

Discerning God's Will

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[0 : 0 0] Pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Heavenly Father, we humble ourselves before you and before your Word again this evening.

You said that your sheep hear your voice, they recognize your voice. And Lord, we have heard your call and we have gathered here as your people to worship you.

And we now incline our ears, our hearts to you. Because we want to become ever more familiar with our shepherd's voice.

Because we want to learn to better discern your will and to follow it, to surrender ourselves to it. So teach us how to do that this evening from this text.

We want to exalt the name of your Son. Captivate our hearts with Christ and His gospel discipline. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[1 : 1 5] Acts chapter 15 verse 36 to chapter 16 verse 10. And after some days, Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaim the Word of the Lord and see how they are.

Now, Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

And there arose a sharp disagreement so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer.

But his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. But Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places.

[2 : 3 2] For they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith. And they increased in numbers daily. And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia. But the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night.

A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, Come over to Macedonia and help us. And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. When it was published in 2001, the World Christian Encyclopedia counted 33,830 denominations worldwide.

[3 : 41] That number is undoubtedly higher today in 2021. And I don't mention this to discredit denominations at all.

Our local church is part of a denomination called Sovereign Grace Churches. And churches that declare themselves independent or non-denominational are themselves splitting away from the historic denominations over different convictions about denominations.

So it's really not all that different from denominations that are split off for other reasons. On matters of first importance that pertain to the gospel of Jesus, there is considerable agreement and unity among all Christians, even among the myriad denominations.

But the reality is, Christians don't always see eye to eye on everything. 1 Corinthians 13, 9-12 tell us that we know in part and we prophesy in part.

But when perfect comes, when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. It says, for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

[4 : 57] In the present, our knowledge of God and His will is imperfect and partial. Our understanding is limited. Our sins cloud our judgment.

Our perceptions are colored by various historical and cultural influences. And for those reasons, disagreements between believers, even among godly believers, are inevitable.

In this passage, we learn from Paul and Barnabas' example that as we proclaim the gospel, we must discern God's will through conflicts, through controversies, and through closed doors.

And trust God to work through them. So we're going to cover those in turn. Conflict, controversy, and closed doors. After spending some days teaching and ministering to the church in Antioch, Paul says to Barnabas in chapter 15, verse 36, Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaim the word of the Lord and see how they are.

Paul was, as many of you know, a frontier missionary who made it his ambition to preach the gospel where the gospel had not been preached. But this doesn't mean that Paul only cared about making converts and didn't care about those who were already converted.

[6 : 15] He wanted to make another long and arduous journey to revisit all the cities where he had preached the gospel and planted churches because he was invested in building up and caring for the people who were already converted.

Make sure that those churches are firmly established. We, too, as a church, must do both. We can't be content merely with caring for the internal needs of our local church.

We must send out missionaries. We must evangelize. We must have an outward orientation toward unbelievers. But we also can't neglect the upbuilding of the local church.

We must nurture and build up one another in Christ-likeness. Otherwise, if we don't do that, there would be no mature believers left to evangelize and minister to others.

We should ask ourselves, ask yourself, which area do you tend to be stronger in, tend to be weaker in? Because we need to be doing both. So far, so good. Barnabas and Paul were agreed on that front.

[7 : 18] They were agreed that they should revisit these churches to encourage them, check on them. But then they hid a snag on the road. It says in verses 37 to 38, Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark, but Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

You might recall from Acts chapter 12 that John called Mark is the son of a certain Mary in Jerusalem who hosted a house church there, so a prominent believer in Jerusalem.

Mary, it turns out, is Barnabas' aunt because John called Mark was Barnabas' cousin according to Colossians chapter 4 verse 10.

So this John called Mark, whom I will call Mark from now on, was beloved in the Jerusalem church. Apostle Peter had a particular affection for this man and called him his spiritual son in 1 Peter 5 verse 13.

So after Paul and Barnabas delivered the famine aid that the Antioch Christians had prepared for the Jerusalem church, they encountered John Mark, they encountered Mark and started having him accompany them on their missionary journeys.

[8 : 30] However, it appears that on their missionary journey, while Mark was following them and assisting them, that at some point he withdrew from them.

