

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Courage Stemming from Conviction

Acts 21:1–16

Let's resume our verse-by-verse study of Acts. Please take your Bibles with me and turn to Acts 21. And as you are turning there, let's play a little game of name that author.

Who wrote the following: "Parting is such sweet sorrow?"¹ That's Shakespeare. And we saw a bit of that "sweet sorrow" last time in Acts 20 when Paul said a tearful goodbye to the Ephesian elders. There's going to be more of that in Acts 21 today.

Here's a harder one for you. Who wrote the following?

*"All my bags are packed; I'm ready to go
I'm standin' here outside your door; I hate to wake you up to say goodbye
But the dawn is breakin'; It's early morn
The taxi's waitin'; He's blowin' his horn
Already I'm so lonesome, I could die"*

That's John Denver, "Leaving on a Jet Plane."² The context of that song is way different from Paul in Acts 21, but the pathos is the same. "I'm leavin' on a transport ship," Paul could sing. "I know I won't be back again." That's Paul and Luke as they are heading toward Jerusalem.

But here's what's different in Acts 21 from what we saw in Acts 20. In Acts 20, the Ephesian elders don't try to talk Paul out of going to Jerusalem. They are sad for him. They weep. They cry. They kiss him. They say their sad goodbyes. But they don't say, "Hey Paul, why don't you just stay here and avoid all that uncomfortable stuff in Jerusalem?" They don't say that.

But in Acts 21 as Paul is making his way to Jerusalem, almost every Christian he encounters tries to talk him out of going to Jerusalem.³ Probably you and I would have done the same. "Paul, why don't you just stay here and lie low? Why don't you avoid all that uncomfortable stuff?" Even Luke, even his faithful sidekick Luke—his Samwise Gamgee if you will—tries to convince Paul that he should avoid the imminent persecution that is coming.⁴

But Paul is unmoved by these entreaties. His conviction through the Holy Spirit is that God wants him in Jerusalem.⁵

The title for the message today is "Courage Stemming from Conviction."⁶ And I want us to explore this topic in light of what the Apostle Paul displays on his way to Jerusalem. In this passage he

¹ Spoken by Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare (Act II, Scene II).

² Although popularized by Peter, Paul and Mary in 1969, the song, originally titled "Babe, I Hate to Go," was written in 1966 by John Denver.

³ JOHANN SPANGENBERG: "Although he hears again and again what the prophets through the Holy Spirit proclaimed to him, namely, that in Jerusalem he will be captured and bound, nevertheless he hurries nowhere else but there, as if he were approaching blissful living where he would encounter every joy and charity." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 290.

⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 433n105: "The subsequent narrative reveals the divine purpose behind Paul's journey to Jerusalem. His arrest there provided him a unique opportunity for witness—before a Jewish crowd, the Jewish Sanhedrin, Roman governors, the Jewish king, and implicitly before the Roman emperor himself. Note how in Phil 1:12–18 Paul expressed how his imprisonment had led to an effective door for witness."

⁵ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 34: "Not everyone agrees on how to interpret Acts 21. Some might title this section of Scripture 'Paul's Bravery,' while others call it 'Paul's Mistake,' arguing that Paul went against the Spirit's direction when he went to Jerusalem."

exemplifies the kind of courageous conviction that we should all have. And maybe it doesn't concern the same thing. God has not called the men and women in this room to go to Jerusalem and receive persecution there like the Apostle Paul. But whatever God has called us to, and whatever God has told us to do in his Word, we should have a similar unshakable, unyielding courageous conviction concerning.

And to that you might say, "What if my convictions are unclear, Pastor Tony, or they differ from what other people are telling me?" That's a good question. And we'll deal with that this morning too.

First, write this down as #1 in your notes.

Courage Stemming from Conviction is...

1) Not **impeded** by emotional pain (Acts 21:1-3)

When we last saw Paul, he was tearfully saying his goodbyes to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. Paul was on a mission! Luke tells us in **Acts 20:16** that Paul was in great haste to get to Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost. Paul was hustling like crazy to get to Jerusalem, and that's why there was this frantic travel pace that Luke records in **Acts 20 and 21**.⁷

But Paul couldn't pass by the region of Asia without imparting some final words and commands to the Ephesian elders. So he calls them to visit him in Miletus. These are men that Paul has spent a lot of time with. He's trained them. He loved them. He served alongside of them for three years in Ephesus. And he says goodbye to them for the last time.

Just by way of review from our previous passage, look at **Acts 20:18**.

¹⁸ And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears ... ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, **constrained by the Spirit**, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

Let me make two points here: **1) Paul is constrained by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. This is not a wish. This is not a hope. This is not a preference. The Holy Spirit says "go," and Paul is being obedient. And 2) Paul knows that suffering is imminent once he gets to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit has testified to him in every city that he has traveled that imprisonment and afflictions await him.**⁸ You might say, "**Well if that's the case, Paul, why don't you just stay in Ephesus?**" Surely the Lord doesn't want you to suffer if you can avoid it? **Does he?**"

Paul goes on to tell the Ephesians that they will never see him again which makes them understandably weepy. And after kisses and hugs and much weeping and praying, they finally say their goodbyes and wave farewell to him in **verse 36**. Paul boards a ship and off he goes.

And in the first verse in **Acts 21** Luke writes the following:

¹ And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos⁹

Now let me just point out a few things in **verse 1**. Notice the "we." Paul is not alone. Luke, the author of **Acts**, is with him on this fateful voyage.¹⁰ And Luke is going to stay with him all the way to Jerusalem and then all the way to Rome later.

⁶ I'm indebted to MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 234 for this verbiage and title: "Courageous commitment, stemming from strong convictions, is an essential quality found in all those whom God chooses to lead."

⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 431-2: "This 'journey motif' is strongly reminiscent of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels. The same forebodings marked Jesus' journey—the same strong resolve on Jesus' part, the same misgivings on the part of his disciples. In the Gospels Jesus' predictions of his coming passion provide the ominous tone. For Paul's journey the warnings of the Christians along his way serve this function."

⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 861: "Nearly the last quarter of Luke's material in Acts (266 of a total of 1006 verses) narrate Paul's imprisonment first in Jerusalem, then in Caesarea, then in Rome."

⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 854n1909: "Cos, initially settled by colonists from Crete and Mycenae, was controlled by Athens, Sparta, Macedonia, and Rome, until it was annexed to the Roman province of Asia in 32 BC. Cos was famous for its medical school that was traced back to Hippocrates; the most important site on the island was the temple of Asclepius, the god of healing, located southwest of the city of Cos at the foot of Mt. Horomedion. A Jewish community is attested for Cos from an early date (1 Macc 15:23)."

