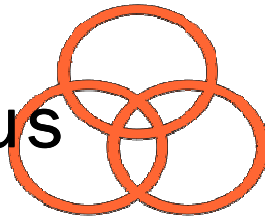



A Five-Day Devotional Journey
August 24 - 30, 2008
Acts 18:18-28

Team Jesus



1 Marking the end of a vow

Read. Acts 18:18 NLT

Paul stayed in Corinth for some time after that, then said goodbye to the brothers and sisters and went to nearby Cenchrea. There he shaved his head according to Jewish custom, marking the end of a vow. Then he set sail for Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him.

Read. 2 Corinthians 1:15-19 Message

Confident of your welcome, I had originally planned two great visits with you—coming by on my way to Macedonia province, and then again on my return trip. Then we could have had a bon-voyage party as you sent me off to Judea. That was the plan. Are you now going to accuse me of being flip with my promises because it didn't work out? Do you think I talk out of both sides of my mouth—a glib yes one moment, a glib no the next? Well, you're wrong. I try to be as true to my word as God is to his. Our word to you wasn't a careless yes canceled by an indifferent no. How could it be? When Silas and Timothy and I proclaimed the Son of God among you, did you pick up on any yes-and-no, on-again, off-again waffling? Wasn't it a clean, strong Yes?

Think.

- Evidently Paul made some sort of vow while at Corinth which was brought to completion upon his departure (the typical Jewish practice was to shave your head at the making of a vow and then again at its completion). What is your record as a "promise-keeper"? What was the biggest or the most unusual promise you've ever made and kept?
- When have you not been able to follow through on a promise? When has someone not followed through on a promise made to you? How did you handle these situations?
- In Paul's later correspondence with the Corinthians, what emphasis did he put on being a promise keeper? How can we more consistently build this value into our lives?

Pray.

Father, instruct my lips in simple, unassuming, speech issuing an unadorned "yes" or "no" as the situation warrants and as your will directs — and give me a faithful heart to follow up my words with corresponding deeds.

Live.

Do what you say today, when you say you'll do it — allow no room for excuses.

You're all picking sides, going around saying, "I'm on Paul's side," or "I'm for Apollos," or "Peter is my man," or "I'm in the Messiah group."

I ask you, "Has the Messiah been chopped up in little pieces so we can each have a relic all our own?"

1 Corinthians 1:12-13 Message

Hot buttons.

Every generation has them. Those controversial issues that grab our attention, stir our minds, fill our blogs and raise our overall temperature and tone. For us it's buttons like abortion, gay marriage, and global warming — and in church "culture wars" such things as whether or not we baptize babies or use a full band in worship.

For Corinthian believers it was lawsuits, loose-living, marital values, meat offered to idols, the role of women in community meetings, rivalries between different expressions of the Holy Spirit, and whether or not they really bought into resurrection from a philosophical standpoint.

Some of their issues remain our issues, while others leave us scratching our heads. But amidst all of their issues and ours there is, all too often, one common thread of experience: they were a fractured fellowship. Whether the issues produced the factions, or the fact that they were fractured made their issues so potent and divisive, the end result was the same: they were caught in a synergy of dysfunction, brokenness feeding on brokenness leading to more brokenness.

And so of all the issues and topics Paul could have started with, he began with and went on to devote the largest amount of space in his first letter stressing the reality of their unity as Jesus followers. He doesn't tell them to work towards unity or to hash out their doctrinal differences and come up with a common platform that left and right could live with. We've fully experienced the splintering results of that approach. Instead he draws their focus, and ours, to the reality that we *are* one field, one building, one team. At the heart of that reality is the fountain of divine love that gushes out of Paul's soul in 1 Corinthians 13. Thoroughly drenched in that fountain there is no difference that cannot be resolved or wrong that cannot be redeemed. And, as Jesus said all along, by this all people will know that we are his disciples.

2) I'll be back

Read. Acts 18:19-22 NLT

They stopped first at the port of Ephesus, where Paul left the others behind. While he was there, he went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews. They asked him to stay longer, but he declined. As he left, however, he said, "I will come back later, God willing." Then he set sail from Ephesus. The next stop was at the port of Caesarea. From there he went up and visited the church at Jerusalem and then went back to Antioch.

