

# Making the Best of Road Trips

## Acts 20:13-16

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-30-2008

### Introduction

Henry David Thoreau once said, “You cannot kill time without injuring eternity.” If that is true, then a lot of us have injured our eternities. We don’t make our time count. When you read biographies of Paul, one of the things that strikes you about Paul is the way that he made his time count. But that didn’t mean that he was a workaholic. Not at all. When he rested, he made his rest count. When he ministered, he made his time of ministry count. And even the huge amount of time that he spent on travel was not wasted at all. And though I really haven’t taken the time to comment on his travels very much thus far, I think this is a nice little snapshot of how Paul made his trips count. When I have travelled to China and India, I have rejoiced in times that I have had alone, but I have also sought to make the most of times that I am seated with a companion. Those are gifts you could not ordinarily get in the busyness of ministry. So I love this little passage. And I trust that it will give you some insights for your own travel, whether across the USA or across town.

### I. The Value of Being Alone on Occasion (v. 13)

#### *A. Deliberately planned (“went ahead... given orders, intending”)*

Let’s begin with verse 13: “**Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot.**” Paul made a deliberate decision to spend a whole day traveling by foot all alone. This verse indicates that he sent the rest of the group ahead on ship. That was the easiest way to travel. But *Paul* traveled twenty miles by foot. One commentator said, “[this was] probably to gain opportunity for quiet fellowship with God, in view of what lay ahead.” The words “given orders” and “intending” showed that this was not an accident. It wasn’t as if he accidentally missed the boat and had to catch up. It was intentional, very deliberate and thought through.

***B. Paul was not being an “efficiency expert” when he chose to travel the slow way by foot (v. 13)***

And I think that Paul’s first and foremost reason was that he wanted to spend time alone with God; he wanted quality time of fellowship. It doesn’t make sense for him to make the twenty-mile walk for efficiency sake. That’s utterly inefficient! Certainly he could travel that distance by foot in one day, but it would have been much faster to travel by ship. And ship travel was dirt cheap in those days.

Which by the way, argues that efficiency should not be the only criterion for time management or even for financial management. When I was in Bible School, I was the ultimate efficiency freak. I studied time management, had ways of double and triple tasking, and made every minute count. I had stuff taped to a wall to memorize while I shaved, I reviewed my Scriptures that I had memorized while I dressed, jogged from class to class to get exercise in a minimum of time. (And of course, I was praying or reviewing Scripture or homework when I jogged.) I memorized Greek cards while standing in dinner line, and read a book in my lap while eating. I was efficient, but I was missing great opportunities to fellowship with others, minister in their lives and to just have fun. When Paul redeemed the time, it didn’t mean that he was an efficiency freak. In fact, I recently read a joke that I thought illustrates this so well. An efficiency expert ended his lecture with a note of caution.

“You don't want to try these techniques at home.”

And when somebody asked, “Why not?” he said,

“I watched my wife's routine at breakfast for years. She made lots of trips between the refrigerator, stove, table and cabinets, often carrying a single item at a time. I noticed that she could be more efficient. One day I told her, ‘Hon, why don't you try carrying several things at once?’”

“Did it save time?” the guy in the audience asked.

“Actually, yes,” replied the expert. “It used to take her 20 minutes to make breakfast. Now I do it in seven.”

I used to think that Paul’s command to redeem the time meant that we couldn’t waste a second; that we had to constantly be shaving time off of our schedule. In fact, that was the year that I kept cutting back on my sleep. My

goal was to sleep only four hours a night for the rest of my life. I thought, “Sleep is such a waste of time.” Here was a poem that was my motto:

I have only just a minute,  
Only sixty seconds in it.  
Forced upon me – can’t refuse it.  
But it’s up to me to use it.  
I must suffer if I lose it.  
Give account if I abuse it.  
Just a tiny little minute,  
But eternity is in it.

I was driven by time, not by God. There is a big difference between the two. And I regret so much my intense drive to not waste one second. I regret my focus on maintaining a 4 point average even at the expense of fellowship. Who cares what grades I got thirty years later? But what of the relationships that were not developed?