¹⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 432: "Paul's companions were representatives from the Gentile churches (Acts 20:4) who were bringing donations to the believers in Jerusalem. Also included in the party was Luke."

Notice also that word “parted.” Does everyone see that in **verse 1**? That word “parted” isn’t strong enough in the ESV. The NIV is better; it reads like this: “After we had torn ourselves away from them” (**Acts 21:1, NIV**). Paul and Luke had to tear themselves away from the Ephesian elders.¹¹ It was a gut-wrenching separation. It was emotionally taxing and painful. And it’s not the last time in this passage where Paul’s heart is torn to pieces.

Why is he doing this? Why doesn’t he stay longer in the relative safety of Miletus? Because the Holy Spirit is *constraining* him. He’s got the courage of his convictions.

So here’s where he goes. Look again at **verse 1**.

¹ And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.¹²

These are little docking stations near Ephesus. They are still a long way from Jerusalem when they get to Patara. Look at **verse 2**.

² And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia,¹³ we went aboard and set sail.

Now here’s where their journey accelerates. Instead of dinking and dunking their way along the coast of Asia Minor, they take a transport across the Mediterranean to Phoenicia. This was about a 400-mile trip and it would have significantly increased their chances of reaching Jerusalem by Pentecost.

Look at **verse 3**.

³ When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria¹⁴ and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo.

Let me show you on the map here where Paul travels.



Paul’s Journey to Jerusalem (from Miletus to Tyre)¹⁵

He goes from Miletus to Cos to Rhodes to Patara. Then he takes a ship crossing all the way to Phoenicia.¹⁶ That allows him to make up some time. They sail right pass Cyprus, which was the island where Paul began his first missionary journey many years before. And then they land in Tyre.¹⁷

¹¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 636: “Paul and company now head to Jerusalem after tearing themselves away from their friends. The term ἀποσπασθέντας (*apospasthentas*) indicates the emotional difficulty of the departure (Luke 22:41).” MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 235: “Luke’s use of the term *apospaō* (parted), which means ‘to tear away’ (cf. 20:30; Luke 22:41), shows the trauma of that parting. So great was the Ephesian elders’ love for him that Paul literally had to tear himself away from his sorrowing friends.”

¹² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 854: “Patara’s harbor was used by the grain ships that sailed between Egypt (Alexandria) and Italy (Rome) (see on 27:6), which enabled Paul and his associates to find a ship that would take them further east.”

¹³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 236: “This ship was undoubtedly much larger than the smaller coastal vessel they had been sailing on. The ship that would bear Paul across the Mediterranean on his eventful voyage to Rome carried 276 people (Acts 27:37), and this one may have been similar in size.”

¹⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 432n102: “Verse 3 switches from the term ‘Phoenicia’ to ‘Syria’ as their destination. The terms were interchangeable. Phoenicia is the more specific designation, referring to the coastal strip that ran from the river Eleutherus in the north to Mt. Carmel in the south, roughly between the cities of Tyre and Ptolemais. The area had been annexed by the Romans in 64 B.C. and later consolidated into the province of Syria. The administrative area was designated as the province of ‘Syria and Phoenicia,’ a term often found in inscriptions (Latin, *Syrie et Phoenice*).”

¹⁵ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), January 1, 2026. Some geographical points added by author.

Paul is closer to Jerusalem now, but he still has a ways to go. Tyre is about a hundred miles north of Jerusalem as the crow flies.¹⁸ And Tyre is the place where Paul has another gut-wrenching encounter with Christians.

Go ahead and write this down as #2 in your notes. Courage stemming from conviction is not impeded by emotional pain. It's also...

2) Not **swayed** by well-meaning dissent (Acts 21:4–6)

Even the well-meaning dissent of faithful Christians. Look at **verse 4** with me. This passage is fascinating.

⁴ And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days.

Presumably the ship had to dock for a few days to unload cargo, and that gives Paul a chance to spend a few days in Tyre. And what does Paul do? Well, don't read past this too quickly. Luke says, "having sought out the disciples." **The Greek word for "sought out" (ἀνευρίσκω) is the same word used of the shepherds when they with haste sought out baby Jesus in the manger after the angels scared the tar out of them (Luke 2:16).** This was not a casual stroll around the neighborhood hoping to find something.¹⁹ They sought out urgently the believers in Tyre, and (eureka!) they located them.

I love this about Paul. He's got seven days to kill in Tyre. What's he going to do with that time? **"Let's do some sightseeing, Paul. Let's check out the beaches in Tyre; I hear they're beautiful."** No. Paul uses this opportunity to find and encourage the believers in this town.²⁰

Now, as far as we know, Paul has rarely, if ever, been to Tyre.²¹ He didn't plant this church. He didn't know the believers there. Maybe he knew them through his associates. But that doesn't really matter to him. They're believers. He's a believer. They're followers of Jesus Christ.²² He's an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Some of these disciples may have even fled to Tyre to escape Paul when he was a murdering adversary of the gospel. But that doesn't matter anymore. These are brothers and sisters in Christ, and Paul seeks mutual encouragement with them because of the gospel that they all hold dear.²³

Now here's where things get really interesting. Look at the end of **verse 4**.

⁴ And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they²⁴ were **telling Paul**

The grammar of this statement indicates that they were repeatedly telling Paul something.²⁵ Maybe for seven days straight they were telling him! Telling him what?

¹⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 636: "Patara to Tyre is a trip of more than four hundred miles ... Xenophon of Ephesus, *Eph. Tale* 1.11–12 and 1.14.6, says that it is a three-day trip; John Chrysostom, *Hom. Acts* 45 says that the trip takes five days."

¹⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 854: "The city of Tyre (Τύρος), one of the oldest cities in the Middle East, was the most important urban center on the south Phoenician coast, not the least on account of its two harbors... Josephus provides evidence for a Jewish community in the city as well as in the villages of the region controlled by Tyre."

¹⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 636: "Tyre was on the Mediterranean east coast, a hundred miles north of Jerusalem."

¹⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 433: "The Greek term used (*aneuriskō*) would indicate that they were previously unacquainted with them and had to 'seek them out.' Most likely the Christian community in Tyre had been established by the Hellenist mission to Phoenicia mentioned in Acts 11:19. Evidently the direct open-sea voyage had saved Paul sufficient time for him to spend a week with the Christians at Tyre and still fulfill his desire to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (cf. 20:16)."

²⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 433: "There had been believers in Tyre since Acts 11:19, as a result of the dispersion after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54–60). But because they were not a group known to other believers, Paul and his company had to look for them."

²¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 854: "Paul and Barnabas and other Christians from Antioch had visited believers in Phoenicia on their journey from Antioch to Jerusalem (15:3), presumably including believers in Tyre; perhaps their meeting place had been changed to a different location."

²² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 854: "Since Jesus' teaching and healing activity attracted people from the region around Tyre and since Jesus had spent time in the region of Tyre, it is quite possible that some of the 'disciples' had been followers of Jesus."

²³ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 34: "The apostle and these new acquaintances all spoke the language of the heart and immediately became part of each other's lives."

²⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 854: "The revelation of the Holy Spirit in the second part of the verse was conveyed through the believers as a group (note the plural οἱτινες and the plural of ἔλεγον), which suggests meetings in which preaching and worship took place."

²⁵ Imperfect, active, indicative of λέγω.

not to go on to Jerusalem.

Okay, now we have a dilemma. Paul feels constrained by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He knows that suffering is coming. He knows that he'll probably be arrested. He might be put to death even. But nevertheless he must exercise courage in the midst of his convictions. He's got to go to Jerusalem.

But now he's got these believers that he just met that are telling him through the Spirit, **"Don't go, Paul! Don't go down there!"** What's he going to do? How do you respond to a warning like that?²⁶

Well **verse 5** says this:

⁵ When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children,²⁷ accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach,²⁸ we prayed²⁹ and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

So just to summarize: They say to Paul, **"Don't go to Jerusalem."** They speak "through the Spirit," Luke notes. And Paul disregards their counsel.³⁰ As soon as his ship was ready, he gets back on board headed for Jerusalem.³¹

Now don't think this was easy. Paul didn't rebuke them or debate them. He received what they said. And then he held fast to his convictions and kept going. And there's even a bit of tenderness in this scene as he says his goodbyes. The Christians in Tyre come out with their whole families, women and children, and they say goodbye to Paul. It's a very touching scene. So even though Paul disregards their counsel, they still have this tender moment with him praying on the beach before he boards the ship.³²

So what's going on here? Some would conclude that Paul was disobedient to the Holy Spirit here. That he was bullheaded. That he had some kind of unhealthy death wish, and so he ignores them and keeps marching to Jerusalem. I don't think that's true. And I don't want to give the impression that Paul was somehow infallible. Paul was human just like you and me. He made mistakes. But I don't think that this was one of them. Here's why. Here's what I think is going on here.

That statement in **verse 4**, "through the Spirit" is inconclusive.³³

And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

This could have been a person utilizing a gift of prophecy, which Paul says in **1 Thessalonians 5:20**, to not despise, but instead test it. Test it for accuracy. Test it against the Scriptures. Test it against what the Holy Spirit is prompting you to do. Even more simply this could have been a believer in Tyre who was exhorting Paul with a spiritual gift of encouragement saying, **"Don't go down there, Paul, because if you do you will be arrested."** Well Paul already knew that he would be arrested. That's already been revealed to him in all of the places he's traveled.³⁴

²⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 433: "The warnings along the way prepared Paul for the imprisonment and hardship that did indeed befall him there, fortified him for the experience, and convinced him that God was in it all."

²⁷ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 434: "It is interesting to note that this is the first mention of children in connection with the apostolic church."

²⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 855n1932: "As regards the reference to the beach, note Hemer, *Acts*, 125, who comments that 'αἰγιαλός describes correctly the smooth beach at Tyre, as opposed to ἀκτὴ, used of a rocky shore.'"

²⁹ JOHN CALVIN: "We must also note the common habit of praying over more important matters, and that, having been informed about the danger, they are the more eager to pray." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 291.

³⁰ JOHN CALVIN: "There are different gifts of the Spirit, so that it is no wonder that those who are strong in the gift of prophecy are sometimes lacking in judgment or courage. The Lord revealed to those brothers, whom Luke mentions, what was to be; but at the same time, they do not know what is expedient and what Paul's calling demands, because the measure of their gifts does not stretch so far." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 291.

³¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 433: "Paul certainly never sought out difficulty. He had no martyr complex. On the other hand, he accepted suffering as a part of his witness and often alluded to this in his letters."

³² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 434: "The reference to prayer is not incidental. Everyone was fully aware of the difficulties facing Paul at Jerusalem."

³³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 237: "The phrase through the Spirit is inconclusive; it merely means that someone spoke as from a spiritual gift of prophecy. As Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 14:29, however, not every manifestation of the gift of prophecy is legitimate."

³⁴ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 34: "'Through the Spirit' means that the Spirit told them that Paul would undergo suffering for Christ, a message that naturally gave the believers deep concern. The Spirit did not tell them to inform Paul he

Here's what I think happened. A person in that church in Tyre receives a prophecy through the Holy Spirit concerning Paul. Prophetic utterances were not uncommon in the first century church (e.g., Judas and Silas [Acts 15:32]). And in this prophecy, he (or she... we'll see some prophetesses later in this passage) prophesied that Paul would be persecuted in Jerusalem.

And the people conclude from that prophecy—*without the aid of the Holy Spirit!*—that Paul shouldn't go to Jerusalem. In other words, they conclude something more than what the Holy Spirit revealed to them. Because surely God wouldn't want Paul to suffer there if he could avoid it!

In other words the Holy Spirit was instrumental in giving the prophecy but not the interpretation. And Paul says, **“Thank you very much. I know I'll suffer in Jerusalem. I know I'll be arrested, but I still have to go.”**³⁵

Here's a quote from **John MacArthur** on this passage. I found this helpful, **“The Spirit's message to Paul in Tyre, as elsewhere, was a warning, not a prohibition... Neither the threat of persecution nor the pleadings of well-meaning fellow believers could divert Paul from fulfilling his calling. He retained the courage of his conviction despite the repeated warnings of severe persecution once he reached Jerusalem... Nothing could dissuade him from carrying out the task the Lord had assigned him.”**³⁶

Now I don't know about you, but I've had similar experiences in my own life. I feel like the Holy Spirit is leading me to do X, Y or Z, but my good, godly friends think that's a mistake. What do you do in situations like that? What do you do when other Spirit-filled people give you advice that differs from what you feel prompted by the Holy Spirit to do?

