

# Guidance

*May 7, 2023*

## Lesson Summary

### ***Main Passages***

Acts 16:6-10

### ***Session Outline***

1. Stopped by the Spirit (Acts 16:6-8)
2. Clear Direction (Acts 16:9-10)
3. Knowing His Voice (Proverbs 16:1-3)

---

### ***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.



## Leader Guide

# Guidance

### Introduction

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 we 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? Read Jeremiah 29:11

## Macedonia

Macedonia was not far geographically, a couple of days by sea. Ethnically, it was a different world—the land of Alexander the Great, the Greek world. Here for the first time Luke used the first person plural. His “we” perhaps indicates that he first joined Paul at Troas.

## 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: Read Exodus 3:11, 13 and Exodus 4:1, 10, 13, and 14-15. 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?

## DxD This Week

### ***Call to Action***

Ask where God is working and where you can join Him. Lead a dedicated time of prayer for multiplication. Where are you called?

## Prayer of Response

*Thank the Lord for establishing your plans and for guiding you along the way. Ask for eyes that are sensitive to see where He is at work, ears ready to listen when He speaks, and feet ready to respond in obedience.*

## Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Acts* by Tony Merida
- *Acts 13–28* by John MacArthur
- *Acts* by R.C. Sproul

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples



### Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

\*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC



## For Next Week

### Session Title

- 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

# Historical Context of Acts

## Purpose

The book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

## Author

The book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

## Setting

The date of composition of the book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30–31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

## Special Features

The book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

## Extended Commentary

### Acts 16:6-10

16:6. Luke tells us that the missionary trio continued north and west through Phrygia and Galatia. In some way, the Holy Spirit kept them from preaching the Word in the province of Asia. Geography grabs the utmost importance in studying Acts, and especially the missionary journeys. Here we must make a distinction between northern and southern Galatia.

Southern Galatia, including the towns of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, received the letter to the Galatians. Northern Galatia was made up of Celtic people (who later immigrated to the British Isles). The Roman province of Asia (not to be confused with the continent to which we ascribe that name today) was located west of Antioch and contained principal cities along the Aegean Sea. The Holy Spirit directed Paul away from that area and sent him instead north and then west on a course for Troas.

It is useless to ponder how the Holy Spirit conveyed this message. From what we already know in Acts, it could have been through a vision, an inner understanding of God's will, or even the prophetic utterance of a local Christian somewhere along the way.

16:7. Paul hit another wall and was again redirected in his travel plans. With all these starts and stops along the way, it is virtually impossible to dogmatically trace the missionaries' route. Polhill (345) suggests that this second change in direction occurred near Dorylaeum. That affords as good a guess as any.

The new travel directions came by the Spirit of Jesus. Again, Luke does not tell us how the message came, but the theological link of the Holy Spirit in verse 6 with the Spirit of Jesus in verse 7 offers an important affirmation of deity for the third person of the Trinity. Furthermore, Paul links both of these with God in verse 10, so we have a full trinitarian involvement in this Macedonian call.

16:8–9. In obedience to the heavenly message, the trio abandoned plans to head north and probably east which would have taken them along the Black Sea to cities connected by an elaborate Roman road system. Had they continued north out of Galatia, they would have eventually arrived in the modern areas of Romania and Bulgaria, moving ever further away from Europe and its cultural center, Athens. They finally came to Troas. There Paul received a vision from a Macedonian begging him to come to Greece.

Here the missionaries stood at the pivotal port between two significant land masses of the ancient world—Asia Minor and Europe. They faced two gigantic waterways—the Aegean and Black Seas. Commentators speculate on the nature of the vision and the identity of the man, but all such imaginative meandering seems useless. Luke emphasizes neither geography nor personalities in this paragraph but rather the absolute God-directed plan and route of this missionary trip.

We did not include Macedonia in the geographical profiles at the beginning of this chapter because of its crucial importance in the flow of the text. Named for Philip of Macedon, it had become a Roman province in 148 b.c. Formerly a Greek kingdom, Macedonia came under strong Athenian influence as early as five hundred years before Christ. There Aristotle came to tutor Alexander the Great after the death of Plato. No less an orator than Demosthenes verbally attacked “the Macedonian menace.” Indeed, the army created by Philip of Macedon later followed his son Alexander all the way to the Ganges, overthrowing the Persians on the way.

The Bible records several Macedonian Christians such as Gaius, Aristarchus, Secundus, Sopater, and Epaphroditus and their enthusiastic support for Paul (Acts 17:11; 19:29; 20:4; Phil. 4:10–19; 1 Thess. 2:8, 17–20; 3:10). It is also likely Luke himself came from Philippi in Macedonia.

16:10. The missionaries wasted no time in following God’s obedience but got ready at once (euteos, which could also be translated “immediately”) to cross the sea to a waiting Europe. Here Luke introduces the first of several “we” sections in Acts, Luke’s way of showing when he joins the missionary party (20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). At other times he tells the narrative in third person. The purpose of this voyage is clear—to preach the gospel to Greeks in their own country.<sup>1</sup>

## References

1. Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, vol. 5, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998).

## Author Bio

### Tony Merida (Exalting Jesus in Acts)

Tony Merida is lead pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, NC, and associate professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.

### John MacArthur (Acts 13-28)

John MacArthur has served as pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, since 1969. His ministry of expository preaching is unparalleled in its breadth and influence. In more than five decades of ministry from the same pulpit, he has preached verse by verse through the entire New Testament and several key sections of the Old Testament. He is Chancellor of the Master’s University and Seminary, and can be heard daily on the Grace to You radio broadcast (carried on hundreds of radio stations worldwide). He has authored numerous bestselling books, including *Twelve Ordinary Men* and *One Perfect Life*.

### R.C. Sproul (Acts)

R.C. Sproul (1939–2017) was founder of Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, Fla. He was also copastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel, first president of Reformation Bible College, and executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine. His radio program, *Renewing Your Mind*, is still broadcast daily on hundreds of radio stations around the world and can also be heard online.