


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
September 14 - 20, 2008
Acts 20:1-38

Many Meetings

1 On the road again

Read. Acts 20:1-6 NLT

When the uproar was over, Paul sent for the believers and encouraged them. Then he said good-bye and left for Macedonia. While there, he encouraged the believers in all the towns he passed through. Then he traveled down to Greece, where he stayed for three months. He was preparing to sail back to Syria when he discovered a plot by some Jews against his life, so he decided to return through Macedonia. Several men were traveling with him. They were Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. They went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. After the Passover ended, we boarded a ship at Philippi in Macedonia and five days later joined them in Troas, where we stayed a week.

Think.

- What did Paul do in the immediate aftermath of the riot in Ephesus? What did he make a point of doing as he traveled south through Greece?
- What does this say about his heart? Where were his priorities?
- Who was traveling with Paul? Any guesses as to why Paul had such a large company with him?
- Would you describe yourself as a “people person” or as someone more task oriented? Why do you think this is? How do you personally maintain a balance between these?

Pray.

Father, focus my heart on the tasks you have laid before me today, and, like Paul, help me to see people...to speak and be your blessing to them...as I continue on today’s journey with you.

Live.

In the midst of all the items on your “to do” list today, take time to encourage people (family, co-workers, friends).

“Don’t they know anything, all these imposters? Don’t they know they can’t get away with this — Treating people like a fast-food meal over which they are too busy to pray?”

Psalms 14:4 Message
Many meetings.

Acts 20 is a chapter filled with meetings. Paul has one thing in mind: getting to Jerusalem with all speed. He’s a man with a mission. Luke doesn’t share it here, but Paul’s letters written at this point in the story of Acts make clear that a big item on Paul’s agenda — and why he was in such an unflappable hurry — was to bring a long planned for and carefully executed offering from gentile churches scattered through Macedonia and Achaia to the poor people of Jerusalem. It was crucial to him that this offering arrived by Pentecost — that the feast celebrating the beginning of the harvest would witness a real harvest of compassion and generosity from gentile believers on “the other side of the fence.”

But even though he was pulling out all the stops to get to Jerusalem in time, it’s important to note that he still took time to stop in the midst of a frenzied journey.

He stopped to see people.

To eat and celebrate with people.

To share his heart with people.

And even to impart life to someone who fell out of the window when he shared his heart just a wee bit too long.

Paul didn’t treat people as a fast food meal over which he was too busy to pray. People weren’t consumables to him, period. He poured *himself* out for people — even when he was in a rush. It’s a key theme in his words to the Ephesians elders: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, guard them, protect them.” Contrasted with true shepherds are the “vicious wolves” Paul warns of — wolves for whom people are nothing more than a quick meal for consumption. Paul provided these elders not merely words, but life practice patiently lived out as for three years he kept at it with this holy community of friends, pouring out his heart with them, one after another, writing with the ink of his life the truth of Jesus: “Supreme joy is found in the giving, not the getting.”

2) Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill

Read. Acts 20:7-12 NLT

On the first day of the week, we gathered with the local believers to share in the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching to them, and since he was leaving the next day, he kept talking until midnight. The upstairs room where we met was lighted with many flickering lamps. As Paul spoke on and on, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, became very drowsy. Finally, he fell sound asleep and dropped three stories to his death below. Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. "Don't worry," he said, "he's alive!" Then they all went back upstairs, shared in the Lord's Supper, and ate together. Paul continued talking to them until dawn, and then he left. Meanwhile, the young man was taken home unhurt, and everyone was greatly relieved.

Think.

- Put yourself in this upper room with these other believers during this first century "church service." What do you see? What do you hear? What do you find most striking about this glimpse into early church life?
- What lesson or lessons do you see in the story about Eutychus? What do you learn from Paul's response to the crisis of Eutychus' sudden fall? What do you think is Luke's purpose in relating this story?

Pray.

Lord, lead me into more intimate connection with a community of holy friends who eat and celebrate and share and embrace the stuff of life together, good and bad.

Live.

If you are not yet connected with a small group of believers with whom you can share life, step out and make the connection.

4) Guard yourselves and God's people

Read. Acts 20:22-31 NLT

"And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God. And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again. I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault, for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know. So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you."

Think.

- How would you define Paul's consuming passion in life? How was it reflected in his actions?
- What is the bottom line of Paul's heart for the Ephesian elders? What does he ask them to do? What does he warn them about?
- What would you identify as your driving passion in life? How is this passion evident in the way you are living?

Pray. Lord, let me not shrink back from embracing your counsel in my life and freely and lovingly sharing it. Help me to recognize and stay away from spiritual predators with hidden agendas.

Live. Prayerfully identify and follow through with the work the Lord has assigned to you in this season of your life.

3) I never shrank back

Read. Acts 20:13-21 NLT

Paul went by land to Assos, where he had arranged for us to join him, while we traveled by ship. He joined us there, and we sailed together to Mitylene. The next day we sailed past the island of Kios. The following day we crossed to the island of Samos, and a day later we arrived at Miletus. Paul had decided to sail on past Ephesus, for he didn't want to spend any more time in the province of Asia. He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, in time for the Festival of Pentecost. But when we landed at Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come and meet him. When they arrived he declared, "You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now I have done the Lord's work humbly and with many tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus."

Think.

- Why was Paul in such a hurry to get to Jerusalem? What important task, unmentioned by Luke, was Paul feeling compelled to carry out (see Romans 15:25-27)?
- Whom does Paul summon to meet with him at Miletus? What does he tell them about his work? What was his one message? What does all of this say about his motivations and purpose — and how does this speak to you?

Pray. Lord, may all my words and deeds and plans and agendas be thoroughly marinated in your will and your kingdom purposes.

Live. Write a brief summary of your work over the past year. Reflect on how it speaks of you and your focus. Submit it to God in prayer.

5) More blessed to give than to receive

Read. Acts 20:32-38 NLT

"And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself. I have never coveted anyone's silver or gold or fine clothes. You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply my own needs and even the needs of those who were with me. And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them. They all cried as they embraced and kissed him good-bye. They were sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they escorted him down to the ship.

Think.

- What's the significance of Paul entrusting these leaders to God and his word? After you have done and said all you can, how freely can you leave others in God's hands without fretting?
- What does Paul remind them he was *not* after — and how did he show this by his example?
- Put yourself in this circle of leaders around Paul. What impresses you most in their parting from one another? What's the key to developing this kind of relationship with others?

Pray.

Lord, give me your heart for those around me — in my home, my school, my work, my neighborhood, my world. Show me what it really means for me to live by the Jesus Creed — finding joy in the giving rather than the getting.

Live. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Carry these words of Jesus with you through the day; see how it affects what you do.