We'll hold that thought. We'll come back to that in just a moment. But first I want to raise the stakes. Because Paul is going to experience something similar in the next city that he visits. In **verse 6**, Paul says another tearful goodbye to the church in Tyre and boards a ship. I'm sure he's like, **“Get me to Jerusalem already, these goodbyes are killing me.”**

Write this down as #3 in your notes. Courage stemming from conviction is not impeded by emotional pain. It's not swayed by well-meaning dissent. And thirdly, it's...

3) Not **deterred** by personal sacrifice (Acts 21:7–16)

Luke writes in **verse 7**,

⁷ *When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais,³⁷ and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day.*

More greetings. More seeking out Christians. More tearful goodbyes.³⁸

⁸ *On the next day³⁹ we departed⁴⁰ and came to Caesarea,*

was not to go to Jerusalem. The Spirit predicted persecution against the apostle, and the people's love for Paul caused them to beg him not to go.”

³⁵ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 121–2: “We already know the Spirit is leading Paul to Jerusalem (20:22–23), but now these Christians seem to be proclaiming a different message from the Spirit. How do we make sense of this? Does the Spirit contradict himself? It seems that the Holy Spirit revealed Paul's future destiny of arrest and suffering to these Christians, just as he had to Paul. These Christians, therefore, did not announce a new, contradictory revelation of the Spirit. Instead, they attempted to persuade Paul to avoid the Spirit's leading into suffering. Thus, the Spirit had revealed to the disciples in Tyre what would happen to Paul: he would indeed suffer. The disciples, however, tried to dissuade Paul from proceeding and, inadvertently, encouraged Paul to oppose the Spirit's leading. Paul, though, committed himself to the will of God and the leading of the Spirit—even if that would lead him to tribulation. And so the believers at Tyre knelt down, prayed, and said their goodbyes to Paul and Luke as they boarded another ship (21:5–6).”

³⁶ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNCT, 238.

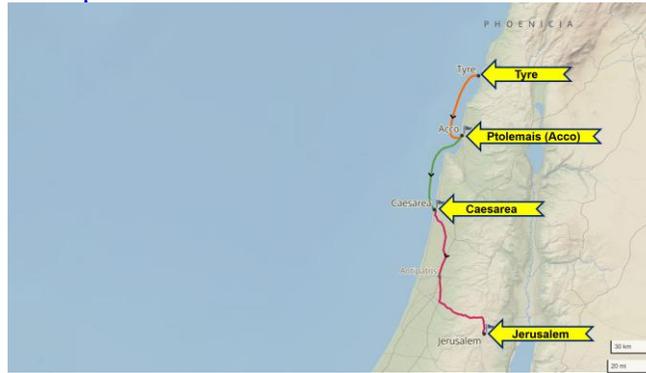
³⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 855: “Luke first describes the voyage (πλόος) from Tyre to Ptolemais, about 27 nautical miles (50 km.) down the coast, where they arrived after a journey of perhaps ten hours of sailing.”

³⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 637: “Paul's company sails to Ptolemais and stays for a day. This seaport was located about twenty-five miles south of Tyre on the Mediterranean's southern Phoenician coast. It was almost eighty miles north of Jerusalem and the population included both Jews and Christians. We are not told how the church came to be there, but obviously other missionary activity has brought the gospel there. It was previously known as Acco (Judg. 1:31; medieval Acre).”

³⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 856: “The departure ‘on the next day’ (τῆ ἐπαύριον [ἡμέρα]; temporal dative) suggests that Paul and his party were bound by the sailing schedule of the ship.”

Caesarea was about sixty miles from Jerusalem.⁴¹ It was the seat of the Roman government in Judea and a very prominent city. Plus it was the port for the city of Jerusalem. Paul's travels from here on out will be by land not by sea.

Here's the journey on the map.



Paul's Journey to Jerusalem (from Tyre to Jerusalem)⁴²

Ptolemais (or Acco) is just a few miles south of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast. And Caesarea is just a few miles south of Ptolemais. And even in Caesarea, Paul and his companions are still sixty miles from Jerusalem. So Luke has really slowed down the narrative here. He wants us to feel the slowness of this journey to Jerusalem.⁴³

And look what happens in **verse 8**.

⁸ On the next day we ... came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist,⁴⁴ who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

Philip the evangelist!⁴⁵ Remember that guy? He was one of the seven “deacons” that the apostles appointed in Jerusalem along with Stephen.⁴⁶ He preached the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch and baptized him. Then he travelled around preaching the gospel and eventually ended up in Caesarea according to **Acts 8:40**.

If you were thinking, **“Whatever happened to that guy Philip after he came to Caesarea?”** Well here you go! He's still there twenty years later when Paul comes waltzing through town.

And **verse 9** tells us something interesting about Philip.

⁹ He had four unmarried⁴⁷ daughters, who prophesied.

⁴⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 434n108: “Paul possibly traveled by foot from Ptolemais to Caesarea. The verb translated ‘continued’ (NIV) in v. 7 (διανύω) more often means *to finish* and may indicate that the voyage ended at Ptolemais. On the other hand, nautical texts evidence that the verb means *to continue a voyage*. Also the land trip from Ptolemais to Caesarea, though only twenty-seven miles, involved high and difficult terrain around the foot of Mt. Carmel.”

⁴¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 434: “Paul was already familiar with the Christian community of Caesarea (cf. 9:30; 18:22). He perhaps had previously met there Philip the evangelist, who had settled in that city (cf. 8:40).”

⁴² Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), January 1, 2026. Some geographical points added by author.

⁴³ JOHN CALVIN: “Luke surveys the course of the voyage briefly, and he does so not only to give a faithful account, so that we may know what happened in each place, but also so that readers may ponder, along with himself, the invincible and heroic bravery of Paul. He preferred to experience the upheavals from such long, tortuous and troublesome journeys in order to labor for Christ, rather than be concerned for a quiet life for himself.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 290.

⁴⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 856: “The term εὐαγγελιστής is rare in Greek; the only potentially non-Christian occurrence is in an (undated) inscription from Rhodes, where it possibly describes a “proclaimer of oracular messages.”

⁴⁵ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNCT, 239: “He richly deserved the appellation evangelist—a title given to no one else in Acts (though Timothy was told to do the work of an evangelist [2 Tim. 4:5]).”

⁴⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 856n1940: “If Luke already collected material for his description of the life and ministry of the early church, the meeting with Philip would have provided him with an opportunity to gather information about Philip's ministry in Samaria and other regions and about the ministry of Stephen, Philip's ‘colleague’ in the group of the Seven.”