Let me give a statement that may be surprising to you – especially coming from me. Most of you know that I have a driven personality anyway. But here’s the statement: God commands you to waste time - at least it is a waste when measured by an efficiency-standard. He commands you to waste money on decorations, fun food and festival celebrations. He’s all about wasting *things* if it means that you don’t waste a relationship. Let’s think about that. Let’s see if that statement is true. Isn’t celebrating the Sabbath a waste of time? Isn’t prayer a waste of time if your only goal in life is to have a massive work output that can be measured? Now I would never have said that prayer was a waste of time back in those days, but inwardly I sometimes felt like it. I was driven by time and tasks, not by God. Here’s another question: Isn’t the quality time in the Song of Solomon an inefficient waste of time if your only goal in marriage is to produce babies? Why all that poetic interaction? Why so slow? You could do it in much less time than the couple in Song of Solomon did. But relationship and love can’t be measured in seconds and efficiency. If you worry about wasting money on wine and an expensive desert when you have guests over, you are missing the point. Isn’t evangelizing the world through sinful, weak and frail Christians a waste of time when angels could do it so much faster? For that matter, why does God have us do any of His work? He could do it instantly simply by uttering a word. He doesn’t need us.

And I bring this all up because it so easy to become driven by agendas, tasks, the expectations of others and a hundred other things, but to fail to be driven by God. And I’m not talking about excusing laziness or lack

of quality. No. Paul did everything thoroughly and with quality. There were times when God made Paul hurry, but there were other times when God made Paul slow down and relax. But the point is that he had all the time needed for relationships (you can see that in his upcoming speech), and he had all the time needed for his ultimate relationship with God.

*C. To have time alone with God (v. 13 with vv. 22-24; Rom. 15:30-32)*

And I believe this was one of those times when Paul needed to spend time alone with God. He would need to pray through what things he should communicate to the Ephesians. He would need to process with the Lord his impending difficulties with the Jews. Verses 22-24 indicate that numerous prophecies have been made about him being bound and suffering tribulations in Jerusalem. He says that he doesn't know if he will die there. In Romans 15 he asks the Romans to pray that he wouldn't die in Jerusalem but would be able to visit them. But there is a lot weighing on Paul's mind, and he needs time alone with God.

For those of you who have difficulty in developing intimacy with God, I suggest that you take a day when you can be all alone. Yes, waste your time with God. Piper's got a wonderful book, "Don't Waste Your Life." And he points out that both lazy people and driven people often waste life by trying not to waste life. Their focus is in the wrong place. When we fail to develop intimacy with Christ, we have missed out on the most important thing we could do in life. When verse 13 says, "**intending himself to go on foot**," Paul was not wasting his life. Yes, from one perspective he was, but not from another perspective. He was putting first things first. He was reserving time between himself and the God that Romans says, "**of Him and through Him and to Him are all things**" (Rom. 11:36). There are so many things that get in the way of aligning our lives with God. But when our lives are in tune with His will, then absolutely everything we do can be done for Him, through Him, and to Him.

Spurgeon once said, "If you make doctrine the main thing, you are very likely to grow narrow-minded. If you make your own experience the main thing, you will become gloomy and critical of others. If you make ordinances the main thing, you will be apt to grow merely formal. But you can never make too much of the living Christ Jesus. Remember that all things else are for His sake. Doctrines and ordinances are the planets, but Christ is the sun. Get to love him best of all" (Spurgeon, volume 54, p. 472).

I think that is what Paul is doing here. Things are weighing upon him so heavily that verse 22 says he was “bound in spirit” and he needs to get away to realign His spirit. He hungers for God as David did.

## II. The Value of Traveling Together (vv. 14-15)

But verses 14-15 show that Paul was not a recluse. Just like Jesus, he had his times alone with Father, and he had his times of fellowship with his work associates. Luke says, “**And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. We sailed from there, and the next day came opposite Chios. The following day we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next day we came to Miletus.**” That was about a five-day trip. When you examine the route that they took you find that he was seeing exquisite outward beauty but was also seeing great spiritual darkness. Assos was an impregnable city on the southern coast of the Gulf of Adramyttium (or modern Edremit). A school of Platonic philosophy taught there, as did another school of Aristotle and his followers. But out of those schools came all kinds of evil. Mitylene was the chief city of Lesbos, the island famous for its lesbian poet Sappho. In fact, that is where the name “Lesbian” comes from. The whole island was a place of wickedness and darkness. But it was beautiful. It was a favorite resort for Roman elite. These places were beautiful, and there were all kinds of alluring things to attract tourists. Chios was the largest of the Aegean islands off the west coast of Asia Minor. Samos was just above Patmos, where the apostle John was later banished. Miletus was the capital city of Ionia and housed the great temple of Diana. From one perspective it was a great tourist trip. From another perspective these were places of danger and darkness. I took Ben to see a massive temple in Asia. I don’t ordinarily do that, but I thought this would be a good educational exercise. We were prayed up and prayed through the whole temple grounds. And Ben knows what I am talking about when I say that you could tangibly feel the darkness. So it was a good thing to have traveling companions, if for no other reason than accountability and support. It’s not a good thing for men to travel alone in resort towns like these. So that is one less that I learn.

