

## **Q&A with Brent Crowe, author of *Moments 'Til Midnight***

### **What inspired you to write *Moments 'Til Midnight*?**

Years ago I had the privilege of visiting the prison and dungeon in Rome, Italy where Paul was held in the days leading up to his execution. This was also the place where he would write the New Testament book/letter referred to as 2 Timothy. I've always had a fascination with Paul's leadership and how God used him in such an impactful way to influence the world. But I have a very hard time relating to Paul, and I don't think I'm the only one. After all, he was an apostle, contributed thirteen books to the New Testament, led the movement of Christianity, and the list could go on and on. In recent years, I've spent a considerable amount of time trying to wrestle with a perspective on Paul in which he was relatable to every Christian. And then one day this thought hit me: what if, at the end of the day, the Apostle Paul saw himself simply as a pilgrim trying to wander well through this world towards the heaven country? What if, after all we have studied concerning his theology and methodology...his leadership and his impact...Paul was just trying to go home.

What if, sitting alone in that dark and damp place where it seemed that every stone had been infected by blood or some other bodily fluid, Paul discovered the exact time his pilgrimage would come to an end. The walls of the dungeon seemed to cry out with a history of pain and hopelessness. And yet, even though the immediate environment was less than ideal, the next step of the journey had been a lighthouse of hope guiding Paul homeward for years. He may have been in a dungeon, but he was soon going to be raised up and seated in heavenly places with Jesus.

And then, if you will allow me one more 'what if'... what did this pilgrim wandering his way home think about in those final hours before his execution? It's amazing how much the brain can remember or recall in a short amount of time. I guess our minds are more like picture galleries than data banks with spreadsheets of information. Therefore, each chapter of the book is intended to be a different hour in the day in which Paul would have recalled an idea, event or relationship that had a positive impact on him being able to wander this world with his eyes wide open!

### **This book focuses on the life of the Apostle Paul. What two or three characteristics set his life apart from so many others?**

Well certainly one thing that sets Paul's life apart was his profound emphasis on grace. I am confident that his thoughts would have been drawn to the theme he wrote most about—grace—and how his life was transformed from one of potential to one of purpose. He tells Timothy in their final correspondence: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and descended from David, according to my gospel" (2 Cor. 2:8).

Secondly, his life continually demonstrated that "with God, all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). Paul's life continually bore witness to Christ's words and to the words he wrote

in Philippians 4:13: “I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.” His journey was so amazing in part because he seemed to continually overcome all odds. I mean, let’s be honest, Paul should or could have died so many times along those ten thousand miles and thirty-ish years as a pilgrim wandering this world:

- There were multiple attempts and plots on his life (Acts 9:23, 29; 20:3; 21:30; 23:10, 12; 25:3).
- He was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19).
- He endured satanic attacks and pressure (1 Thess. 2:18).
- He was beaten and jailed at Philippi (Acts 16:19–24).
- He suffered name calling and ridicule (Acts 17:16–18; 26:24).
- He was falsely accused (Acts 21:21, 28; 24:5–9).
- On five occasions he was given thirty- nine lashes by the Jews (2 Cor. 11:24).
- He was beaten with rods three times by the Romans (2 Cor. 11:25).
- He survived numerous violent storms at sea (2 Cor. 11:25; Acts 27:14–20).
- He was bitten by a poisonous snake (Acts 28:3–4).
- He was forsaken by friends and co-laborers (2 Tim. 4:10, 16).<sup>1</sup>

All that and not to mention, he spent nearly six years in jail! Any one of the above-mentioned events could have been enough to bring his journey to an end. In the end all one can do is marvel at the hand of God on this man, this pilgrim, this apostle who lived his purpose, accomplishing what so many would have deemed impossible.