⁴⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 856: “There is no connection between prophecy and virginity. While the prophetess Anna was a widow (Luke 2:36–37) and thus not engaging in sexual intercourse, the women in Corinth who prophesied (1 Cor 11:5) included married women (cf. 1 Cor 14:35 in the context of 14:29–37).” Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 436: “The word ‘virgin’ may indicate that

So not only is he still in Caesarea, but, presumably, he settled down.⁴⁸ He got married! He had some kids. And he stayed in Caesarea for twenty years ministering to the church there. Some guys do that, by the way. We can't all be like the Apostle Paul.

And it says here that Philip's daughters had the gift of prophecy, which was a gift that men as well as women had in the early church.⁴⁹ Women are not allowed to serve as elders or teach Scripture in mixed company. Paul gives those directives clearly in his epistles (**1 Tim 2:11–12; 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; see also Titus 2:3–5**). But women, in Paul's day, did prophesy.⁵⁰ There was a woman named Anna who met with Jesus at the temple immediately after his birth, and she was called a prophetess (**Luke 2:36**).⁵¹ **I would just remind you that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are available to men are available to women, but the office of elder and the task of teaching Scripture in mixed company is reserved for men. That's what the Bible teaches. And that's what we uphold here as a complementarian church.**⁵²

Now two points of interests here in **verses 8 and 9**. **1)** First of all Philip welcomes Paul into his house. That's intriguing. Because earlier in the book of **Acts**, Philip was expelled out of Jerusalem in large part due to Paul's persecution of Christians. Twenty years before, these guys were enemies.⁵³ Now they're fast friends. How did that happen? **That's what the gospel does. It makes enemies friends.**

2) Second point of interest is this—Paul is going to Jerusalem. Philip knows all about Jerusalem! I'm sure Philip was like, **"You want to go to that place where Christian Jews like you and me got thrown out of town."**

Paul responds, **"Yes I do."**

"Don't you know they'll arrest you when they find out you're back in town?"

"Yes, I do. Everywhere I go people try to talk me out of going there. But I have to go."

And I don't think that Philip's daughters who prophesied were silent when Paul was in his house. In other words, I don't think that this was just some incidental detail in this story. Luke tells us, **"And Philip had some daughters who prophesied! The end!"**

No, I think there's something implied in that statement. I bet these young ladies were actively telling Paul, just like the people in Tyre earlier, **"You're going to get arrested when you get to Jerusalem, Paul! You're going to be persecuted there."**

Paul's like, **"Yes, I know. Thank you! You're not the first person to tell me that."**

And if that's not enough, look at **verse 10**.

¹⁰ *While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.*

Philip's daughters were unmarried at this time, or it could mean that they had chosen to remain virgins for the sake of the ministry, something that Paul encouraged people to do in 1 Corinthians 7:1–7."

⁴⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 856: "Philip evidently had settled in Caesarea, the seat of the Roman governor, bought a house, and preached the gospel before Jews and, presumably, Gentiles in Caesarea and the surrounding areas—presumably after the events connected with the conversion of Cornelius through the ministry of Peter (10:1–48)."

⁴⁹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 240: "It has been recorded that early believers regarded these women as valuable sources of information on the early history of the church. The historian Eusebius notes that the church Father Papias received information from them (*Ecclesiastical History*, III.XXXIX; [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973], 126). Perhaps Luke used them as a source of information in writing his gospel and Acts. He would have had many opportunities to talk with them, not only during this visit, but also during Paul's two-year imprisonment at Caesarea (Acts 24:27)."

⁵⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 637: "Acts 2:17–18 shows that such gifts come on both men and women. First Corinthians 11:5 indicates how a woman should give prophecy in the church."

⁵¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 435: "Perhaps the most significant observation in the present narrative is the testimony that there were women in the early church who were recognized as having the gift of prophecy. In his Gospel, Luke mentioned Anna, who was also a prophetess who foretold the future redemptive role of the infant Jesus (2:36–38). Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, pointed to the prophesying of 'daughters' as a sign of the gift of the Spirit in these last days (Acts 2:17)."

⁵² MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 240: "The revelatory aspect of the gift of prophecy ceased at the close of the apostolic era with the completing of Scripture. The nonrevelatory, reiterative aspect of the prophets' ministry of doctrinal and practical exhortation has been taken over by the evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In fact, in the last letters he wrote, the pastoral epistles, Paul does not refer to prophets at all; instead, teaching is to be done by the elders (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9)."

⁵³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 239: "The Christians' chief persecutor, once so feared (cf. Gal. 1:22–24), was welcomed into his house, and he and his friends stayed with him."

Now this guy Agabus predicted the famine in Jerusalem in **Acts 11**. So this guy is legitimate as a prophet. He's got a reputation for prophesying accurately. What's he going to say? **"O Paul's fine going down to Jerusalem. Nothing bad's going to happen to him there, no problem!"**

Let's see. Look at **verse 11**.

¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands⁵⁴ and said,⁵⁵ "Thus says the Holy Spirit,⁵⁶ 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem⁵⁷ will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"⁵⁸

Is there any doubt now that Paul's trip to Jerusalem is not going to end well?⁵⁹ **Paul is going to be a sitting duck in Jerusalem.**⁶⁰

In fact, this language is worse than you know. The "handing over of Paul to the Gentiles" (Greek: παραδίδομι [*paradidōmi*]) sounds like something else in Luke's writings. What does that sound like? Who was handed over to the Gentiles in Luke's gospel? Jesus was (**Luke 18:32; see also 23:1; 23:25; 24:7**).

Luke writes in **verse 12**,

¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged [Paul] not to go up to Jerusalem.

Did you notice the "we"? Luke's had enough of this. He's changing teams. He now joins Agabus and the Christians in Caesarea and they pleaded with Paul.⁶¹ **"Paul, please don't go to Jerusalem! You've got to listen to us! We need you, Paul! Aren't you of more use to Christ here—alive! —then dead or imprisoned in Jerusalem?"⁶² Don't go there. Please, Paul. Don't throw your life away so meaninglessly."**⁶³

What's an apostle to do in a situation like this?⁶⁴ **What would you do? How persuadable would you be with Christian friends begging you not do something? Hopefully you would be persuadable by the counsel of good friends. But there are some things in this world... there are some convictions... that only God can persuade you concerning.**

⁵⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 857: "Agabus stood up, approached Paul, took (ἄρας) Paul's belt, sat down again, tied (δήσας) first his own feet with the belt, then his hands, tying the knot with his teeth while crouching in a hog-tie position, and then uttered (εἶπεν) a prophecy."

