

Read verses 1-6.

In these six verses, are the names of many places and many people.



Ephesus; the area of Macedonia; Greece (Achaia)

An unnamed city that we know was Corinth.

Syria; Berea; Thessalonica; Derbe.

The province of Asia; Troas; Philippi.

Regarding people... Dr. Luke writes of a group of unnamed disciples in Ephesus, a group of unnamed Jewish adversaries in Corinth, as well as listing the names of 7 other individuals – some whom we recognize and others we don't.



Sopater, son of Pyrrhus - was from Berea.

Aristarchus and Secundus - were from Thessalonica.

Gaius and Timothy - were from Derbe.

Tychicus and Trophimus – were from the province of Asia.

And lastly, an unnamed person that we know was Dr. Luke.

Are you thinking... why is Rick focusing on these verses?

Are you wondering yet, what could there be in this passage to take away, to integrate into our lives.... other than possible names for baby boys?

There is one key truth principle – which we will discover by comparing Scripture with Scripture – and it has to do with how the follower of Jesus lives.

All human beings are created in the likeness of God – this is where our worth and dignity comes from.

But follower of Jesus, through faith in our Savior, I remind you that you have been recreated in the image of God.



As **a new kind of humanity**, who we are... now determines how we live.

From our passage – the key point of connection and application concerns the practice of an integrity that honors...God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit.

There are two other secondary truth connections in these six verses. Let's look at them first.



Have you ever read J.R. Tolkien's book, 'The Lord of the Rings' or watched the movie?

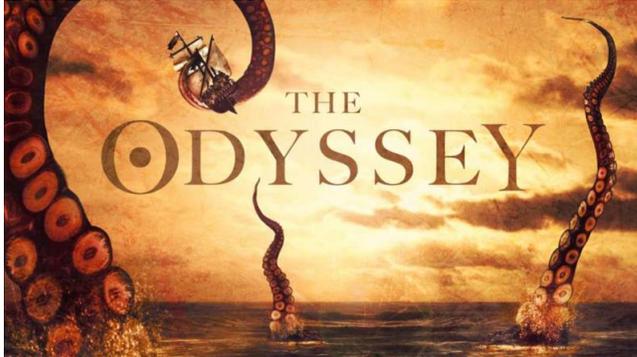
Tolkien wrote his book in the style of a travel narrative in order to tell the story of the world and key human dramas.

Frodo and his companions had to travel from the Shire to Mount Doom in order to save the world by destroying a powerful ring.

An evil being known as Sauron, craved this ring and desperately searched for it, in order to bring to fruition his ambition to dominate the entire world of men, hobbits, elves and dwarves.

Throughout the journey, Frodo, and those with him encountered good and evil... not just in other creatures, who either helped or hindered... but also in themselves.

In the time of the New Testament, the book that had caught the imagination of many was 'The Odyssey,' written by Homer the Greek poet.



Similar to Lord of the Rings, the Odyssey is a great adventure story, into which Homer placed important moral and spiritual principles.

The book of Acts was also written in the style of a travel narrative. In addition to providing important details of the spread of Christianity into the Roman Empire and beyond, Dr. Luke also communicated important moral and spiritual truth principles for those who would follow Jesus.

Since chapter 13, the story of Acts, has focused on the apostle Paul and the part he played in taking the gospel of Jesus outside of the borders of Israel.

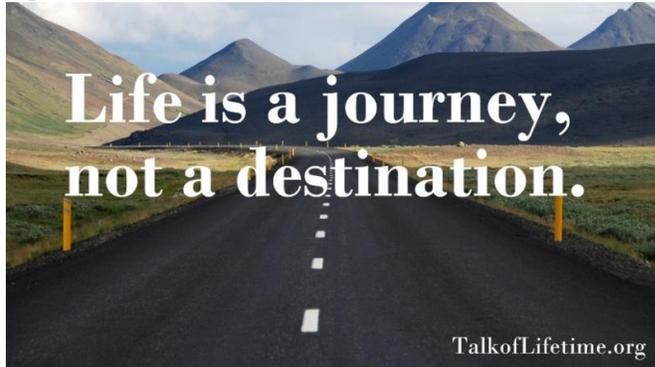


In the first six verses of Acts 20 we read again that Paul and his ministry companions are on the move – from Ephesus to Macedonia to Corinth to Asia...heading home to Syria.

