

# Don't Let Your Friends Dissuade You

Acts 21:1-16

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## Introduction:

Today in our sermon series from the book of Acts,

- we come to a new section that records Paul's journey from Asia to Jerusalem and then to Rome.
  - This journey takes up all the rest of the book of Acts.
  - Paul did not particularly *want* to leave Asia,
    - but he was impressed with the need to bring together the churches he had planted with their religious mother, Jerusalem, and their political mother, Rome.
  - This was, in fact, a task which Christ, by the Holy Spirit, had called him to carry out, as we read some time ago in Acts 19:21 which says:
    - **Acts 19:21: When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."**
  - Once Paul ascertained that this was what the Lord wanted, he began to make preparations for departure...
    - We saw in chapter 19 & 20 how he visited the churches he had planted in Asia, Macedonia, and Greece, to bid them farewell, to encourage them to continue in the Lord, and to take a collection for the saints in Jerusalem.
      - Even as he makes his way from one church to another, he describes himself in Acts 20:22 as:
        - **"bound in the Spirit"** to take this journey even though **"the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me."**
      - The Lord is the one who is sending him on this journey to Jerusalem and then to Rome, so Paul obeys.
  - What was the purpose of this journey? Why was it important?
    - Well, Jerusalem and Rome are the two great centers of power that Paul had disturbed by his ministry of raising up Gentile churches.
      - Paul wanted to do all he could to establish unity with these great centers,
        - at least among the disciples of Christ in them.
      - To bring this about, Paul is going up to Jerusalem with no less than nine men who represent the churches that he has established...
        - There has been some uneasiness about the Gentile mission in Jerusalem.
          - We have already seen how Paul was instrumental in establishing in Jerusalem that the Gentiles need not be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses.
        - But there is still uneasiness about his work among the Gentiles,
          - So Paul and his companions are armed with two things that ought to help accept his work...
            - They come with reports and testimonies about the work that the Lord has done in their regions...miracles and conversions...
            - And they carry with them a monetary offering from the Gentiles for the relief of the poor persecuted saints at Jerusalem.

- In this way, Paul hopes to build relations with the Presbytery at Jerusalem.
- He also sees the importance of linking the churches he has established with the church at Rome.
  - Paul wrote his epistle to them at this time to tell them of his plans to visit them and to ask for their prayers for him at Jerusalem.
    - This is what he wrote to them in Romans 15:25-29:
      - **Rom 15:25-29: But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.**
    - Paul goes on to asks for their prayers for his visit to Jerusalem because he knows that there are difficulties there...
      - **Rom 15:30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.**
- By going there, Paul will link himself and his ministry throughout Asia Minor and Greece, with the mother city.
  - This will facilitate missions and a healthy working relationship among these churches.
- It was imperative that the Gentiles in all of these regions knew of their connection with Israel as their mother.
  - The foundation of the gospel is found in Israel's scriptures and Israel's people...
  - And the Gentiles needed to know that they did not support the root, but that the root supported them.
    - Without this, they would be subject to falling into the kind of heresy that denied the Lord as the one who had worked out His plan of redemption from ancient times.
    - They would make it appear as if He were a god who had only recently come on the scene.

TRANS> So you see that Paul has some very important work to do for the Lord Jesus.

- From Acts 21 to Acts 28, we will see him taking this journey, first to Jerusalem and then to Rome...
  - And we will see in particular how the Lord enables him to complete this journey in the face of all kinds of opposition...
  - We will see how Jesus remarkably preserves Paul on this journey...
    - He does not allow him to be talked out of going to Jerusalem because of the dangers that await him there...
    - He does not allow him to visit Jerusalem and remain unnoticed by the unbelieving Jews without testifying to them...
      - But He also keeps him from being torn to pieces by the mob violence of the unbelieving Jews...
      - And from a plot to murder him by a band of zealous Jews...
  - He brings it about through all this that he is able to testify before governors and kings...

- but keeps him from being executed or left to rot so as to do the Jews a favour...
- And then He preserves him from a shipwreck that might have taken his life...
  - and from the custom of killing prisoners when there is a shipwreck (lest they escape)...
  - from a poisonous snakebite...
- And at Rome, He sees that his imprisonment is one in which he is able to testify to both Jews and Greeks.
- So you see that Jesus does some very remarkable things to get Paul to the places He wants him to be.
  - And today we are going to look in particular at how He gives Paul courage in the face of danger at Jerusalem...
    - And keeps him from being dissuaded by his well-meaning friends!
    - This teaches us how the Lord is able to bring His servants to the places that He wants them to be!