⁵⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 435n112: "For symbolic prophecies in the OT, see 1 Kgs 11:29–31; Isa 8:1–4; 20:1–4; Jer 13:1–11; 19:1–13; 27:1–22; Hos 1:2. This is the only complete example in the NT of the form, which includes the symbolic act, the formula 'thus says,' and the interpretation of the symbolism."

⁵⁶ BEDE: "Agabus is imitating the ancient prophets who were accustomed to say, 'The Lord God says this,' because the Holy Spirit is Lord and God in the same way as the Father and the Son are, and it is impossible to separate the operation of those whose nature and will are one." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 260.

⁵⁷ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 437: "The unsaved Jews of Jerusalem, who were still the enemies of Paul after so many years, would bind the apostle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. Just as it was done with Yeshua in Matthew 20:19, so it would now be done to Paul."

⁵⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 436: "The well-meant pleas of his Christian friends only heightened the conflict for him. They could not deter him from his firm conviction that the journey was in God's will. He was indeed willing even to die for his Lord if need be (v. 13)."

⁵⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 638–9: "Agabus has predicted what will take place, and the believers urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He is not, however, prohibited from doing so. He will go to Jerusalem and face his persecution and arrest... There is no indication in Luke's narrative that Paul is disobedient here, as the Spirit has told Paul what he will be facing (Acts 20:22–23)."

⁶⁰ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 34: "Agabus did not interpret the prophecy or say whether Paul should or should not go to the Holy City, but Paul's friends did!"

⁶¹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 34: "The well-meaning believers were trying to make God's will conform to their preconceptions. 'If Paul goes to Jerusalem, he is going to suffer, and we will be deprived of his ministry. This cannot be God's will.'"

⁶² JOHANN SPANGENBERG: Certainly these and the very same words: "Dear Paul, since certain harm and destruction is prepared for you in Jerusalem, you should not test God and deliberately place yourself in danger. Besides, there are still many lands and people that should be turned to faith through you! So that the newly begun Christian congregations here and there, built and established through you, may receive consolation and exhortation to stand firm, especially in these dangerous times, remain with us—even if you indeed do not want to spare yourself—do so for the poor newly initiated Christians." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 294.

⁶³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 435: "This was not so much a warning on Agabus's part as a prediction."

⁶⁴ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 34: "Their love and loyalty were commendable — they wanted to preserve Paul. But their motives, though noble, were shortsighted. These Christians were not seeing God's ultimate purposes. They were looking out for Paul's good but not God's."

What does Paul do?⁶⁵ Look at **verse 13**.

¹³ Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking⁶⁶ my heart?"

"I can handle the suffering in Jerusalem, but I can't handle this! I can't handle this suffering here in Caesarea... where my friends don't support what God has called me to do."⁶⁷

"You're breaking my heart!" Don't go breaking my heart," says Paul.

I think I said last time that Paul is *not* this robotic, unemotional idea-machine that just cranks out theology. He's a people person.⁶⁸ He's sensitive at times. And this emotional turmoil gets the best of him here.

One of the things that I was wrestling with in this passage is why did God keep revealing to people in Paul's path that Paul would suffer in Jerusalem. Why not keep them in the dark? I understand why God told Paul. Paul needed to get mentally prepared to suffer. But why tell the church in Tyre? Why tell the church in Caesarea? Why reveal this to Agabus? Why make the people in Ephesus suffer needlessly with these prophecies?⁶⁹

Why? Here's the reason why. You want to know why?⁷⁰ Here's why I think God did this. So that they could hear Paul say this in **verse 13**:

*For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*⁷¹

What a statement! Those believers needed to hear that. Luke needed to hear that. Luke needed to record that in the book of **Acts** so that you and me, twenty centuries later, could read this. You and I need to hear Paul say, **"Safety is not the utmost concern. Longevity in this life is not the most important thing. My only goal... my preeminent calling in this life... my one consuming holy ambition is to uphold the name of the Lord Jesus. And I am wholeheartedly submitted to him. If I die, I die. Let God be true and every man a liar."**

"The important thing is your health, Paul."

"No, it's not!"

Paul states elsewhere, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell" (**Phil 1:21–22**). Paul states elsewhere, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ" (**Gal 1:10**).

⁶⁵ JOHN CALVIN: "Now we must see why the threatening persecution was made known once again by Agabus. As far as Paul was concerned, he had already been given more than enough warning. Therefore, I have no doubt that this confirmation was added for the sake of others, because the Lord wished to make his servant's bonds famous everywhere, partly so that all might know that he entered the fight of his own free will, partly so that they might learn that God had appointed him a champion to fight for the gospel. It was surely a useful example of invincible steadfastness, when, knowingly and willingly, he offered himself to the violence of his enemies." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 294.

⁶⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 639: "The verb for 'breaking' (συνθρύπτοντες, *synthryptontes*) the heart is vivid, as it is often used of beating clothes to clean them... they are pounding on Paul's emotions."

⁶⁷ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 34: "Paul acknowledged that they were tearing him apart, that what Satan and his forces could not do was happening through his brothers and sisters!"

⁶⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 860: "Missionaries and pastors should be known for their commitment to people: churches are made up of people, whose commitment to the Lord takes precedence over plans, programs, strategies, and structures."

⁶⁹ RUDOLF GWALTHER: "In every city and congregation, the Lord tells Paul how he shall be imprisoned. Now others come with the spirit of prophecy and warn him not to go. What purpose do these things serve? Truly God meant to prepare his apostle for the cross by continual premeditation.... Also he teaches us here an example of Christian constancy and obedience, which we must so earnestly labor to have, such that we must not obey people." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 290.

⁷⁰ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 123: "We can learn something revolutionary from Paul: fully aware of the impending suffering to befall him, he did not hesitate to continue on his mission. His chief concern in life was not comfort, safety, or a long life. His chief purpose, rather, centered on the proclamation of the gospel of God, whatever the cost. God summons all his people to trust perfectly in his will."

⁷¹ JOHN CALVIN: "Only those who will freely lay down their own lives as a testimony to the truth will ever be properly disposed to live for the Lord." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 294–5.

Paul says, **“I’m in this for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and nothing else.” We need to hear this in America. We need to hear this in a place where safety and security and prosperity are idols in our hearts. And we view them as more important than obedience to God.**

I feel like a lot of Christians in America are like, “Sure, I’ll be a Christian, as long as it doesn’t cost me anything. As long as it doesn’t inconvenience me or involve any emotional discomfort.” You know in America, we like to think of Christianity as just some folder in the filing cabinet of your life that you pull out every once in a while. And Paul’s like it’s not a folder; it’s the whole filing cabinet.