What is the Holy Spirit wanting to impress upon us through these details?

To follow Jesus is to keep in step with him; going where he leads us.

In this regard, the practice and the experience of the believer is in agreement with the first half of this statement...

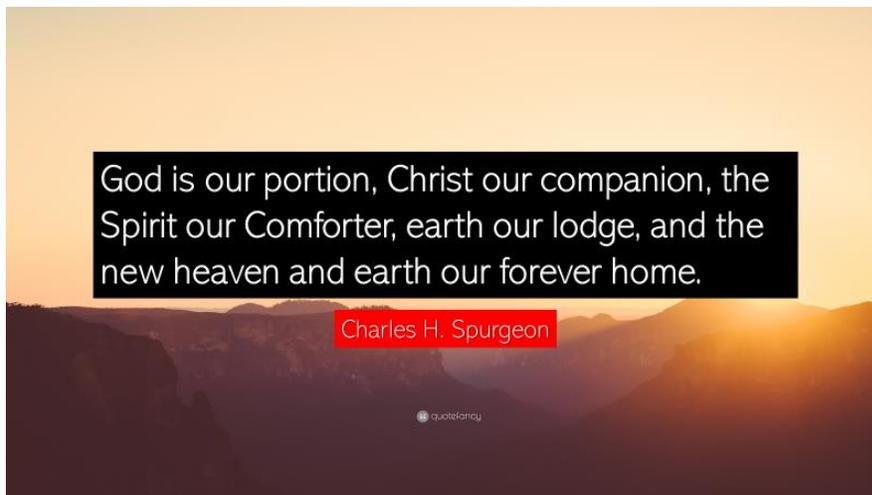


But where Christianity differs is that we believe the journey of our life is not simply a series of experiences or accomplishments, but a journey realized with someone... who is making us ready... for the place he is taking us to.

That someone is our Lord Jesus.

that somewhere is a new heaven and a new earth where we will live with him.

And he makes us ready through the Spirit and the Word.

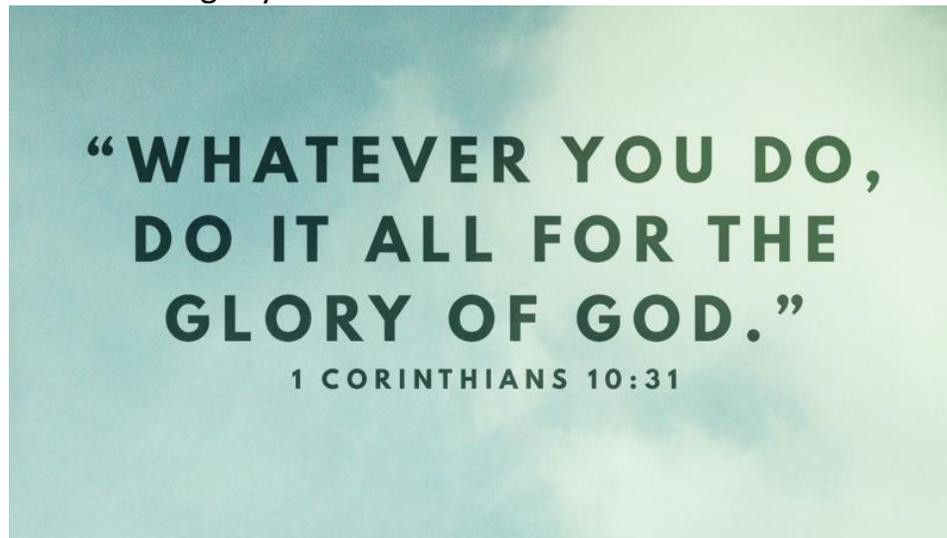


Here's the second truth connection.