He didn't go with them to do the missionary work. Paul saw this as nothing less than desertion. Like when a soldier deserts his comrades in the battlefield.

You could imagine Paul arguing with Barnabas over this issue this way. Barnabas, Proverbs 25, 19 says this, Trusting in a treacherous man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips.

Barnabas, Mark proved undependable. He deserted us at the moment of our need. He was like a decayed tooth that you can't chew with when you need to eat something.

Or a slipping food that you can't put weight on. Our missionary work involves long journeys that's physically exhausting and emotionally draining.

[9 : 34] And even more than that, we're entering a spiritual battlefield. And we can't, and we can be, and we have been persecuted. We might even be killed. We don't have the luxury of taking a chance on someone who has already deserted us in the past.

We're a small team. Every single person is integral. We can't afford to lose one man. You really can't blame Paul for making this argument.

Saying we can't take Mark along with him. But on the other hand, it's also hard to blame Barnabas for wanting to give Mark a second chance. Barnabas was a gracious man.

Remember from Acts 4.36, his actual name is Joseph. But nobody calls him that. Everyone calls him Barnabas by his nickname because it means son of encouragement.

Why? Because Barnabas was a man who was always found encouraging and building up other people, other fellow Christians. The word encouragement means to exhort and embolden another person for a certain task, for a course of action.

[10 : 40] The same word is used in Acts 9.31 to refer to the comfort that the Holy Spirit brings. So Barnabas is someone who comforts others, encourages others.

There's an older pastor in our denomination named Kyle Huber. And I mention him because he's been like a Barnabas to me. He's someone that's always sending encouraging texts and letting me know that he's praying for me.

Whenever I spend time with him, I walk away more aware of God's gracious presence in my life. That kind of person. I hope you have people like that in your life. People who encourage you, build you up, comfort you.

Barnabas was that kind of man. So when a fledgling church in Antioch needed some encouragement, who would they send but Barnabas? In Acts chapter 11.22-26.

In Acts 9.27, when Paul, right after Paul's conversion, because of his fierce reputation, his terrible reputation as a persecutor of the church, the Jerusalem church was wary of him.

[11 : 45] The apostles didn't want anything to do with him. And of course, who else? But it was Barnabas who took Paul along and introduced him to the apostles. To the church in Jerusalem. Barnabas was a man who understood the importance of second chances.

And Mark wasn't any man. He was Barnabas' cousin. So you can imagine Barnabas arguing back and forth with Paul. Paul, please, let's give Mark another chance.

He's a young lad, and he's remorseful about what he did. He's given us his word that he will accompany us and assist us and not desert us again. Didn't nearly all of the twelve apostles forsake Jesus when he was arrested and crucified?

Did not the great apostle Peter deny our Lord three times? And yet he did not give them all a second chance? Did he not reinstate Peter as the leader of the twelve?

Come on, Paul. You were once a persecutor of the church. And yet our Lord showed you mercy, didn't he? Can we give Mark just one more chance?

[12 : 54] Even if it's just for my sake. He's my cousin after all. He'll be crushed if we refuse to take him along because of that one incident. You really can't blame Barnabas for wanting to take Mark along with him either.

Verse 39 says that there arose a sharp disagreement. The same word is used in Greek literature to describe a severe convulsion that comes as a result of a disease.

It's the word from which we get the English word paroxysm, which means a sudden uncontrollable outburst, a fit of emotion or action. Paul and Barnabas were not engaging in soft-spoken debate.

They were engaged in a sharp disagreement. There were emotionally charged statements said, bitter arguments made.

Two dear friends and Christian comrades simply could not see eye to eye on this issue. So that, it says in verses 39 to 41, they separated from each other.

[14 : 04] Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, sprinkling the churches.

It's a sad scene, really. The separation must have been so painful, can you imagine, for Paul and Barnabas. Remember, it was Barnabas, as I mentioned before, who first took a chance on Paul and introduced him to the church in Jerusalem.

It was Barnabas who went to Tarsus to recruit Paul for their ministry in Antioch in the first place. Humanly speaking, there would have been no Apostle Paul that we know of apart from Apostle Barnabas.

