

Acts 16:6-15 (NIV)

⁶Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. ¹¹From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. ¹²From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. ¹³On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. ¹⁵When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

44-16-01-Empowered for Guidance

Trinity, Holy Spirit, guidance, evangelism, God’s will
Acts 16:6-15

The right direction is always the one in which God is leading.

INTRODUCTION: (Text for Scripture reading)

–How many ever pray to know the right direction to take—to make the right decision? Believing bad information, trusting false assumptions being overconfident... they all teach us to treasure the right choice. It’s a universal human desire. [In *Psychology and the Promethean Will*, William Sheldon, writes: “...deeper and more fundamental than sexuality, deeper than the craving for social power, deeper even than the desire for possessions, there is a still more generalized and more universal craving in the human make-up. It is the craving for knowledge of the right direction—for orientation.... Every system of philosophy, whether called religious or not, is at bottom a human attempt to satisfy the craving to be pointed in the right direction.”] Christians know that **HOM.idea**.

–God guided many OT leaders, but in the NT, He empowers all His people with divine guidance– **Acts 2:17-18**, ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.’
–Without divine revelation, life isn’t safe. Without divine direction we get lost. But the Holy Spirit often has to begin our guidance by...

- I. The Obstruction of Our Own Plans**– **v.6-8**, *Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.*
- A. *Strange!* God kept Paul “from preaching the word.” But if God keeps us from the good, He must be planning a better. (Gospel zeal must be in sync with God’s planning and timing.)
- B. Paul and his ministry team saw needs they wanted to meet, but “the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.” [Several times Leanne Payne was asked to bring her powerful healing ministry to Asian lands, where people were spiritually bound in misogyny. God’s leading always prevented her. *Why?*]
- C. When God obstructs what we think important, it may be to get our focus off our own ideas so He can show us His plans. (Paul had to bypass “Mysia” for an appointment in “Troas” with a divine vision. It was that vision that led him in the right direction.)

TRANS: Blocked personal plans may actually be put us on the right path, helping us let go of our own solutions so we'll be ready to let God guide us. If we fail to find the right direction, it's not time to give up.

[Students aren't expelled for failing tests. Their teachers keep on guiding them.] The Holy Spirit is our *Teacher and Guide*, and He is committed to...

II. The Opening up of God's Will to Us– v.9, *During the night Paul had a vision of a man... begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."*

A. The Holy Spirit knows us intimately and usually guides us in ways that match our individual personalities and dispositions:

1. The naturalness or ordinariness of His methods may lead us to mistake His voice as ours: "*That must be me, not God!*"
2. He may use simple things, like persistent thoughts, a Bible verse, a dream or daydream, or a mental picture that keeps popping up.
3. OR Jesus can show up, as He did to Paul on the Damascus Road, or send visions, as in this passage. (That's special, but, *if we're receptive*, the form of guidance is *not* that important.)
4. Our duty is receptivity to the reality of what Jesus tells us– John 10:27, My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

B. Guidance doesn't cancel our intelligence– v.10b, "*concluding that God had called us*" (*Common sense* might say, "*What a weird dream! It must be something I ate.*" But getting divine guidance must be in our *Christian logic*: "*This might be God giving me direction.*")

C. Paul's response was immediate– v.10a, *we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia* ("*But what if my impression isn't right?*" Better to be wrong about a direction than wrong in not following a right one.)

TRANS: I regret the many times I've been slow to respond to nudges God was giving me. That's a problem. His guidance may cover just a small window of time, and we don't know when that window will close.

[An evangelist, who felt led to share Christ with a waitress, left the restaurant without doing so. Later feeling convicted, he returned only to find she had committed suicide.] **The right direction is always the one where God is leading**. If we feel the Holy Spirit guiding us to do something...

III. Our Obligation is Simply to Follow Directions

A. What did God guide Paul's team to do?– v.10, *we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel*

to them. (Paul and his team were *messengers entrusted with God's message*; so are we! *Jesus is not done yet spreading His Gospel*.)

B. Spirit-empowered guidance leads to Spirit-empowered ministry. (Note how God used the normal thinking of Paul's team to guide them in the right direction– Acts 16:13-15, *On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*)

C. Paul's "vision of a man of Macedonia" calling for help resulted in the woman Lydia "and the members of her household [being] baptized."

1. At this stage in his growth, Paul's Jewish mind might not have responded as trustingly, if a woman had been in his "vision".
2. Despite the details of Paul's guidance, Jesus was building His Church in Philippi and making Lydia's home the center for it.

D. God wants to guide us in ministry! [In a Bible study on obeying God's voice, a young man asked, "*Does God still speak to us?*" After several shared stories of being led by God in different ways, he left praying, "*God, if you still speak to people, speak to me. I'll try to listen and obey.*" As he drove, he kept getting impressions and urges, which he thought were crazy but finally obeyed: buy a gallon of milk / turn down that street / stop here / take it to those in that house. When he rang the doorbell, a bewildered man answered. He handed him the milk, saying "*Here, I brought this to you.*" It was a couple who'd run out of money, and the wife had prayed for an angel to bring some milk for their baby. She asked, "*Are you an angel?*" The young man gave them the rest of his money, and left knowing God answers prayer and still speaks to His people.]

CONCLUSION:

–God still guides us in **right directions**. He led Paul. He led this young man. He can lead us. He puts people on our minds by hearing a name, imagining a face, recalling a memory. Our part is follow His lead (it might be a *prayer*, a *visit*, a *gift*, a *message*), then, to leave it with Him. We must overcome doubts that God would speak to us. But that's what this passage and the whole Bible shows: He really does speak to us personally, as personally as we speak to Him in prayer.