We learn from these verses in Acts 20 that Paul did many things that would be considered ordinary – he encouraged people; he said good-byes; he travelled; he visited with old friends; he met people who didn't like him; he changed his plans.

The sanctification of the follower of Jesus happens in the context of our ordinary lives.

From the moment Paul was introduced in Acts 9, it has been seen... that he lived for the glory of God...

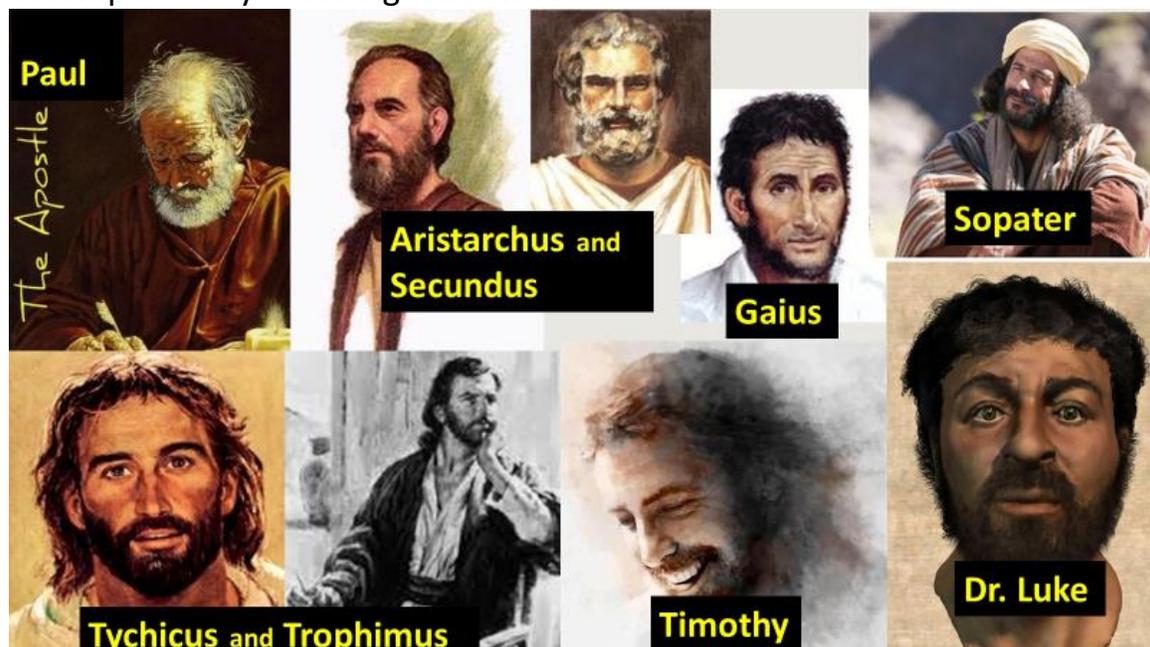


It is a good thing to desire that our efforts would honor God and spread his fame – in fact, that is an indicator that a person has been born of the Spirit. But our responsibility as we journey with our God ...each day of our lives, is to be found faithful... every single day... in whatever God puts before us.

...

Let’s now consider the primary truth connection in these six verses.

When Paul left Ephesus, he went to Macedonia and then to Corinth, accompanied by these eight individuals.



In Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth we discover what they were doing.

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

... we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

² In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.

⁵ And they exceeded our expectations:

They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

An offering was being collected for poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

⁶ So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.

⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Let's keep reading... for the presence of these eight men with Paul was connected to the offering being gathered.

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

¹⁶ Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you.

¹⁷ For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.

¹⁸ And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel.

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

¹⁹ What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.

²⁰ We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift.

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

²¹ For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

²² In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you.