For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever would lose his life for my sake and for the gospel will find it” (Matt 16:24–25). Paul actually took Jesus’s word seriously. He gave up ownership of his life for Christ’s sake and for the gospel.⁷²

And watch how Luke, Philip, Agabus, and the others responded. This is good in **verse 14**.

¹⁴ And since [Paul] would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, “Let the will⁷³ of the Lord be done.”⁷⁴

That’s a good place to land right there. Let God’s will be done. Even if it involves suffering. Even if it involves death. Even if it involved disagreement between Christians.

This is not unlike what Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).⁷⁵ **Sometimes when Christians can’t agree on a matter, we just turn it over to God.**⁷⁶

I think that’s what happened in Tyre when Paul was there. They told him not to go to Jerusalem. He said, **“I’m going.”** But at least they got together on that beach and knelt and prayed together. Their disagreement didn’t lead to divisiveness. They prayed together. They sent Paul off.

“Let the will of the Lord be done.”

But notice what else the church in Caesarea does. This is fantastic. Look at **verse 15**.

¹⁵ After these days we got ready⁷⁷ and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus,⁷⁸ an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.⁷⁹

“Paul, we don’t think it’s a good idea to go. We think you should stay. But even though we disagree, let us send some guys with you to bless you on your way. And by the way, look up this guy Mnason when you get to town. He’ll leave the light on for you.” That is awesome.⁸⁰

⁷² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 123: “In the Christian worldview, therefore, the question should not be ‘Why does suffering happen to me?’ but rather, ‘How can I proclaim the gospel of Jesus in the midst of my trials?’”

⁷³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 859: “They accept ‘the Lord’s will’ (τοῦ κυρίου is placed in emphasized initial position), who will do what he will do in his wisdom and grace. They respond to Paul’s determination not with resignation but with the acknowledgement that it is the Lord’s will that Paul will be arrested in Jerusalem. Their submission to God’s will agrees with the conviction of the early Christian church, reflected throughout Luke’s narrative in Acts, that it is the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord who directs the mission of his followers, who empowers their witness, and who gives them courage to suffer.”

⁷⁴ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 241: “That was not fatalistic resignation but confident trust in God’s sovereign and perfect will (cf. 1 Sam. 3:18; Matt. 6:10; Luke 22:42). They committed Paul into His care.”

⁷⁵ Sproul, *Acts*, 355: “Of course, the will of the Lord was going to be done, and Paul knew that, just as Jesus knew the will of God when He wrestled in the garden and prayed, ‘Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done’ (Luke 22:42).”

⁷⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 436n117: “Ultimately individuals are left to themselves to determine God’s purposes for them. On the other hand, the understanding of others is significant input in seeking to determine those purposes for oneself. The present incident provides an excellent example of that sort of interchange within the Christian community between conflicting understandings of God’s will.”

⁷⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 436: “For this final leg they may have used pack animals.”

⁷⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 436n121: “His Cypriot origin most likely links him with the Greek-speaking ‘Hellenist’ group within the Jerusalem Christian community (cf. 4:36; 11:20). Mnason is a variant of the name Jason, a name often taken by Hellenistic Jews. Some manuscripts have Jason in v. 16.”

⁷⁹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 440: “The statement ‘with whom we should lodge’ may mean that Mnason’s home was halfway to Jerusalem, since it was a two-day trip, or it may mean that Mnason had a house in Jerusalem where they would stay.”

⁸⁰ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 242: “They also knew that by identifying with him they put themselves at risk. Yet they were willing to accept that risk because the apostle was. His courage was contagious.”

Can Christians disagree on stuff and still love each other? I sure hope so... because I disagree with Christians a lot. Not on essential stuff like the deity of Christ, but non-essential stuff. And I praise God that this is modeled here for us in the Scriptures. I praise God for Paul's courage of conviction. I want to be convictional and courageous like that. But I also praise God for the unity and the love and the prayer that these Christians shared even as they disagree with Paul and his plan to go to Jerusalem.

Now before we close, let me say a few additional things. Let me ask you this question: What do you do when other Spirit-filled people give you advice that differs from what you feel led by the Spirit to do? This happens! What do you do? Let me frame it this way—what do you do when your friends try to steer you away from your convictions?⁸¹

I'll give you four answers to that question. But before I do that let me just clarify what I'm talking about here. The issue with Paul was a non-moral issue. And by that, I mean, it wasn't the kind of thing where the Bible clearly prohibits one action over against another. Should he go to Jerusalem or should he not go to Jerusalem? The Bible doesn't prohibit either. So we're talking about a subjective prompting of the Holy Spirit.⁸²

So I'm not talking about an instance where your friends advise you to sleep with your girlfriend. Or some lady at work tells you go ahead and lash out at your kids. Or your accountant tells you it's okay to cheat on your taxes. We're talking about convictions in areas that are not clearly prohibited in Scripture, and therefore are analogous to Paul's journey to Jerusalem.

These are the kinds of issues I'm wanting to address here. Should I marry this person? Should I move here for a job opportunity? Should I have 3 kids or 4 kids or 10? Should I... I don't know... you fill in the blank... buy a pizza parlor and convert it to a music studio? You feel like the answer is yes. You feel like God is leading you by his Holy Spirit to make this decision. And your friends say, "That's a bad move. Don't do that!" What do you do?

Four things. Here's the first.

When Christians Try to Steer You Away from Your Convictions:

1) **Hear** them out⁸³

Paul almost to the point of utter exasperation was willing to hear from the people around him. He didn't shut them out. He didn't castigate them, "I'm the apostle around here, so shut up already." He didn't demean them or insult them. He listened to them. He heard them out. He even let Agabus take off his belt and do a little demonstration with it. And it was only after he was emotionally taxed to his limits he said, "Why are you breaking my heart?" After that they backed off. But he heard them out.

Now let me just share my own experiences. There are a few times in my life where I have felt a strong sense of conviction regarding a non-moral decision. For example, when I was called to ministry. When I married my wife. When I moved to Chicago for seminary. When I moved to central Illinois to pastor a church in a city that I had never heard of before. In those cases, I felt a strong sense of conviction, a prompting in my Spirit, to do those things.

You might say, "That's really subjective, Tony." You're right, it is. Honestly there are times when I wish God had given me a crystal ball along with the Bible, so that I could discern his will for my life in non-moral categories. But he hasn't done that. And we are called to pray, seek counsel, be led by the Spirit, and step out in faith.