Let me draw your attention now to our text—Acts 21:1-16.

Acts 21:1-16: Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following *day* to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. 2 And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. 3 When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. 4 And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. 5 When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till *we were* out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. 6 When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. 7 And when we had finished *our* voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. 8 On the next *day* we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was *one* of the

May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

seven, and stayed with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. 10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.'" 12 Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." 15 And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. 16 Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

**I. In this reading, I want to show you two ways that friends can dissuade you from your duty to Christ...**

A. First, they can dissuade you simply by being such good friends that you don't want to leave them when you ought to for Christ's kingdom!

A.1. Although it is not clear in the New King James Version which I read,

- When it says:
  - **Acts 21:1: Now it came to pass that when we had departed from them we set sail...**
  - the word translated *departed* is a word that means *torn away*.
  - making it read, "Now it came to pass that when we had torn away from them..."

A.2. This is instructive because it reminds us of the close relationship that Paul had with the saints at Ephesus—and in many other places.

- You will remember how they wept at his departure, especially because he had said that they would see his face no more.
- You can be sure that it was very difficult for the Apostle to leave them!
  - He had poured out his life for them and when you do that, it makes you close...
    - especially when those you do it for return the love as these had done.
    - If you want to strengthen your marriage, one of the best things you can do is start pouring out your life for your spouse!
- What's more, we have seen that Paul was concerned about them...
  - He had jealously watched over them and now he must leave them.
    - Yes, he committed them to Lord, and yes, he had prepared elders to look after them, but Paul knew the reality of the situation...
    - He knew that in the past he had left churches only to have them fall into difficulty from false teachers.
      - This concern made it even more difficult for him to leave.

TRANS> But the Lord had work for him to do elsewhere now and so he and his companions had to tear themselves away.

- This is how it ought to be when a pastor leaves a congregation or when any member leaves.
  - I have mentioned before that it is a safeguard to us to have such care for one another

A.3. But we must be ready to separate from each other when God calls for it.

- I was actually reminded of this last week when the Bigneys requested prayer for the establishment of a church in Truro...
  - To be honest, my first thought was, “no, we can't pray for that—that would mean that the Bigneys would leave us...”
- But of course it was wrong of me to think like that...
  - If it is in the best interests of God's kingdom—if a solid church could be raised up in Truro, and God raised up leadership for us here in Halifax—
    - it would be good if God established a church in Truro!
- Brothers and sisters, that is one of the things we are seeking as a church—
  - We want to be able to establish daughter churches rather than to become a mega church...
    - And that will mean that people who are dear to us will be separated from us.
    - Suppose the day comes that we are able to start a daughter church in Dartmouth—
      - That will mean that many of members will be worshipping over there instead of with us here in Halifax!
      - That would be hard—they would have to tear themselves away from us...
        - but it would be a wonderful thing for the sake of the kingdom!
        - It is something we need to work toward and pray for!

TRANS> So that is one way that friends can dissuade you—simply by being good friends that you don't want to be separated from for the sake of the kingdom...

- But now look with me at the second way friends can dissuade you...
  - This is the way that is most prominent in our text...

B. Friends can dissuade from serving Christ by being overly protective...

B.1. You can see from our text that Paul's friends tried to talk him out of going to Jerusalem to do the work that God had given him to do!

B.1.a. They did not do this because they were enemies of the gospel, but because they were friends of the gospel...

- And they knew that the Lord had greatly used Paul and they did not want anything bad to happen to him!
- They knew, by prophecy, that he was going to face severe opposition by the Jews at Jerusalem...
  - They knew that he would be put in chains and delivered over to the Romans.

B.1.b. Look at all the pressure they put Paul under, trying to dissuade him.

**B.1.b.1)** In verse 4, we are told that he spent a week with the disciples at Tyre, and it says,

- **Acts 21:4: They told Paul [literally *kept telling Paul*] through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.**
- It almost sounds as if the Holy Spirit was telling Paul not to go...
  - some people have even argued for that view...
    - but it can't be that—the Spirit had told Paul to go and the Spirit does not contradict Himself...
  - It was not the Spirit that was telling Paul not to go...
    - The Spirit was doing what He had already been doing for weeks...
      - He was telling of all the trouble that Paul would meet with when he went to Jerusalem...
        - and the people were interpreting it that he should not go and telling him not to go.
- We need to guard against making the same mistake with the scriptures...
  - It is one thing when the scripture says that something is not to be done—like that you should not steal...
    - If a brother is stealing, we can tell him on God's authority to stop!
  - But it is quite another thing to confuse our application of what the scripture says with what it actually says...
    - For example, you might apply the verse that says that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit to say that we should try to take care of our bodies...
      - But you can't go and tell the brother who you fear is about to have a heart attack that the Bible says you should not eat French fries...
    - That is to mix up the application of what God says with what He has actually said.
      - And that is what the saints at Tyre were doing to Paul.