It was also a bit tedious to travel. When I am tempted to complain about the long trips I make to India or Asia, I need to remind myself of the long trips these guys took by boat. The seven weeks between Passover and Pentecost that you find in these two chapters were largely spent in travel on boats. For everything you have to complain about on your long trips, you can remind yourself that it could always be worse, and be thankful. At least

you aren't traveling across the states in a covered wagon. So this passage gives me perspective.

But what wonderful opportunities they would have had to invest in each other's lives during this time! I love it when I can take a companion along with me on my trips. While I value the times alone when my companions are sleeping, I love the times we can talk. Those 26-40 hour trips give opportunities to talk about every conceivable topic, to discuss worldview, to counsel, encourage and grow in the Lord. In regular ministry, I just don't have the luxury to spend that kind of time discipling a person one-on-one. So I value such trips by valuing the times alone (I can get reading, memorizing and lots of prayer, and sometimes just zoning out – there's a place for that too). And I value such trips by valuing the times of talk. Both make the trips not seem quite so bad. When you travel alone, take the opportunities for prayer and listening to CDs. It's amazing how many lectures you can listen to in a year if you have a twenty-minute commute. When you travel with others, take it as a gift of fellowship from God's hands. Traveling need not be a waste. I miss my old times of commuting.

### III. The Value of Planning (v. 16)

The third thing I see in this passage is the value of planning. Verse 16 says, **“For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.”**

#### *A. Stopping in Ephesus would slow him down (“decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia”)*

Now, here is the strange thing about that statement. The text says that he doesn't stop in Ephesus because he doesn't want to spend time in Asia, yet commentators estimate that to send a messenger back from Miletus to Ephesus would take two days (about 31 miles as the crow flies) and to bring the elders back would have taken another two days. Paul then spends one day with them. So altogether, by skipping Ephesus he adds four days to his schedule. How did that save time? This has been a point that liberals have sometimes criticized. If Paul wanted to save time he could have stopped in Ephesus, spent two days there, and still been three days ahead of schedule.

#### **1. The boat retrofitting? Unloading? Reloading for five days? (see. v. 38)**

Well, that may seem like a logical criticism, but when all the facts are considered, it doesn't really hold much water. First of all, verse 38 indicates

that at the end of five days they board the same ship that they came in. For some reason the ship has been docked for five days. So they maybe didn't have much choice. Alexander suggests that the boat was unloading goods and loading a new cargo, and perhaps retrofitting the ship. In any case, if Paul knows ahead of time that this is what would happen, and he knows the other shipping schedules, this was likely the fastest way to go. While docked, he makes the most of his time. He knows ahead of time that this will be the best way to meet with the elders. So it actually shows planning.

## **2. The needs of the church?**

Second, if he had stayed in Ephesus, some commentators suggest that he would have been pressured to stick around much longer than a week. There were so many needs in the church at this time that it would have been easier to instruct the elders from a distance than to get away from them if he actually entered the city of Ephesus. That may be true; it may not be true. The text doesn't tell us.

## **3. The danger of the crisis of 19:21-41?**

Others suggest that the danger of the mob riot that happened in Ephesus in chapter 19:21-41 may still be a danger. He didn't want to risk staying in a prison. That would definitely delay him. This may be a little more credible of an explanation, though from my perspective, it seems like an understatement if it is true.

## **4. The difficulty of securing the money?**

Others suggest that Ephesus was a dangerous city, and securing the money might have been difficult.

Personally, I think it was simply a case of being aware of the shipping schedules, and it would take awhile to get another ship if he stopped in Ephesus. The only thing that this text talks about is saving time and the fact that they board the same ship in verse 38. This shows planning.

