

**Travels with the Spirit: A Summer Travelogue Through the Book of Acts  
Travel Testimony**

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It was the first anniversary of my father's death. I was in Istanbul, Turkey, setting up a study abroad program with a delegation from my college. My mind was churning with all the details to work out, but my heart was overloaded with grief. My colleagues were dazzled by this ancient, cosmopolitan city: Arabic signs, crowded markets, domed mosques, the Muslim call to prayer resounding throughout the city, noisy street vendors and tourists everywhere, but my heart desperately needed something else.

There are ancient castle ruins about an hour's ferry ride away. Somehow going there felt right. In spite of the risks, I set out alone. A crowd of vendors and others eager to take advantage of tourists surrounded the ferry station. It was a relief to get onboard and finally be alone.

The ferry docked at the village at the foot of the castle ruins. Several vendors hawking guide services zeroed in on me. I waved them away as I set out for the castle, but one was very persistent. He kept pace right alongside, got in front of me, worked hard to make me respond. It was really unnerving. I was intimidated and scared.

As I tried to keep going and ignore the vendor, I noticed three Muslim school girls up ahead who kept turning around to look at me. They seemed to be talking about me. I felt more conspicuous and scared than ever. Then one of them turned and said in English, "Are you going to the castle?" I nodded.

She gestured with her arm, "We will take you." At that, the persistent vendor finally drifted away. The girls walked on ahead deep in conversation. Every now and then, one would glance back to make sure I was there. Once she pointed to a turn we needed to take and made sure to catch my eye so she knew I understood.

The path led us up, up, up the mountain, through pastures and trees. Near the top there was a wall of tumbled boulders, remnants of the castle wall. The girls scrambled up. As I approached, my young guide turned around, reached down to stretch out her hand, and pulled me up. When I stood beside them, she gestured around at the grassy mountain dotted with boulders, sheep, and a few tourists, and said, "This is it."

The girls went on their way. I found my way to the edge of the pasture overlooking the Black Sea and sat down. It was a glorious June day. The sky was a brilliant blue. Far

below the sea was as serene and blue as the sky. It was as quiet and solitary a place as I've ever known.

I sat for a long time. I was too confused, too exhausted, too heart-sick to find any words for prayer, but somehow my heart was finally able to pour out all it was holding. As I sat under that beautiful mediterranean sky thousands of miles from home, I found myself entrusting my father back to God. Somehow, all the turmoil and pain and anguish of my grief was replaced by what Philippians 4:6 describes: "the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding." That's what came over me that day.

Now, I often turn to silence and solitude for prayer. I learned that prayer doesn't need words; the heart can say all that is needed. I learned that if I am just still and listen, God will hear—and somehow respond—to my prayer.

Now, when I hear the parable of the Good Samaritan, I think about three Muslim schoolgirls. When I hear Matthew 25:35, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," I remember how they came to my rescue, for I was indeed a stranger, vulnerable and scared, and they took me in. Those schoolgirls embodied the Gospel that day. Now, I try to watch for strangers and welcome them with as much wisdom, gentleness, and compassion as they did.