B.1.b.2) It was no better at Caesarea...

- At Caesarea, Paul stayed with Philip the Evangelist who was one of the seven deacons...
  - This in itself is a remarkable testimony of God's grace.
  - Years before it was Paul who had overseen the killing of one of the seven deacons that worked with Philip—Stephen...
    - and now Paul is staying at Philip's house, welcomed as a dear brother!

- But anyway, while he is there, the prophet Agabus comes from Judea... verse 11 says:
  - **Acts 21:11: When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”**
- There is nothing wrong with this prophecy—Agabus is just telling Paul what the Holy Spirit has been telling him all along...
  - But the problem comes, again, with the interpretation of the prophecy...
    - Look at verse 12:
      - **Acts 21:12: Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.**
    - It is understandable—
      - They loved Paul and they did not want him to get hurt,
        - but no one should ever suppose that a prophecy that warns of tribulation is a prophecy given to direct you to avoid the tribulation!
        - If that were true, none of the disciples should have followed Jesus because He told them that if they followed Him, they would have much tribulation!
    - And what made it all the more difficult for Paul was that even his travel companions—including Luke—joined in trying to talk him out of going!
      - It was hard enough to know that trouble awaited him, but now he had added to this the fact that all his friends were trying to talk him out of it!
      - They should have been encouraging him and strengthening him—especially his travel companions!

B.2. If you have been a Christian for very long, I am sure you have faced this kind of opposition from well-meaning friends and relations...

B.2.a. Some of you met with it when you were first converted and started going to church...

- Your parents or your old friends warned you that you were getting too religious or they told you were getting into a cult or something.
- Or maybe they just told you that you shouldn’t go to church so much and that you certainly don’t need to keep the whole Lord’s Day.
- In some cases, they really were concerned about you.

B.2.b. Many of you who homeschool met with this kind of opposition from friends and family about that...

- They told you how hard it would be—and that turned out to be true!
- But they also told you that you would mess up your children and that they would not know how to deal with the real world—
  - or that their education would be grossly deficient—
  - or that they would suffer from a lack of socialization...
  - or that Mom needed to be out helping to pay the bills instead of at home teaching the kids!

B.2.c. I have heard several stories about believers who were advised not to tithe so they could put away for retirement or something...

- and those who were rebuked for chastening their children and told of the damage that they would cause by it...

- And you know how believers will discourage other believers from witnessing to the lost—
- It is true that witnessing can be done in a harsh or unloving way, but many times the critics are critical because they feel guilty for not witnessing enough themselves.
  - If you do it wrong, you can figure it out soon enough, but if you don't do it all, what then?

B.2.d. Young men are sometimes wrongly discouraged about going into the ministry...

- They are told that there is not enough money in it or told of the pressures and things that they will face...
- The warnings are appropriate, but they should be presented in a way of counting the cost and encouragement to faithfulness rather than trying to talk them out of it.

B.2.e. There are many examples in history too...

- John G Patton was discouraged from going to minister in the South Seas because, they said, "you will be eaten by cannibals."
  - He replied to those who said that he would grow old soon and die and be eaten by worms, so what difference did it make if he were eaten by cannibals a little sooner?
- And there is the example of Martin Luther who was discouraged from going to the Diet of Worms to defend his doctrine—
  - He went anyway and made one of the most important defenses of the Reformation and the teachings of scripture.
  - Later when a plot was discovered to kill him, his friends kidnapped him, but it is good they did not do this before he went to Worms.
- We might think of a more modern example—that of Jay Adams when he wrote *Competent to Counsel* around 1970.
  - He had some of his peers review it and they said that it was too strong.
  - Jay considered what they said, and then, as he said, "I took my file and made all the edges even sharper."
    - God greatly used this book to help many return to the scriptures.

TRANS> If you are serving Christ, you will have to contend, at times, with the dissuasions of well-meaning friends.