Now have I misread the Spirit's prompting in my life? Yes! Absolutely! But that's part of a Christian's growth process. You learn to discern the prompting of the Spirit from your own fleshly desires. All I can say is that the way that Paul was constrained by the Holy Spirit here, I've experienced

⁸¹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 34: "Some of us are wrestling with crucial or thorny decisions. We may wonder what God's will for us is, or we may think we know God's will but are not sure we can do it. The story of Paul's struggle offers us helpful insights in how not to be derailed in following God's directions for us."

⁸² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 640: "Only discernment, engagement, and prayer, however, can determine when the hard path is to be taken and when an easier escape should be sought. In Acts we have seen both routes followed at different times."

⁸³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 640: "If all believers possess God's Spirit, we must be willing to learn from each other and hear each other."

that on a few occasions in my own life. And not all the time either. Some people can't seem to eat lunch or get a drink of water without a prompting of the Holy Spirit. I don't think that's healthy. And I don't think that's how God works. But in a few meaningful instances, I've experienced what Paul was experiencing here.

And here's the thing, some people didn't agree with me. Some people I trust a lot didn't agree with what I felt the Holy Spirit was leading me to do. Some people didn't think I should marry Sanja twenty-five years ago... or should I say it this way, some people didn't think Sanja should marry me. Good people! Godly people!

Some people questioned my call to ministry. Some people tried to talk me out of moving to Illinois. Some people tried to talk me out of moving back to Texas. I heard Kent Hughes say once, "I have never made a major decision in my life without someone saying 'you're wrong.'"

Listen, when God is leading you in a certain direction, more often than not God's people will come along side of you and confirm that calling. And the godlier your counselors are, the better counsel you'll typically get. So don't use this passage as an excuse to ignore godly counsel. But at the end of the day, you've got to do what you think is best. And you got to follow your convictions. Not your friends. The onus of responsibility is on you to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Now let's flip the situation. Let's say that you're the Agabus in this little scenario. Let's say that you are Luke, Paul's trusted companion, who pleads with him in Caesarea to not go to Jerusalem. What do you do when your friends make decisions that you disagree with? You've got to let your friends make their decisions. You can't control them. Parents, there will come a time when you've got to let your kids make their decisions and make their mistakes. They need to learn to pray and discern God's leading in their lives.

Here's something I say often when I give counsel, "Here's what I think... Here's the best of my discernment spiritually. But ultimately this is a matter between you and God. You've got to make that call...if you marry that man... if you take that job... if you move to Alaska.

Now just to clarify again, we're talking about non-moral convictions here. If someone says to me, I think the Holy Spirit is leading me to move in with my boyfriend, I'll say "No, that's not the Holy Spirit! That's your flesh!"

"Pastor Tony, I think the Holy Spirit is leading me to abandon my wife and children." No! The Holy Spirit is not leading you to do that. But with non-moral issues, I will say something like this: "Here's what I think. The decision is yours. It's between you and God."

And I'll also say this, "You have my full support whatever you decide. And I'm here for you."

What do you do with your friends try to steer you away from your convictions? You hear them out. And here's a second thing.

2) **Pray** with them

Did we see that modeled in the text? Absolutely! What did Paul do before he left the Ephesian elders in Miletus? He prayed with them and he wept with them. What did Paul do in Tyre before he left Tyre? He knelt down on the beach and prayed with them. That's powerful right there!

Brothers and sisters can disagree and still have unity. Do you believe that?

I had this disagreement once with a brother and I eventually said, "Let's just agree to disagree." And he said, "No. I refuse to agree to disagree. You're wrong." And I was like, "Great! Thank you for compromising our unity as brothers in Christ, just because I didn't agree with your opinions."

Don't do that, Christian! Brothers and Sisters in Christ can disagree and still have unity. And you know what a big part of that is? Prayer. Prayer can work wonders to knit hearts together despite a disagreement.

Here's a third thing to do with friends.

3) **Reason** with them

Here's what happened with Paul. He said eventually, "Look, your logic is flawed. You guys have discerned from the Holy Spirit that I'm going to be arrested and persecuted in Jerusalem. But you have

assumed by that, that God doesn't want me to go to Jerusalem. You assume by that that God wouldn't want me to suffer or be persecuted. That logic is flawed."

"Yes, I will be persecuted. Yes, I will be arrested. And yes, God wants me to go to Jerusalem. That's God will for me." That was a great teaching moment for the church in Caesarea. God sometimes asks us to suffer.⁸⁴ It's true.

And Paul says,

... I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

You know there are people every day that give their lives for the gospel. They travel to hostile nations. They preach the gospel in places where it's illegal to do so. Just because it's dangerous or unsafe doesn't mean it's not God's will.

Now sometimes the stakes aren't always that high. Sometimes you are feeling led to move to Cincinnati just because it's a better job opportunity, and you can provide better for your family. If that's the case then you should pray and reason with your friends and show them why you've decided what you've decided. And try to discern as best you can the Spirit's leading. If you've decided to marry someone don't just say, "I've got to marry someone it might as well be her." That's not a great reason to marry. And if you have good friends, they'll give you some pushback on that.

And here's a final thing you do.

4) **Demonstrate** love despite **disagreement**⁸⁵

You demonstrate your love for them while concurrently holding fast to your convictions. Amen? Most of your friends don't want to control your lives. They're just looking out for you.

These churches weren't trying to manipulate Paul. They loved him. In some ways they were blinded by their love for him. And Paul reciprocated his love for them while concurrently holding fast to his convictions. We can do this too. We can demonstrate our love for others, even in disagreement, while concurrently holding fast to our convictions.

⁸⁴ Sproul, *Acts*, 354–5: "Many times in my life I have said, 'Most of the places that you lead me, Lord, I'll follow, but please don't lead me over there.' If the Lord came and asked you to go somewhere with little or no appeal, how soon would you pack? Would you pack your bags filled with joy in your soul that He asked you to go for Him? Paul had a vocation, and he knew what lay ahead."

⁸⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 639: "The interaction between the believers and Paul about whether he should face suffering is significant because it shows that sometimes well-intentioned people can be wrong about what God desires. There is no doubt that those who warn Paul have his best interests at heart and are trying to protect him. It also is clear, however, that Paul has a real sense of what God is calling him to do and that he has prepared himself to pay the human price to do it. What is so instructive about the scene is that once it becomes clear that Paul is being driven by the Spirit to face what is ahead, the believers who love him and God's will embrace the path and support him."