The two had traveled thousands of miles together. They had preached the gospel together. They had slept in the same quarters, eaten the same foods.

They had been persecuted together, driven out of cities by persecutors together. They had seen the Lord perform miracles through them. And had seen Him save multitudes through their partnership.

[15 : 06] They were brothers from another mother. And yet, they decided to go on separate ways on account of this sharp disagreement. The way verses 39 to 41 are written seems to suggest that the church in Antioch sided with Paul on this disagreement.

Verse 39 makes it sound like Barnabas and Mark absconded without any fanfare. It's kind of quietly departed. Barnabas just took Mark along and left. It just says, Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

But, in contrast, it says, Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. That verb, commended, is singular in the Greek.

It applies to Paul only. It doesn't apply to Paul and Barnabas. And not only that, in chapter 16, starting in verse 10, we get the first we passage in Acts, which are passages where Luke, the author of the book, starts to put himself in the narrative, using first-person plural pronouns, indicating that he was an eyewitness of traveling with Paul.

So Luke himself decided to side with Paul and to go with him on his missionary journey. But we do know that Barnabas was later vindicated from other texts.

[16 : 27] In Philemon 24, Paul describes Mark as his fellow worker. In Colossians 4, verse 10, he commands Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, to the Colossian church. And then, most movingly, in 2 Timothy, chapter 4, verse 11, I think I have this to show on the projector.

Toward the end of his life, after Paul had been abandoned by almost everyone, he writes to Timothy this, Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

So obviously, Paul was willing to give Mark another chance at a later point in ministry. And it seems by then that Mark had matured and grown in faithfulness as well.

He even authored the Gospel of Mark, which is part of the Scriptures. I think this account of Paul and Barnabas' separation is very instructive for us. Note first that this was not a disagreement that was a matter of truth and error, of orthodoxy and heresy.

They were both trying to apply biblical principles. It was an important disagreement because it affected their ministry. But they were both trying to faithfully apply biblical principles.

[17 : 43] Paul wanted to protect the missionary work. Barnabas wanted to care pastorally for Mark. Sometimes, even godly Christians like Barnabas and Paul simply disagree.

It's not necessarily the case that one of them is in sin. It is sometimes the case that one of them is just wrong. And this kind of disagreement will happen until Christ returns and our faith is turned to sight.

Only then will we know perfect. We are finite. We are not omniscient. We are all susceptible to faulty thinking and erroneous judgments.

Of course, the Holy Spirit could have decisively ended this debate by giving them a vision maybe of what to do with Mark. He does that.

He just shows Paul's vision later in chapter 16. But he doesn't do that here. Sometimes God works in and through uncertainty and leaves us to make the best decisions we can with the partial knowledge we have.

[18 : 51] And then he asks us to trust him with the rest. So as we proclaim the gospel, we have to discern God's will through conflicts that inevitably arise and trust God to work through them.

And God did work through this disagreement. The outcome of the disagreement is that now, instead of just one missionary team, there are now two missionary teams that are sent out for gospel ministry.

Not having Barnabas or Mark to share in his ministry, Paul chooses Silas to accompany him. And we know that Silas, also called Silvanus, as elsewhere in the New Testament, became a faithful brother that accompanied him through much of his mission's work.

Not only that, when he gets to Lystra in chapter 16, Paul identifies another promising young man named Timothy to accompany him on his missionary journey. So that with the loss of Barnabas and Mark, new leaders are raised up and equipped, and more churches, therefore, can be planted.

It's also not hard to imagine the kind of humbling effect that this disagreement would have had on everyone involved. Paul's tough love probably humbled Mark and helped him realize just how serious it is for him to abandon fellow missionaries.

[20 : 10] After seeing how seriously Paul took what he did, I'd venture to say that Mark probably never did that again. Not only that, Barnabas' graciousness toward Mark probably made him more grateful for the privilege and mercy of being called to the ministry of the gospel, knowing that it's a grace, not an entitlement.

Likewise, Paul's emphasis on steadfast commitment likely made Barnabas more watchful and perhaps less indulgent of Mark his cousin. And Barnabas' emphasis on grace could have probably made Paul more patient and compassionate toward others, perhaps later in his ministry.