## II. What should you do when you meet with such opposition in your service to Christ?

A. This may surprise you, but the first thing you should do is to make sure that you listen carefully to what your detractors are saying!

A.1. Consider that in Paul's case, the Holy Spirit was the One who was giving all the warnings to Paul!

- As Paul himself said, before he even left Asia,
  - **Acts 20:23: "The Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulation await me."**
- The Spirit was not the one telling him not to go, but the Spirit was the one who kept bringing it up about the dangers...
  - And if the Spirit was bringing it up, Paul ought to listen to it!

TRANS> But why? Why would the Spirit do that if He wanted Paul to go?

- A.2. There are some very good reasons that God often brings you a flood of opposition when you set out to do something hard for His sake!
- Consider some of these reasons...
- A.2.a. He raises opposition to help you be sure that you are doing the right thing.
- Sometimes we are too hasty and we take on more than we can handle.
    - Not everyone is cut out to be a missionary to the South Seas.
  - Sometimes we do things for the wrong reasons—perhaps to fit in or to prove that we are as faithful as the next guy.
    - There are times when you should let your friends dissuade you.
- A.2.b. Another reason for listening is to prepare you for the hard things you will face.
- The Lord did not want Paul to be surprised with what was going to happen to him at Jerusalem.
    - Paul had lots of warnings so he could be prepared.
  - If you are doing something hard, like homeschooling—you need to know before you get started that it will be hard.
    - If you are going to the mission field, you need to know what it is like to live in a hut with termites and ants and burning heat and tropical diseases.
    - To many venture out with enthusiasm but then quit because they never really counted the cost. Friends can help you do that.
- A.2.c. Related to this, another reason that God raises up opposition is to test your commitment.
- You have to evaluate if you are ready to bear the hardships involved.
    - This is a very good thing to do because it helps you consider all the reasons you have to make the sacrifice for the Lord!
    - You have to look at the importance of what you are doing for Him, at the importance of His kingdom and at His great love.
- A.2.d. Consider that dissuasion also benefits others—even the ones that are doing the dissuasion...
- As they bring up all the hardships you will face and you still want to do it for Him,
    - it causes them to think about their own commitment to Him...
    - As you give them your reasons for wanting to serve Him sacrificially and tell them what a great master He is,
      - It helps them to see that it is true!
  - Think about in Paul's case...
    - He was doing what he was doing because he claimed to have seen the Lord Jesus personally and to have been called by Him.
      - If he was lying—he would not have been willing to walk into persecution like he did.
      - Why would anyone do that for a lie?
        - Paul was able to show people what he loved to show them—how much he loved the Lord and how He was such a great Saviour that he was willing to do anything for Him!
        - If you love the Lord, opposition about doing his will is an opportunity for you to testify of Him...

TRANS> So you see that instead of being bummed out when friends and enemies try to dissuade you from your service to God,

- give thanks for the opposition!
    - God has sent it with a good purpose!
  - And after you have listened to your friends...
- B. If you are still convinced that you are doing the right thing—then proceed with your plans, despite what your detractors say!

- B.1. It seems that Paul has been very patient with all the opposition he has been given...
- but now that even his travelling companions whom he has brought to Jerusalem with him are trying to talk him out of going,
    - he finally speaks up—in a very kindly manner...
  - Look at verse 13 and you can see for yourself...
    - **Acts 21:13: Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?”**
    - *breaking my heart* is our idiom—in the original it is *beating on my heart*—
      - the word is used of women washing clothes as they did by beating on them with stones!
        - Paul says, “why are you trying to break down my resolve—to make my firm resolve go limp?”
        - He is moved by their tears and their concern—
    - But he assures them that he is totally committed to the work that is before him no matter what the cost...
      - He continues, saying:
        - **Acts 21:13 continued: “For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”**
    - If you are sure that you are doing the right thing,
      - that is the sort of thing that you need to say to your friends...
      - Tell them that you know it will be hard—and that even if it is harder than they think it will be—
        - you are totally committed to do it for your Lord.
    - In this gentle way, you say, as Jesus said in a more harsh way to Peter, “Get behind Me Satan,” when he dared to tell the Lord of glory not to go to the cross!
      - Do not let anyone dissuade you from what God has called you to do!

