

Session 14

GUIDANCE

Acts 16:6-10

Memory Verse

During the night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, “Cross over to Macedonia and help us!”

– ACTS 16:9, CSB




Guidance

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God calls and directs His people in every detail of life. Though we make plans, the Lord directs our lives, and we need to be led by Him.

Have you ever tried to get a child to let go of something so that you can give them something better? It can be tough to help them realize that letting go of what they think is good can end up much better in the long run.

The same thing is true for us spiritually. We think we know what we need to do for the Lord and how things should go in our lives. We tend to hold tightly to our plans, and these may be good plans. But when we learn to listen to guidance from the Holy Spirit and open our fists to release control, we may experience something far greater than we could have imagined.

 Why is it hard for child to let go of a valued item he or she has in his or her grasp, even if it is in exchange for something better?

 What are the things adults don't want to let go of, even for the hope of something better?

Session Summary

Paul and his companions were committed to taking the gospel every place possible. They planned to go toward Asia but were prevented by the Holy Spirit. Paul listened to and honored the direction of the Holy Spirit by adjusting his plans to be in obedience to what the Lord instructed.

It is important that believers learn from Paul and listen to the voice of the Lord in our lives. Even when something is good, if it is not the right timing according to the Lord, we must listen and obey. God alone knows the best time and place for us to act for His sake. Paul continued to travel and spread the gospel as he was directed by the Spirit of God.

1. Stopped by the Spirit (Acts 16:6-8)

Paul had been encouraging and strengthening churches around the region of Galatia and was ready to move on to a new area. He had planned to go west toward Asia Minor, the area of modern-day Turkey. Paul wanted to share the good news of the gospel to the people there, but Scripture tells us that he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit from doing so.

It may seem confusing that the Lord would forbid someone from doing His work in any way. Paul was dedicated to preaching the gospel and committed to taking the truth to places that needed to hear about Jesus. But God alone knows what is happening everywhere and at all times. Paul was not the right person at the right time to take the gospel to this region. His desire to preach the gospel there was good, but it was even better that his desire was to do God's work, in God's way, and in God's time.



Have you ever felt like the timing was not right to do something God called you to do? How does being in the Scriptures help us hear from the Holy Spirit and follow Him obediently?

Paul could have become frustrated when he was forbidden to follow through on his plans. Instead, he pivoted to go another direction. Paul's not letting a change in plans keep him from continuing the work of the Lord and preaching the gospel is a beautiful example of how believers should carry out God's call on their lives.

? When have you seen someone give up when his or her attempt to serve the Lord did not go as planned? How might that be a misunderstanding of God's timing in our lives?

After the failed attempt to go to Asia, Paul and his companions tried to go north to Bithynia but were once again prevented by the Holy Spirit. Again, Paul showed his dedication and commitment to serving the Lord and adjusted his travels. Finally, Paul and his companions went to Troas. It was not Paul's original plan to go to Troas, but it was the Holy Spirit's plan to lead him there at that exact time.

Paul responded rightly to the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. Although we do not know how the Spirit spoke to him or prevented him from going different places, we know that it was from the Spirit. The Holy Spirit can direct and lead us by closed doors as well as open doors. He uses both hindrances and invitations to get us where He wants us to be, and we should be open and responsive to the way the Lord speaks. If we aren't careful, we can be so focused on our own plans that we fail to receive the Spirit's direction. Paul was willing to lay down his own plans so that he could do the work of the Lord in the most effective way, place, and time.

? Application: How do you typically respond when your plans are thwarted? How might that need to change in light of Paul's example?

2. Clear Direction (Acts 16:9-10)

After taking the step of obedient faith and going to Troas, Paul received clear direction from the Lord in a vision. In this vision, a man asked him to come to Macedonia on the continent of Europe. This prompted Paul and his team to go

to Europe and take the gospel to that continent for the first time. Being prevented from going to two other places ended up being the catalyst and first steps in taking the good news to an entire continent that had not been exposed to Jesus. Paul had planned to preach Jesus in some new cities in his own region, but God's plan was to give Paul an entire continent to reach for the cause of Christ.

How does reading this account of Paul's journey change your perspective on obstacles to your plans?

The man in the vision asked Paul to come and help. We constantly encounter people who need help. Paul was willing to go to Macedonia and bring the people help by introducing them to Jesus, who was their greatest need. It is a good reminder for us that the greatest help we can offer anyone is to bring them the life changing gospel of Jesus Christ. Although we can help in other ways to meet people's tangible needs, if we do those things without sharing Jesus, we met a temporary need without offering life change that matters for eternity.

Once he saw the vision, Paul did not hesitate to go to Macedonia. He led his group of travelers, and they went immediately. Paul demonstrated his willingness to continue following the direction of the Spirit by not arguing, making excuses, or asking many questions. He obeyed and headed out to a new place to do God's work. A strong godly leader will respond to the Lord and bring others along with them. Imagine what those fellow missionaries learned from being on mission with Paul.