I say all of that to demonstrate the truth of Joseph's observation in Genesis 50, verse 20. You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

Even what the devil means for evil against us, God means it for our good. Notice it doesn't say, what you meant for evil, God used for good, or God turned into good.

It doesn't say that. It says, what you meant for evil, God meant for good. God is not a grand chess master who can only control his side of the chessboard.

[21 : 30] Imagine you're playing a game against a world-class grand chess master like Magnus Carlsen. It doesn't even have to be Magnus Carlsen. You could probably play against someone like Daniel Yuan.

You probably won't win a single game. Because there are so many steps ahead of you, it doesn't matter what you do. You're just going to lose.

Every single time, the outcome is going to be exactly the same. But even someone like Magnus Carlsen is only responding to what other people are doing.

He can't, doesn't have control, any control, doesn't have any idea what the person sitting across from him will do. He can only control, he can only respond to it. But God's not like that.

God doesn't merely play with us on the chessboard. He created the chessboard. He made all the chess pieces. He made you. We're not equal players and actors with God in this world.

[22 : 33] God works out his sovereign will, not in spite of what you do, but in and through everything you do. In other words, even the sins we commit, even the evils that we do, the mistakes that we make, even what the devil or our enemies mean for evil against us, God means that very thing for his glory and for our good.

That's a kind of transcendence and sovereignty that goes far beyond our logic and imagination. So we proclaim the gospel, and as we do that, we discern God's will through conflicts that inevitably occur, and we trust God to work through.

Not only disagreements and conflicts, but we will also inevitably face controversy in ministry. It says in 16, verses 1 to 2, Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra.

A disciple was there named Timothy, son of a Jewish woman who was a believer. His father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. This is where we're first introduced to Timothy in the book of Acts.

Timothy was Paul's son in the faith. He accompanied Paul on many of his missionary journeys and became a trusted minister of the gospel. Paul heaps high praises on him in Philippians 2, 19 to 20.

[23 : 53] And we learn from 2 Timothy 3, 15 that Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, were Jews who passed on their knowledge of the Old Testament to Timothy. They had come to believe in Jesus at some point, probably, maybe during Paul's previous ministry in Lystra, two years or so ago.

And Timothy had been absorbing everything like a sponge. He's been growing and maturing so that he was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.

Now, do you guys remember what happened in Lystra when Paul was there? This is helpful to remember. Last time Paul was there, he was stoned. He left in shame.

This is why we can't judge the success of our ministry by the external appearance of things. Paul's mission's work in Lystra, by all metrics, was a spectacular failure.

Who would have known that a gem of a man like Timothy would emerge from that rubble? Paul's missionary team was already shorthanded with the loss of Barnabas and Mark, so this was really golden opportunity and discovery to find such a promising young man.

- [25 : 15] But despite Timothy's sterling reputation, his ethnic background was a matter of controversy. And Paul addresses this in verse 3. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places where they all knew that his father was a Greek.

Now this might seem like a compromise. After all, wasn't Paul just at Jerusalem council in chapter 15 strongly contending that Gentiles need not be circumcised and become Jewish in order to be saved?

But this is not a compromise. Luke takes care to note in verse 4 that as they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.

The Greek word translated decisions is where we get the English word dogma. It refers to a formal decision rendered by the appropriate authorities. It can be translated decree.

So that Paul is going around with his team promulgating the decree that the apostles handed to them from the Jerusalem council. They're telling everybody about it.

- [26 : 23] And they're doing this not only in the cities that were specifically addressed in that apostolic letter but in other places as well. in Lystra and Iconium which shows that they believe that the letter, the content of the letter had universal validity for all the churches.

All that to say Paul's not backtracking here. He's continuing to stand his ground and insist that Gentiles will be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ not by their good works and not by becoming circumcised and becoming a Jew.

The difference here is that Timothy had a Jewish mother rendering his ethnic status ambiguous. Some Jews were deeply offended that Timothy who had at least some Jewish heritage was not circumcised.

It's not hard to imagine the controversy. Timothy whom everyone knew had a Greek father was still active in the synagogue along with his mother and Jewish mother Eunice and grandmother Lois. he studied like a Jew talked like a Jew ate foods along with the Jews in every way he seemed a cultural Jew but he was not circumcised which was enough not to Jews.