- B.2. And let me add that if you are on the side of the detractors...
- Then you need to learn from the way Paul’s detractors responded once they saw that he was absolutely committed...
    - [And don’t tell me that you are never on the side of the detractors!
    - Of course you are—of course there are times when you will be and even times when you should be...
      - Jesus Himself was on the side of the detractors of the man who came and said he would follow Him...
        - Jesus began to tell the man about the hardships he would face—that the Son of man did not even have a place to lay His head.]
  - You **will** be on the side of detractors at times...but once you see that your friend is committed, give up trying to dissuade him!
    - Why are you weeping and breaking his heart?

- Support him and encourage him (as long as he is not doing something sinful of course) and do as Paul's detractors...
  - Look at verse 14...
    - **Acts 21:14** So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."
    - They finally put the matter in God's hands.
      - Paul is ready to die at Jerusalem, so they are ready to let him.
      - They had learned from Jesus that the cross is part of our service and they were willing to accept it for Paul.
- But now look at what they do!
  - They don't stop with just saying, "the will of the Lord be done."
  - They escort their dear brother Paul to Jerusalem and they arrange lodging for him there at a time when lodging would be hard to find.
    - **Verse 15-16: And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.**
  - This is a great response...
    - Support your brother in the hard task that he is undertaking.
    - Come on side with him and honour him—he is the Lord's servant and he is doing what he is doing for Him—because he loves Him!

TRANS> So you see how we ought to respond whether we are the one who is doing the service or the one who is testing the one who is ready to serve...

- But there is another lesson in all this—a very powerful lesson—that I don't want you to miss...
  - I've already mentioned it briefly...but I want to look at it more closely...

### III. Paul's unfaltering commitment brings to our attention the glory of Jesus and His kingdom!

- Do not miss this

A. Paul brings before us the very real fact that Jesus and His kingdom are well worth suffering for!

A.1. We don't like to think about that too much—

- Honestly now!
- We like to avoid that truth because we don't want to be obligated to radical sacrificial service...
  - Immediately our detracting voice says, "Don't be too extreme."
    - Don't you hear that voice in your own heart?
- But you tell me, *Was Paul too extreme?*
  - Was his Lord unworthy of the service Paul gave to Him?
  - Did Paul go too far?
  - Paul certainly thought He was worthy of it—
    - And of course Paul was right!
    - You *know* that he was right!

A.2. Consider King Jesus and His kingdom!

A.2.a. He is the best King of all...

- He is the very Son of God—having taken our flesh...

- His love for us is exhibited by the cross—He came and bore the curse of God that we might be reconciled to God!
- He is so good to us—so gracious—so kind and compassionate!
- And consider how wise He is—
  - He made the world and all that is in it—
    - but even more than that—He knows how to live well—how to live in a most blessed and beautiful manner...
- And consider how glorious He is—
  - He has majesty and authority—
    - He controls the surging seas and thunder and lightening.
    - He has all authority in heaven and earth...
      - All judgement is put into His hands.
      - The angels cover their faces in His glorious presence!
  - And He dearly dearly loves us...
    - so much so that He gave His soul for us—
    - He gave His back to the smiters and His cheeks to those who pluck out the hair.
    - He did not hide His face from shame and spitting...
      - All for our sake...that we might live in His kingdom.

A.2.b. And consider His kingdom...

- It is the kingdom of heaven where righteousness dwells...
  - It is a kingdom where all live according to His righteous and noble ways.
    - where all love as He loves and serve as He serves...
- It is a kingdom where miserable, corrupt, hell-bound sinners are rescued and redeemed!
  - It is a kingdom that completely turns around the wretched destiny to which we were headed...

TRANS> Do you see?

- Paul was doing the only reasonable thing...
  - He was giving himself fully into the service of this King and His kingdom...

B. Now what about you?

B.1. Are you willing to look at this great King and this marvellous kingdom?

- Will you really look at it and see how worthy it is?
- What sacrifice could be too great to make for it?
  - Can you tell me?

B.2. Are you ready to serve Him in ways that you are not serving Him now?

- What are you neglecting that He has called you to do?
  - Is it too great a sacrifice for you?
- What are you called to suffer that you are not willing to suffer for Him?
  - Are you ashamed to tell others that you belong to Him?
  - Is His kingdom not important enough to tell the lost about?
  - Is it not worth reaching out to others to do what you can to win them?

B.3. Do you see that He is worthy of your all?

- Can you say what Paul said?

- **“I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.”**
- Look at Him! Look at His beauty! Look at His kingdom!
- And when you have finished looking, look again!
- He truly is worthy!
  - Let no one dissuade you!
    - Do not dissuade yourself!