What keeps you from obeying God with urgency?

God is still calling people to the mission field. There is no set way that it happens, and every circumstance is unique to the people involved. One thing is consistent in every situation: when God calls you, He will go with you and equip you. We are to respond like Paul and obey without delay. Many times, we are called to a mission field that is near us. The calling is not always to go to another continent, although it may be. Sometimes God calls us to a mission field that is across the street, in the gym where our kids play, at work, or someplace else that is easily overlooked. The key is to view our lives through His eyes and be sensitive to His voice when He speaks.

In verse 10 Luke shifted his language from “they” to “we.” This reveals another aspect of God’s timing and direction. In stopping in Troas where Paul received the vision about Macedonia, this group of missionary travelers met and picked up Luke, a doctor. Because God said no to Paul twice, Doctor Luke was added to the missionary team, which resulted in Luke’s written account of these events in Scripture. Little did Paul know that when he was forbidden to fulfill his plans, he would acquire a companion who would be so valuable to him over the years of his travels. The gospel would go to an entire continent, his team was strengthened, and Luke’s account of these events would be recorded in the Scriptures for the benefit of the church for ages to come. What could have frustrated Paul had a much greater purpose than he could ever have imagined.

? Application: What does seeing the purpose of God for Paul in hindsight show you about your own life? Where have you been able to look back at your life and see God’s work in a way you didn’t initially understand or expect?

3. Knowing His Voice (Proverbs 16:1-3)

There is nothing wrong with making plans. Man was created in the image of God, and God is an organized planner and preparer. It is part of our nature to plan and prepare for what we think is ahead. The key is to make your plans under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to listen when God speaks regarding those plans. In this Proverb, “the answer of the tongue” refers to wisdom from the Lord. We are cautioned to always pay attention, as Paul did, when the Lord speaks His wisdom in our lives.

It is easy to justify our choices and actions, especially for things done for the Lord. We believe that we are acting out of right feelings and our hearts are in the right place. But God can weigh the true thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Men and women are masters at self-deception, and we deceive ourselves easily, meaning we often don’t accurately evaluate our own hearts and motives. God uses His Spirit and Word to assess the deepest regions of our lives.

? How have you seen it to be true that people are good at self-deception? Where has this been true in your own life?

Just as Paul made plans to do the Lord's work, we also should plan our lives in a way that brings Him glory. But this passage reminds us we are to commit our work to the Lord. This command comes with a promise that our plans will be established. Paul had good plans, but they were not what God had planned for him. When he listened and responded in obedience to the Holy Spirit, his efforts had more impact than he could have imagined. When we make our plans and commit them to the Lord, we open ourselves up to redirection by God, always seeking a life of impact for His kingdom.

? How can you see the principles in this passage applied to Paul's situation in Acts 16? How do you need to apply the principles of this proverb to your life?

The Hebrew word for "commit" has the implication of "rolling." This pictures something too heavy for a person to lift so it must be rolled. We are to take the work, burden, and plans that are too weighty to lift and roll them onto the Lord. When you roll something over to another person, you are no longer in control. When you make plans but trust and commit them to God, you no longer need to stress over every detail. You can turn it over to God and trust that He will establish those plans according to His perfect will.


The word "established" brings the idea of finality and permanence. It is freeing to understand that when we roll our burdens, works, and plans over to God, we can leave them there permanently and don't have to pick them back up. Paul demonstrated what that looks like in real life when he made plans to leave on a missionary journey but continually responded with obedience when he was directed otherwise by the Holy Spirit. When we are continually willing to obey in this way, we will experience the power of God at work around us just as Paul did.

? Application: What do you need to roll onto the Lord so He can shoulder the weight instead of you trying to control the situation?


Conclusion

To fulfill God's call on our lives, we need to make plans and be prepared. Paul demonstrated the key to having those plans succeed and flourish by showing how to respond when God speaks. Sometimes God will guide us by putting up hindrances to our plans. Other times He will guide us by giving us clear direction. Our responsibility is to pay attention and listen to what God has to say and then obey.

It can be tempting to think that the plans we've made are most important, but following the guidance of the Holy Spirit is what matters most. We worship the Lord and not our plans. When we respond correctly to the direction of the Lord, we position ourselves to experience the working of His mighty power in ways we may never have imagined. Because of his willingness to lay down his own plans, Paul was able to take the gospel to an entirely new continent and impact generations of people for God's glory.

 Where is God calling you to be obedient right now? What do you need to start or stop in line with His leading?

 What role does our group play in helping one another be obedient to the Lord and understand His will for our lives?

 Who is God calling you to seek a gospel conversation with this week? How will you respond?

Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



FOR NEXT WEEK

Power and Unity

Main Passages

- Acts 16:11-40

Session Outline

1. The Gospel without Prejudice (Acts 16:11-18)
2. Facing Opposition (Acts 16:19-29)
3. The Power of the Gospel (Acts 16:30-40)

Memorize

During the night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!"

- Acts 16:9, CSB