So Paul takes decisive action and circumcises Timothy before taking him along on this missionary journey. In 1 Corinthians 9 20 to 21 Paul writes this to the Jews I became as a Jew in order to win Jews.

- [27 : 54] To those under the law I became as one under the law though not being myself under the law that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ that I might win those outside the law.

We're seeing that missionary principle at work here in Acts 16. To the Jews Paul became like the Jew in order to win Jews. While Paul consistently objected to Gentile believers being circumcised he never objected to Jews being circumcised.

Paul was not conceding that Timothy needed to be circumcised in order to be saved but that Timothy needed to be circumcised in order to be accepted by the Jews as a Jew. It was a cultural reason not a soteriological one a salvation reason.

It was so that Timothy wouldn't cause offense at every single synagogue that they visit. It was so that they might be able to get a fair hearing for the gospel from among the Jews.

It was for the sake of the gospel. But to Gentiles Paul became as a Gentile in order to win Gentiles. So in Galatians chapter 2 verse 1 to 5 Paul recounts that when he traveled to Jerusalem with Titus he did not circumcise Titus though he was a Greek.

[29 : 15] And when Judaizers took issue with this and insisted on Titus' circumcision Paul says this we did not yield in submission even for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Titus unlike Timothy did not have an ambiguous ethnic status. He was a Gentile through and through and to circumcise him would have been a disastrous concession that undermines the gospel itself because it would suggest that Gentiles do need to be circumcised and become Jewish in order to be saved.

So Paul is actually being very consistent here. The concern that drives Paul in both of those cases is the preservation and proclamation of the gospel. When we are ministering to others especially in cross-cultural missionary contexts we will face many controversial issues.

contextualization issues that require careful discernment of God's will. And in those situations we need to distinguish carefully between contextualization and compromise.

Are we compromising the truth of the gospel itself? Are we marring the picture of the gospel? Or are we faithfully applying the gospel to a different cultural context?

[30 : 37] In this case Paul wisely navigated this controversy regarding Timothy's ambiguous status and in doing so faithfully preserved the gospel. And the result was this in verse 5.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and they increased in numbers daily. As we proclaim the gospel we must discern God's will through conflicts and controversies and trust God to work through them.

In ministry we will also inevitably face closed doors. Read verses 6-8 chapter 16 with me. And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

And when they had come up to Mysia they attempted to go into Bithynia but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Mysia they went down to Troas. Paul wanted to go to Asia Minor to proclaim the gospel but he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit from doing so.

After that door was closed Paul attempted to go into Bithynia but once again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. We are not told why the Holy Spirit prevented Paul and his companions from going into those two areas but we are told twice that it was the Holy Spirit himself who closed those doors and that's an important point.

[31 : 57] The rare phrase Spirit of Jesus used there teaches us two things. One that Jesus also sends the Spirit. He is. It's Jesus' Spirit. Not only the Father Spirit which is an unmistakable statement of Jesus' deity.

Secondly it shows us that Jesus is still himself personally involved in the missionary work of his apostles. Remember at the Great Commission in Matthew 28 Jesus promised his disciples surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age.

This is how he's fulfilling that promise through the Spirit of Jesus accompanying and directing their mission. So we as a church are in the process of training and sending out missionaries and as we make our plans we have to remember that it's God who ultimately directs our missionary efforts.

I've said this many times but successful Christian missions work is never a calculable result of man's ingenious methods and man's meticulous plans.

Never. It is always the sovereign work of the Spirit of God. To be on mission is to be submitted to the orders of our general.

[33 : 12] To be guided by the Spirit of Jesus. Paul is not so rigidly attached to his own plan that he just barges into Phrygia and Galatia anyway after being forbidden by the Holy Spirit from doing so.

Well God I can't do that. It's part of my plan. My 10 year plan. Have it all figured out. Paul remained pliable to the will of his master and that's what Christian laborers should see themselves as.

Completely disposed to the will of God. Totally expendable and therefore ever attentive to the voice of the Spirit. But this doesn't mean that we humans should take no initiative.

