

Travels with the Spirit: A Summer Travelogue Through the Book of Acts
Travel Testimony
“Taking Risks”
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In 1997, I arrived in Islamabad, Pakistan, to begin six months of archival work toward my PhD dissertation. I knew exactly one person there, who I hadn't actually met in person. It was my first travel outside of the United States. Eventually this one person connected me to a middle-class family in the city of Lahore, from whom I rented a room. This family owned a small property outside of the city, where tenants grew small amounts of fruits and vegetables, and as landlords my hosts were entitled to a share of that produce. The task of driving out to collect that share fell to the middle of the three brothers who were my hosts. He was about twenty years old at the time, and he kindly invited me to go. As we got into the small sedan—imagine a Fiat 500 with four doors rather than two—I dutifully sat in the front passenger seat and put on the seat belt. Seeing this, he said, “We don't really do that here.” I paused for a moment. “But why are they in the car?” I asked. In reply, he shrugged. So, not wishing to seem an ungrateful or stodgy guest, I unbuckled the belt, and off we went, dodging goods trucks, slower cars, and the occasional camel. I came closer to God that day, or at least closer to a more visceral understanding of what it means to put one's trust in God. But shouldn't we follow the example of Jesus, and refrain from putting God to the test? Should we *not* throw ourselves down from the precipice, expecting that the angels will break our fall?

Part of my daily routine in Lahore involved walking about a mile from my hosts' home to the provincial archives. My route primarily followed a divided boulevard, intersected by numerous streets. One morning, in February 1998, I stepped off the curb to cross one of these streets, after checking over my shoulder for oncoming traffic. After landing my first step down, an auto-rickshaw turned left in front of me, close enough for me to feel the breeze of its wake on my face. It's true, as a pedestrian I was lowest on the hierarchy of moving objects on the road—okay, slightly higher than donkeys, but below bicycles and well below the apex predator, the Mitsubishi Pajero. But despite my familiarity, despite my precautions, the simple act of walking placed me in potential danger. Travel is a risk. Walking is a risk. Living is a risk. Yet God clearly wants us to live, to take the risk of being among others, some of whom may in fact do us harm. I will keep traveling, but probably I'll buckle up.