

# St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings,  
for 05.03.15 (Easter 5b)*

## **Day One: Acts 8:26-40**

*Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on the way he met an Ethiopian eunuch...*

We all like the idea of God giving us a call, telling us where he wants us to serve. Even as a congregation, we wish that God would just make it crystal clear where he wants us to serve and what he wants us to do. Is it too much to ask that he give us just one little sign? Say, a single sentence on a Post-It note?

That's what the apostle Philip got, just one sentence to tell him exactly where he was called, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." But this is one of those times when you think there is something wrong with your GPS. Philip was called to a "desert road!" There's nothing there!

What kind of a place is that to be called to serve?

Have you ever asked that question? Why did God call me to this place in my life? Nothing works for me here!

Sometimes we can't see any sense in the situation to which God has called us. We can't see any way that we could do any good. Our work seems like a road in the middle of nowhere. A dead end.

But because Philip obeyed, he brought the gospel, not just to one man, but to another entire nation! It wasn't the desert road that was important, but the act of obedience, Philip taking the journey, because it was along the way that he discovered the real purpose of his call when he met the man from Ethiopia.

What journey are you on today? Maybe it seems like it's going nowhere. Maybe where it's going is not what is so important, but rather the people who are on the same road with you. What chance to serve have you encountered along the way?

**Prayer:** *Dearest Savior, give me faith to get out of bed today, to set my foot upon the road, and to follow you wherever you lead. Amen.*

## **Day Two: 1 John 4:1-11**

*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

The first letter of John is a wonderful letter, full of encouragement and inspiration. There are so many little gems in 1st John that I would encourage you to read the entire letter. But these words of our text, from chapter 4, are especially precious.

We all want to love. We all want to experience love. Most of our music is about falling in love or being in love. We say that “people who love people are the luckiest people in the world.” And when people are in love they are happy and carefree. At least it seems like that.

But we’re all too familiar with how love seems to run out – patience grows thin – life gets complicated – relationships get tangled. Our love often fails, and when it does we suffer deep pain.

We want to send greeting cards that proclaim ‘this is the evidence of my love,’ but a greeting card is not enough to overcome our failures, the

times we didn’t show our love like we should have, or the times we loved ourselves or thought of ourselves too much. Our love runs out.

But John says, “THIS is love: not that we loved God,” not that we could be strong or perfect or loving, “but that he loved us...”

Love is not an impossible thing – something we can only dream about, or only experience for a short time before it dies. Love is not far away from us. It’s not something that we used to have, but then the only person in the world who could have loved us is lost to us.

God’s love is the source of our love. God’s love is always there for us. God’s love is what fills us with love, what makes us love, and what revives our love when we have poisoned it. God’s love is enough for us. And his love will never weaken or fade away. His love has rescued us, so that our love can be renewed.

**Prayer:** *Dearest Father, you have loved me first. Teach me to love. Amen.*

### Day Three: John 15:1-8

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken...”*

Pruning hurts. It hurts a grape vine. It hurts trees. It hurts us.

The dictionary says that debridement is “the medical removal of a patient's dead, damaged, or infected tissue to improve the healing potential of the remaining healthy tissue.” It sounds simple, but it can be terribly painful. Burn patients often must undergo many sessions of debridement, like pruning, carefully removing dead tissue bit by bit so that the healthy tissue can grow. It hurts, and yet it is lifesaving.

We may have “dead tissue” in our lives too, resentments and bitterness from old wounds, or wrong lessons learned. You would think that we’d be happy to let those things go, but we’re often quite attached to them. We’ve learned to live with them, and we’re reluctant to surrender them.

Tearing away the anger you feel toward one who wronged you feels like you are losing. You are surrendering the only weapon you had to get even. But in reality you are pulling out the poisoned thorn of bitterness.

Cutting off a way of life that is familiar to you, a pattern of behavior that you’re used to but which separates you from God, feels scary. What will I do instead? If I don’t look out for myself, who will look out for me? If I love others, won’t they take advantage of me?

But in love our Great Physician cleans us, even if it is painful or unpleasant. He takes away things that we love, but things that we have grown too dependent on, so that we may grow healthy and strong.

What pruning has God done in your life that, afterward, you realized was a blessing? When have you lost something, only to find that God had something better for you?

**Prayer:** *O Gardener, I pray, make me grow and bear fruit. O Great Physician, I pray, let me live for you. Amen.*

**Day Four: John 15:1-8** (again)

*He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.*

My late father-in-law kept a small apple orchard. Since it took a lot of time and effort, it also formed the subject for many conversations and I learned a bit about the care of trees.

For instance, did you know that pruning is not just to remove dead or diseased branches? And it's also not just done to make the tree produce more fruit? In fact, a careful grower might prune his trees so that they bear LESS fruit!

That's right. An apple tree can grow out of control, with its branches too long and too far from the trunk. If it does, a heavy harvest of apples can cause a large branch to break off from the tree. It can even split a tree in half and kill it. The tree could actually be killed by having too "good" of a harvest!

But a careful pruning can allow the tree to grow in a proper shape that can hold its harvest safely – be low enough to make the harvest easier –

high enough to permit mowing of the weeds and poison ivy – and be beautiful so that the tree and the entire orchard are a feast for the eyes.

We expect our heavenly Father, whom Jesus calls the Gardener, to prune away our sins, or to bring some discipline into our lives so that we can bear fruit. But what about giving us a pleasing shape? Or protecting us from growing too fast, or too far?

Are you willing to allow God to trim some of the branches of which you're most proud? Are you willing to be limited by God?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I thought I knew what shape my life should take, but my Father has trimmed away some of what I loved the best. Teach me to welcome his pruning and his nourishment, so that I may be most beautiful in HIS eyes. Amen.*

<p>These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship at <a href="http://stpaulannarbor.org">stpaulannarbor.org</a></p>
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