Notice that Paul doesn't just throw his hand up in the air and sit around when God closes doors. When God closes the door to Phrygia and Galatia, look at what Paul does. He just goes right to Mysia and then tries to go into Bithynia.

So God has to close that door too. And then he goes to Troas. Troas was the primary Asian harbor for ships destined for Macedonia. It's possible that Paul was planning that and that the Spirit of God confirmed that in his vision.

[34 : 27] If we wait around for the hand of God to appear and then write on the wall exactly what he wants you to do, we likely won't get much work done. Because God often does not speak with that kind of clarity.

So we need to learn to discern God's will through closed doors and trust God to work through them. Paul doesn't know exactly which city he should travel to next, but he does know that God has commanded him to preach the gospel to all nations.

So when God closes one door, he just goes to another place in an attempt to share the gospel there. Likewise for us, we do not need to wait around for the writing on the wall.

You do know that God has called you to be fishers of men. You do know that God has commanded you to share the gospel with your neighbors. You do know that God has called the church to make disciples of all nations.

So the question to ask is, how can I be involved with that? Everyone can be involved with that in some way. So we use our best discernment and start working, trusting that God will close some doors and redirect us as necessary.

[35 : 44] And when God closes a door, it means either that the work we're currently engaged in is still not over, or that he's about to open another one. He says in verses 9 to 10, and a vision appeared to Paul in the night.

A man of Macedonia was standing there urging him, saying, come over to Macedonia and help us. And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So God shows Paul a vision. He recognized this figure in the vision as a man of Macedonia, so he must have been in some kind of traditional Macedonian attire to be recognizable. And then Paul, after recognizing him, the man urges Paul to come over to help them.

And then it says in verse 10, that immediately we sought to go into Macedonia. Notice it says we. Paul doesn't unilaterally decide this. Paul receives the vision from the Lord, tells his team, and then we immediately sought to go on into Macedonia.

Once the team concludes that Paul's vision is indeed directed from God, there's no debate. The time for discerning God's will is over. It's not time for obedience. And they obey promptly, immediately.

[37 : 07] Notice their laser focus on their mission. There's no doubt in their mind what that vision means. They don't ask after the vision, so what are we supposed to do when we get to Macedonia?

Wait, wait, wait, don't go away man of Macedonia. Tell us what exactly you need help with. You didn't tell us, you just said help us. What do you need help with? No such questions are raised.

Why? Because they know exactly what their mission is. To proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. They know that that's what the man of Macedonia needs most to be saved.

that's our mission too. To proclaim the good news of Jesus being led by the Holy Spirit.

The Christian life is all about Jesus because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him because there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved than the name of Jesus because Jesus alone died for our sins and was raised from the dead.

[38 : 19] Because Jesus alone can offer forgiveness of sins because Jesus alone promises eternal life and future resurrection from the dead. Frederick Buechner, an American novelist and theologian, once famously said this, the place God calls you to is a place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

For us as Christians, brothers and sisters, our deepest gladness is Jesus Christ, our Savior. And the world's deepest hunger is for Jesus Christ.

proclaiming Jesus is precisely where our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet. So how can we orient our lives around this mission?

Are you willing to drop what you're doing to lose what you value in order to pursue this calling? That's the posture of the servants of Christ and Paul and his missionary companion responded with that kind of faith and obedience, and the result quite literally changed the course of human history.

This is what New Testament scholar Richard Longnecker says about this verse. Authentic turning points in history are few, but surely among them that of the Macedonian vision ranks high.

[39 : 53] Because of Paul's obedience at this point, the gospel went westward, and ultimately Europe and the western world were evangelized. Christian response to the call of God is never a trivial thing.

Indeed, as in this instance, great issues and untold blessings may depend on it. No obedience is too small in the cause of Christ.

So let us faithfully proclaim the gospel, discerning God's will through conflicts, controversies, and closed doors, while trusting God to work through them all. Let's pray.

God, increase, increase our gladness in Jesus, and increase our awareness of the world's desperate hunger for Jesus.

God, amen. Amen. Make us more attentive to and sensitive to the voice of your spirit, and give us wisdom as we make decisions, as we trudge along, carrying our cross and following our Savior.

[41 : 12] Jesus' name we pray. Amen.