The world needs people who believe God can use them to accomplish what so many believe to be impossible— people who see that ocean of problems and are willing to set sail and solve a few. The world needs people who get lost in their own heads as they consider the forgotten and overlooked and think creatively to find answers. It needs those who are willing to ask questions others won’t even consider, pilgrims who believe their journey is meant to intersect with the Mount Everest-sized crises in our culture not run from them. The type of pilgrims that believe God plus them can make up a majority any day of the week don’t need a movement or an organization behind them before they act. They are sojourners who dare to take Jesus’ words seriously: “With God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26).

**This book is written for people of all ages, but you spend most of your time working with students. What can young people in particular learn from the Apostle Paul?**

My hope is that they would begin to see themselves as modern-day pilgrims, that in the pages of this book, they would allow one pilgrim’s journey to echo through the ages into their journeys. So that we can wander well, as temporary sojourners, because we inherited the wisdom of a pilgrim that finished well. My desire and really the invitation of this book is this:

Come and...

*Let us wonder together.*

*Let us learn and discover.*

*Let us ask questions and wrestle with answers.*

*Let us resolve to live with a profound sense of purpose . . .*

*so that we may journey through this world with our eyes wide open*

*and make our way home, to THE home,*

*the place where all pilgrims arrive after a lifetime of wandering.*

**What is most misunderstood about Paul and how does *Moments 'Til Midnight* help?**

In my opinion, the most misunderstood aspect of Paul's life and legacy was that, like all pilgrims and temporary residents of this world, he was simply trying to wander well towards the heaven country. Yes, he was extraordinary in so many ways, and that point cannot be overstated. But there is also something extraordinarily similar about his pilgrimage and our own. He had very real struggles, some he never overcame (2 Cor. 12:7); he had good days and bad days; he knew what it was like to be abandoned and alone. In other words, while Paul was a real person who faced real challenges and went on a real journey, he had the highways on his heart that were leading to the heaven country, and the directions haven't changed in two millennia.

**You tell several stories of people's lives in this book. Why do stories like this have such a profound impact on us as readers?**

Because, quite simply, we were created for stories. Stories are like 'illuminating magnets' that draw us in and teach us simultaneously. That is why God expressed his desired will in the form of a narrative...a grand narrative. In other words, the Bible is a story that is true through and through, in fact it could be understood as *the story* (theologians call it the 'meta-narrative') that gives meaning and definition to all other stories.

Henrietta Mears wrote about how we are all currently 'writing the autobiography of our own souls.' God's story is a lamp, a flashlight of sorts that illuminates the pathways of our journey. So, you see, we can wander well through this broken world because of The Word of God. And our wanderings, each step, each sunrise and sunset, each day at school or work, each meal we eat and the company we keep, all our comings and goings compile the pilgrimage that is the story of our lives.

**How do you hope readers grow as a result of reading this book?**

First, I hope that they will awaken to the grand adventure of life.

That they will discover, or rediscover that we are part of that ancient tradition of people who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was infinitely more than a renegade rabbi from the backside of nowhere. And we believe in the depths of our souls that following Jesus is the daring adventure that makes up the pilgrimage of our lives. For we are pilgrims wandering on our way home. My prayer is that readers will realize they were created for such an endeavor, and to deprive their life of this sense of pilgrimage is to miss out on so much of life's purpose.

Secondly, that they would have a firm grasp on what it means to be a sojourner/pilgrim who is seeking to wander well in this broken world. I hope they will truly embrace the identity of a person on an epic journey towards the heaven country. That they will rejoice with the Psalmist when he writes: *Happy are the people whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage* (Ps. 84:5 CSB). When the text reads 'whose hearts are set on pilgrimage', it could literally be translated "the highways are on their hearts."

Therefore, the characteristics of someone who has "the highways on their hearts" are:

1. *A pilgrim is consumed with the understanding that his/her life is all about a journey or pilgrimage.*
2. *A pilgrim is willing to exhaust his/her resources to journey well.*
3. *A pilgrim believes that one journey can change the world.*
4. *A pilgrim lives with the tension between the present journey and the destination.*