### ***B. Paul seeks to maximize his time (“spend time... hurrying”)***

A second thing that shows planning is that Paul does indeed see time like money. The Greek word for “spend time” is accurately translated. He spends time, and he plans where he will spend it. He tarries in some cities and hurries past others. He only has so much time just like he only has so much money. He doesn't want to spend a lot of time in Asia. It all shows planning.

***C. Paul is always driven by a purpose (“so that”)***

And in all of this he is driven by a purpose – “***so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem...*** Paul knows that he will suffer in Jerusalem, yet he also knows that this is his destiny, and he cannot procrastinate. But Romans 15 says that he also greatly longs to bless the church there and to find this gift of money to be acceptable. So he plans.

***D. Yet he submits his plans to God’s sovereignty (“if possible”)***

But despite all of his planning, he submits his plans to God’s sovereignty. The text adds, “if possible.”

And all these indicators are good guides for our own planning. You must plan, but you can’t plan forever. Like the fourth word in this verse, we must finally come to decisions. Nor are decisions good enough. We must take action as Paul did in these verses. Those decisions and actions must be driven by a God-given goal (the “so that” of this verse). Fifth, there must be time management on God’s plans. We saw earlier that he wasn’t driven by time and tasks, but by God. But if we are in tune with God, we will always be involved in time management (in this case, hinted at by the word “hurrying.”). This may seem like a subtle difference, but it is profound. If we serve God we will always plan and have time management. But the reverse is not always true. Many who plan and have time management begin to forget the very one that they are planning for and serving. We begin to be caught up in service rather than the Served One just as Martha got exasperated with Jesus because He wasn’t fitting her time schedule and tasks. She had reversed things. Well, Paul leaves the Martha syndrome behind when he does all of this, “if possible,” or under God’s sovereignty. All of this shows balance in planning. Some people spend so much time planning that they don’t get to the action.

Dr. J.B. Gambrel tells the story of General Stonewall Jackson’s famous valley campaign. Jackson came to a river that he needed to cross. He assigns the task of building a bridge to the army engineers. He then walked out and just happened to mention to his wagon master that it was critical that they get across as soon as possible. The wagon master started gathering all the logs, rocks and fence rails he could find and built a bridge. Long before daylight General Jackson was told that all the wagons and artillery had crossed the river. Surprised, he asked where the engineers were. The wagon master told Jackson that they were in their tent still drawing up plans for a



bridge. (Pulpit Helps, May, 1991.) That wagon master was a man who did not let moss grow on his wheels. And I find that Paul had much the same spirit. He planned, but he was a man of action.

#### IV. The Value of Retreats (v. 16b)

The last thing that I see in this section is that Paul valued retreats. He was hurrying to be at Jerusalem. And the purpose for going to Jerusalem was to celebrate the Day of Pentecost. When you look at all the relaxing that happened on Pentecost (what a workaholic might consider a waste of time), it makes a person wonder why Paul liked these festivals. Well, I think he liked them because he had balance – he was not a workaholic. Paul had enjoyed these festivals in the past. They had thoroughly refreshed him. And now he looked forward to enjoying it one last time before facing the prophesied trouble.

And there is a value to retreats. When people are climbing Mount Everest, there are at least four camps that people stop at on the way up. They have to stop because of the physical limitations of their bodies. They need time to rest. And we need times of rest on our climb of the spiritual Mount Everest.

#### Conclusion

I started this sermon by saying that every moment should count for eternity. I didn't mean that we should be workaholics; for I went on to say that God commands us to waste time, at least from an efficiency-perspective. But here is how you get the balance: when we seek Christ as the pearl of great price, and when our lives revolve around Him, then our lives will count whether we are resting or working; traveling or have arrived. Paul made everything count – his time alone, his time with associates and his times of celebration. As Piper says, the surest way to waste your life is to seek pleasure apart from Christ, to seek success apart from Christ, purpose apart from Christ, anything apart from Christ. Paul said in Philippians 1:21, “**for to me, to live is Christ...**” He is not an add-on; He *is* our life. . As Spurgeon said, He is the sun around which the planets of all other important things revolve. All of the important things in your life need to be planets revolving around the Sun. This is certainly true of your travels. Travels can be exhausting endeavors, but with a little planning, there is much that can make you look forward to your trips like Paul did. Make your travels another planet revolving around the sun of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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