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

²³ As for Titus, he is my partner
and co-worker among you;
as for our brothers,
they are representatives of the churches
and an honor to Christ.

²⁴ Therefore show these men the proof of your love
and the reason for our pride in you,
so that the churches can see it.

When Paul wrote of **how** the funds gathered were being administered, his use of the phrase **“avoid any criticism”** and **“taking pains to do what is right”** emphasize both the importance... and the God-honoring and Christ-exalting impact of integrity.

For the believer, we practice integrity not only because it is right, but in order to honor our God...who is light and in whom there is no darkness.

Godliness is not just what the believer doesn't do; it is how we live for the glory of God.

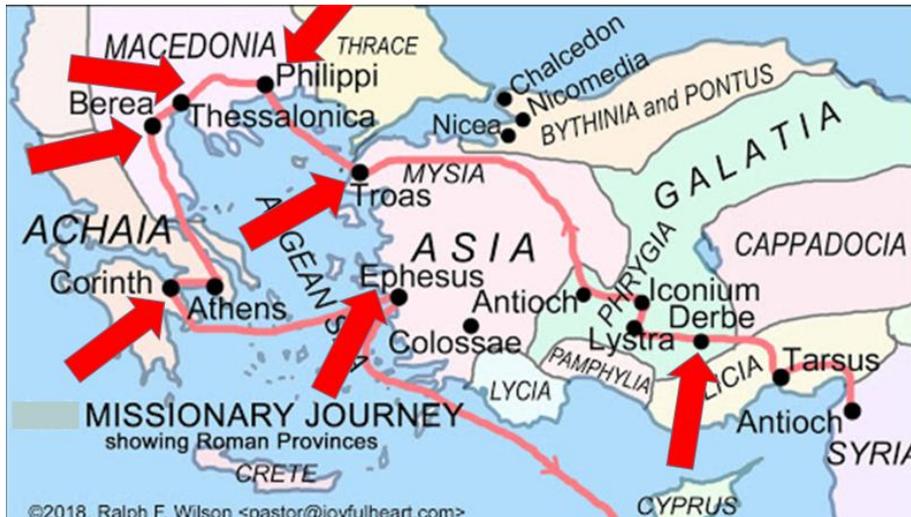
The impact of a community of faith who practices integrity is beautiful and awe-inspiring.

Let me summarize from these verses.

- **Integrity fuels enthusiasm.**
- It stimulates initiative.
- **It honors the Lord Jesus.**
- It inspires honorable motives.
- **It provokes a godly unwillingness to compromise and cut corners.**
- It awakens a burning passion to do what is right in the eyes of God and others.
- **It brings people together in the cause of Christ.**

I remind you from our passage, that what was being done was the practice of many churches.

The men who journeyed with Paul were from the different churches who had contributed:

