a whole new wardrobe. He's introduced a whole new system called the kingdom of heaven that is in the process of making all things new. Jesus got a cross for his trouble. Paul got a riot for his. We might tend take issue with the "troublemaker" label. I think Paul would have made it into a badge and put it on proud display. For Jesus followers are and always have been troublemakers — agents of holy "chaos" and subversive grace, harbingers of a kingdom through which everything must change.

2) Lives echoing the Master's word

Read. 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10 Message

You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you, and determined to live that way yourselves. In imitating us, you imitated the Master. Although great trouble accompanied the Word, you were able to take great joy from the Holy Spirit!—taking the trouble with the joy, the joy with the trouble. Do you know that all over the provinces of both Macedonia and Achaia believers look up to you? The word has gotten around. Your lives are echoing the Master's Word, not only in the provinces but all over the place. The news of your faith in God is out. We don't even have to say anything anymore—you're the message! People come up and tell us how you received us with open arms, how you deserted the dead idols of your old life so you could embrace and serve God, the true God. They marvel at how expectantly you await the arrival of his Son, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescued us from certain doom.

Think.

- What kind of impact did these believers in Thessalonica have? Where had news about them spread? What were people saying about them?
- "Great trouble...great joy" How had the Thessalonian believers experienced both of these elements in their walk with God? How does your experience compare with theirs?
- In what specific ways do you see your life echoing Jesus and his message? How would you like it to more clearly echo Jesus?

Pray.

Lord Jesus, let my life be a clearer reflection of you, in good times and in times of great trouble. Give me the joy and expectant hope evident in these early believers.

Live. Read 1 Thessalonians at least once today in one sitting. Take in, absorb the life and rhythm of these early disciples.

4) They searched the scriptures

Read. Acts 17:10-12 NLT

That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men.

Read. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Message

When you got the Message of God we preached, you didn't pass it off as just one more human opinion, but you took it to heart as God's true word to you, which it is, God himself at work in you believers!

Think.

- What reception does Paul find in the synagogue at Berea? What did they do with Paul's message? How does Luke account for their eagerness?
- "They searched the scriptures day after day..." Meditate on and then unpack this statement. What keys does it hold for us in our search for knowing and living out the truth?
- How would you describe your own attitude towards the Bible? Is it an open or closed book to you? Is it intimidating or inspiring? Out-dated or highly relevant? Why?

Pray.

Holy Spirit, breathe upon me that your Word may be alive and vivid and fresh and open and life-changing to me. When I find myself in the doldrums and all seems stale and old, revive my heart and my imagination to again hear your rhythms in the Word.

Live.

Read and chew on as much of Psalm 119 as you can manage today

3) Troublemakers all over the world

Read. Acts 17:5-9 NLT

But some of the Jews were jealous, so they gathered some troublemakers from the marketplace to form a mob and start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd. Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council. "Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world," they shouted, "and now they are here disturbing our city, too. And Jason has welcomed them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus." The people of the city, as well as the city council, were thrown into turmoil by these reports. So the officials forced Jason and the other believers to post bond, and then they released them.

Think.

- Who stirred up trouble in the city? What accusations were made by the mob before the city council? How did the council respond?
- Have you started noting a "Pauline pattern" in Acts? Enter a new town. Find a synagogue. Preach Jesus from the scriptures. Persuade many. Cause a riot. Get in trouble with the law. Leave town before being killed. How do our methods of evangelism and church planting compare with Paul's? How might they need to differ? What do you think we can learn from Paul?
- Are Jesus followers peacemakers or troublemakers? Explain.

Pray.

Lord, help me to find my voice in this culture as I follow you; not to live a life calculated on the basis of human approval, but also not to live a life of abrasive contradiction in a society that desperately needs your touch.

Live.

Find a creative way to get involved in community life and to use your voice for the kingdom.

5) A career of opposing God

Read. Acts 17:13-15 NLT

But when some Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, they went there and stirred up trouble. The believers acted at once, sending Paul on to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind. Those escorting Paul went with him all the way to Athens; then they returned to Berea with instructions for Silas and Timothy to hurry and join him.

Read. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 Message

Friends, do you realize that you followed in the exact footsteps of the churches of God in Judea, those who were the first to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ? You got the same bad treatment from your countrymen as they did from theirs, the Jews who killed the Master Jesus (to say nothing of the prophets) and followed it up by running us out of town. They make themselves offensive to God and everyone else by trying to keep us from telling people who've never heard of our God how to be saved. They've made a career of opposing God, and have gotten mighty good at it. But God is fed up, ready to put an end to it.

Think.

- What pattern repeats itself in Berea? How do you think Paul kept on going, running into the same walls of opposition over and over? How did he explain this opposition to the new believers in Thessalonica? How did he encourage them?
- How do you typically respond to repeated opposition? What do you find helps you to keep on going in spite of it?

Pray.

Lord, fix my eyes on you, even when all voices are raised in opposition. Establish me firmly in a career of moving in harmony with you.

Live. Be a "troublemaker" — perform an act of radical grace.