Read. James 4:13-17 Message

And now I have a word for you who brashly announce, "Today—at the latest, tomorrow—we're off to such and such a city for the year. We're going to start a business and make a lot of money." You don't know the first thing about tomorrow. You're nothing but a wisp of fog, catching a brief bit of sun before disappearing. Instead, make it a habit to say, "If the Master wills it and we're still alive, we'll do this or that." As it is, you are full of your grandiose selves. All such vaunting self-importance is evil. In fact, if you know the right thing to do and don't do it, that, for you, is evil.

Think.

- What seems to be governing Paul's choices as he arrives in Ephesus and then departs? What does he tell the people there?
- What concerns would you say usually govern your day to day choices and plans, as well as your longer range plans? Which attitude reflected in James' comments do you most often see in yourself? What do you think is the key to developing the genuine humility that says "If the Lord wills"?

Pray. Lord, free me from arrogance and presumptuous plans and visions. Give me childlike surrender to your motions in my life.

Live. Identify any ways you have been presumptuous about the future — and change course!

4) I planted, Apollos watered

Read. Acts 18:24-26 NLT

Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. He had been taught the way of the Lord, and he taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy. However, he knew only about John's baptism. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately.

Read. 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 Message

Who do you think Paul is, anyway? Or Apollos, for that matter? Servants, both of us—servants who waited on you as you gradually learned to entrust your lives to our mutual Master. We each carried out our servant assignment. I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plants, but God made you grow. It's not the one who plants or the one who waters who is at the center of this process but God, who makes things grow. Planting and watering are menial servant jobs at minimum wages. What makes them worth doing is the God we are serving. You happen to be God's field in which we are working.

Think.

- What picture do you get of Apollos? What kind of man is he? What impresses you most about him?
- What lessons do you see in Priscilla and Aquila's interaction with Apollos? How do you know when to correct or update a teacher or pastor (or anyone)? How did Priscilla & Aquila do it right?
- How approachable and teachable are you?

Pray. Lord bless me with the boldness of Apollos to know and speak your Word freely — and the humility to learn new lessons from unexpected sources.

Live. If someone brings correction to you, listen before speaking.

3) Visiting and strengthening the believers

Read. Acts 18:23 NLT

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul went back through Galatia and Phrygia, visiting and strengthening all the believers.

Read. Hebrews 10:19-25 Message

So, friends, we can now—without hesitation—walk right up to God, into "the Holy Place." Jesus has cleared the way by the blood of his sacrifice, acting as our priest before God. The "curtain" into God's presence is his body. So let's do it—full of belief, confident that we're presentable inside and out. Let's keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word. Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshiping together as some do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching.

Think.

- What was Paul's purpose in his third trip through central Asia Minor? What was he intent on doing?
- Which do you find more challenging — making visits or receiving them? Why?
- How does the author of Hebrews envision our coming together? What kind of motives does he see drawing us together? What kind of activities does he see taking place? How might this differ from the picture you get of "attending" a church service or a small group? How can you help this vision become more of a reality in your church or small group?

Pray.

Lord, lead me in the grace of connecting in healthy and vibrant ways with others — to spur and be spurred on to live and to love.

Live.

Really visit someone this week — come alongside someone and be God's presence in their life.

5) There is going to be an inspection

Read. Acts 18:27-28 NLT

Apollos had been thinking about going to Achaia, and the brothers and sisters in Ephesus encouraged him to go. They wrote to the believers in Achaia, asking them to welcome him. When he arrived there, he proved to be of great benefit to those who, by God's grace, had believed. He refuted the Jews with powerful arguments in public debate. Using the Scriptures, he explained to them that Jesus was the Messiah.

Read. 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 Message

Or, to put it another way, you are God's house. Using the gift God gave me as a good architect, I designed blueprints; Apollos is putting up the walls. Let each carpenter who comes on the job take care to build on the foundation! Remember, there is only one foundation, the one already laid: Jesus Christ. Take particular care in picking out your building materials. Eventually there is going to be an inspection. If you use cheap or inferior materials, you'll be found out. The inspection will be thorough and rigorous. You won't get by with a thing. If your work passes inspection, fine; if it doesn't, your part of the building will be torn out and started over. But you won't be torn out; you'll survive—but just barely.

Think.

- How did Apollos impact Corinth? What did he do?
- How does Paul compare and contrast his role and that of Apollos? What metaphors and images does he use to help the Corinthians see beyond personalities to the bigger picture?
- How is God calling you to "work in the field" or "build on the foundation"? How will you pursue this call?

Pray. Lord, give me hardworking, teambuilding hands of peace.

Live. Find a practical way to promote unity on "the team."