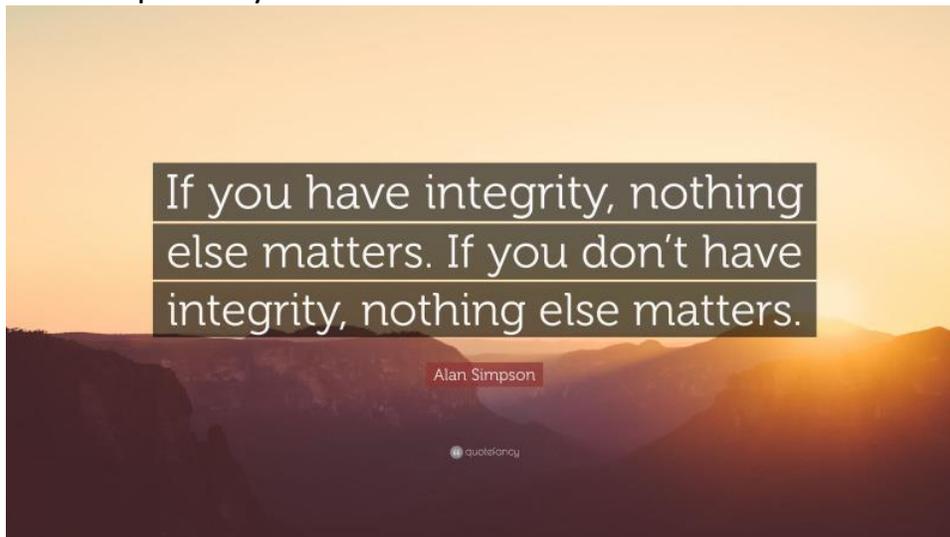


Their presence with Paul was one of the ways in which Paul took pains to do what was right... in order to honor God.

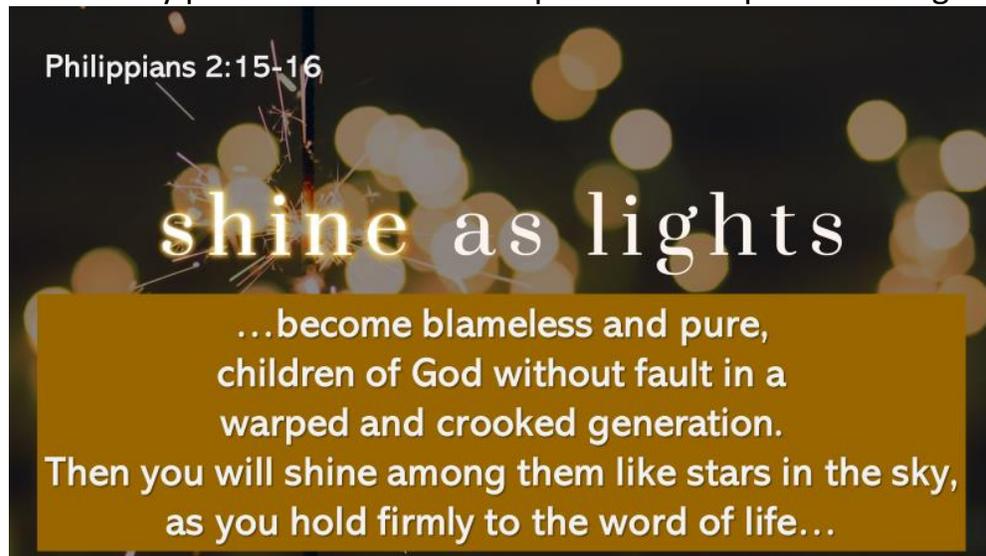
When these men returned home to their respective cities and churches, they would provide an eyewitness confirmation that the offering had been given to the intended recipients...and the impact it had.

While it is not the same...nonetheless, the gift we sent to Caldas last Christmas, was administered by the team who went...and their report confirmed your money was delivered and used as intended.

Integrity matters.
Alan Simpson says...



God is very passionate that his adopted children practice integrity.



Why is this so important to God?

Because of the condition of this world and its people.

How do the people of God become blameless and pure?

This verse tells us... by holding firmly to his word; by aligning our lives with what God says is good; by believing and then acting upon the promises of God.

This is the means by which we learn to live with an integrity that is distinguished by purity and a goodness that is like that of God's.

It will take effort.

Sometimes it will be costly to do what is right, in every circumstance.

But the prize which we pursue; the destination of our life journey is worth the effort.

- The life of faith is a life lived on the move with God.**

- It is a life lived in the midst of the ordinary.**
- It is a life that...again and again and again and again... because of love for God... chooses to do and to say what is good and right and pure...because these are the things in which God delights; and this is how we honor him.**

The Blessing

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...

Consider him...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

There used to be a TV show that told the story of people who were hoarders, and those who attempted to help them throw away the unnecessary things that cluttered their homes and in turn their lives.

May you and I know the blessing of God that would help us this morning to throw off everything that hinders us in our journey of faith, including any sin that might have entangled us.

May we run with perseverance.

May we live our lives with focus.

May we keep our eyes on Jesus.

He lived as he is asking us to live.

He didn't give up.

May we receive the blessing of grace from God so that we too might not lose heart.

We get one life...to live for the honor of our God.

In Acts 20:3 we're told that Paul stayed in Corinth for three months. It was during these three months, in addition, to all the ministry that he did, that Paul wrote the letter to the church at Rome.

What Paul wrote in Romans 15 is important to place alongside of Acts 20.

Romans 15:17-31

Paul's calling and his ambition was to preach the gospel where Jesus Christ was not known.

He had done that from Jerusalem to Illyricum.

That's why he was making plans to go to Spain after the love offering had been delivered to Jerusalem.

God has a plan for your life in its entirety.

But the details are typically given to you one piece at a time.

Like a journey – you travel on one road for a time.

And then you turn and travel on another road for a time.

And then you turn and travel on another road for a time.

To the best of our knowledge, while it was Paul's dream to go to Spain, he never made it there.

What does this tell us?

Connected to discerning of the will of God for our lives, one responsibility at a time, it would seem that God is pleased by the dreams of his people to keep on serving him in new and fresh ways.

A part of Paul's dream of going to Spain was to make a stop in Rome.

Not all our dreams will be realized.

Not all of our ideas are God's will.

How do we connect the will of God to the dreams we have?

We present to the Lord as an offering our dreams;

releasing him to do with them as he pleases;

to fulfill what pleases him and to set aside what pleases him

And every choice you make

This is reflected in choices people make; choices that cut corners; that make compromises; that keep a person moving further and further away from their Creator.

He was as careful in
To achieve that goal, as it was for Paul with the offering

When it comes to the character of those you interact with

Regardless of the situation, the follower of Jesus is called upon to

The gospel is holistic.
It addresses all of life's issues.
Paul shared with people how their sins might be forgiven.
But he also showed people how to live this new life made possible
through faith in Jesus, and challenged and encouraged them
to live like Jesus lived.

And living like Jesus included a concern for the poor
and an understanding that what God had placed in their hands
was given as a trust to be used to bless others
as God's Spirit directed them to do so.

Paul didn't write his letters to the churches from some monastery
where he was isolated and disconnected from everyday life.

He did write some of his latter letters from prison.
But many of his letters were written while he was on the move.

In the living of his life in service to Jesus,
God's Spirit spoke God's truth
into Paul's mind and heart.

You and I will not pen Scripture as Paul did.
But direction and insight will come from God's Spirit to us
in the midst of living our lives for Jesus.

There are times when we will need to draw back in order to hear from God.
But more often than not, we hear from God
as we put one foot in front of the other and step out in faith.

That's the third thing I want you to realize out of this passage.
The fourth is this.

As God's Spirit spoke God's truth into the mind of Paul
and he in turn wrote down that truth guided by the Spirit,
it was no ordinary literature that Paul wrote.
The Bible is God-breathed.
Because it is, it is a very dangerous book.
It reveals to us the Creator God and Savior,
who in the words of CS Lewis, while good, is not safe.

This Creator God and Savior possesses such incredible power,
that even his words, written for us to read in the pages of the Bible,
brim with such life that they can pierce into the very core of our being.

His words convict; they turn our thinking right side up;
they persuade a person to turn from their empty way of living to
God,
and in doing so to be born again of the Spirit.
This is why we are a community that describes itself
as being Word centered.
This is why I want to encourage you as a community
to re-establish the habit of bringing your Bible to church.

I will slow down in my teaching in order to give you time

to look up each passage that we read.
But I want to encourage you to look up every passage.

The written Word of God must play a central role in our lives
and in the practice of our faith.
If our life as followers of Jesus is a journey; this book is the map.

To that end, teens and adults, let's model to the children of this church,
the high priority we place upon the words spoken by our God
and recorded in the pages of this book.

That's the fifth thing I want you to realize.

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That's what Paul did.
And that's the sixth thing I want you to realize.

Here's the seventh and last thing I want you to realize.