

The Holy Spirit

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It was military recruitment day at a local high school. The goal was to recruit students for the US military, and the gym was packed for a school assembly.

The Airforce recruiter went first. The recruiter offered the Airforce motto, Aim High...Fly-Fight-Win. He presented a fabulous power point with pictures of the Airforce in action. He said, "the Airforce is an amazing branch of the US military you should join the Airforce."

The Army recruiter stood up next and said, "no, let me tell you why you should join the army." The Army is oldest branch of the military that started in 1778, and fought the American Revolution and its motto is, This We'll Defend. He showed some power points of soldiers in action and then said, "the Army is an amazing branch of the US military, and you should join."

The Navy recruiter stands up and says our motto is, Not Self, but Country." Some power points are splashed across the screen and then the Navy recruiter tells the students that day, "the Navy is an amazing branch of the US military, and you should join."

Finally, **the Marine recruiter** stands up. No power point. He does not tell them the motto. The recruiter stands on the edge of the stage and looks over the room. He looks to the left, and says, "nope." He looks up the center aisle, pauses and announces, "none there either." Finally, he looks to the right and with sadness in his voice as he declares, "none over their either."

Then he says, "I don't think any of you are good enough for the Marines Corp." He goes on, "you have to understand the Marines are the most difficult thing you will ever do with your life. It will challenge you physically emotionally and academically. It will challenge you more than any other challenge in life, and I don't think there is a single person in this room ready to be in the Marine Corp.

If you think I am wrong, I will be in the back of the room when the assembly is over." What the Marine recruiter is doing is putting up a filter and announcing, "I am looking for a certain kind of person. Different from all of the rest. If you are that kind of person, you will do well here.

..., if you are looking for a challenge, if you are looking to push yourself, if you are looking for the greatest opportunities in life to learn and reach your potential.

And if you like serving one another, if you are looking for a cause bigger than yourself then you are who we are looking for.

It is a filter. Christianity is a filter. It invites those who want to rid themselves of sin and serve the greatest cause in mankind's history, taking the message of Jesus atoning death to your family, friends and neighbors. And to do it for the rest of your life.

Acts 16 is a filter. God is about to put together a team of Christ followers who will penetrate deep into the Roman world. These rebels will infiltrate deep into the empires reaches. Previously, Paul and Barnabas danced on the edges of the Roman empire and now Paul is asking like the Marine recruiter,

"If you are looking for a challenge, if you are looking to push yourself, if you are looking for the greatest opportunities in life to learn and reach your potential.

...And if you like to serve one another, if you are looking for a cause bigger than yourself **then you are who we are looking for."**

Christ followers are no longer merely a Jewish sect. The Jesus movement is fast becoming a predominantly a Gentile Movement. It has been about a year since Paul and Barnabas have returned from their first missionary journey that lasted two years.

For Paul, the ministry was an adventure and a launching pad. Paul could never settle to sit in the comfortable pew of the Antioch church. As long as there were open doors for the message of Jesus death on the cross that would set the captives free. Paul was on the move.

Paul and Barnabas agreed that what they had experienced on their first missionary journey, the salvations, the deliverances, even the stoning's were **all a part of God's plan to save the world.**

There are events unfolding in your life that are all part of God's plan to save and heal the world. Do you see them?

That day in Acts 16, Paul and Barnabas are convinced the next trip must be longer and penetrate deeper into the Roman empire. Paul takes 3 missionary journeys in his lifetime.

Paul's 1st missionary journey lasted about **two years and** takes place between 46-48 AD and is recorded in Acts 13-14. Here Paul preaches his first sermon and introduces the gospel of grace and experiences Holy Spirit supernatural activity.

Paul's 2nd missionary journey lasted about **three years**, taking place between 49-52AD. During this journey he traveled through regions of Asia Minor and Greece establishing churches and spreading the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. After a vision of a man from Macedonia Paul plants a series of churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus.

While Paul and Barnabas are on the same page about expanding the missionary vision, what they could not agree upon was the composition of the team. Here are two dedicated servants of God who had tested Jesus Christ new message of grace. Gentiles could be saved, they wanted to be saved, and God was pleased when this happened and God would give Gentiles his grace, miracles and even use them for his purposes.

As Paul and Barnabas drafted their teams, Barnabas chose John Mark and Paul chose Silas. Silas is the Greek version for the word Paul. Two Paul's on the same team. Like Paul, Silas was a Roman citizen.

Paul was adamant about not taking John Mark, having deserted them to return home. ³⁹ *They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus,* ⁴⁰ *but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. (Acts 15-NIV)*

Who was right? Both men were right on some things, and both were wrong on others. It seemed like the only solution was for the friends to go into different regions with the Jesus message.

We know that Barnabas and John Mark did succeed, and later John Mark is the author of the gospel of Mark. We know that Paul and Silas did succeed because God opened the doors for Jesus in Europe. Now, there were two missionary teams instead of one. If God had to depend on perfect people to get the work done, God would still be waiting. Stop bailing on being used of God, just because you are not perfect, neither were the first disciples. Ok, ok!

Barnabas cared about people over programs. Paul cared about programs over people. Barnabas ran the Celebrate Recovery program and wanted the John Mark's and their shortcomings to find healing even with a boatload of self-inflicted mistakes.

Bethel is a church that welcomes everyone even with your self-inflicted mistakes. Why? Because *All People Matter to God*.

Have you wanted to give up? Join God's family at Bethel and start to live up.

Have you been imprisoned? Join God's family and learn in the bible it is filled with those who have been incarcerated-Joseph, Paul and Silas, Apostle Peter, even Jesus Christ was falsely imprisoned for a night while he was tossed around one of the most corrupt legal systems called on to give people their day in court.

Have you run out of money? Join God's family and become rich in Christ. Rich in friends. Rich opportunities to serve Christ. Even rich in job referrals.

Have you run out of emotional strength? Join God's family and be renewed in the strength of your mind as you read God's word. *Romans 12:2b-NIV- ... but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

Paul needed workers to get the job done. And like the Marines, Paul wanted some courageous, hardworking soldiers for Jesus. Those who loved the demanding work of missions. And don't complain about the work conditions. Paul announces, **then you are who we are looking for.**

Paul looked at a person and asked, "What can that person do for the work of God?" Barnabas looked at a person and asked, "What can the work of God do for that person?" (Acts 15:36-41)

Barnabas and John Mark take a sea-based voyage to Cyprus and strengthen the disciples from the first missionary journey. Paul and Silas take a land-based route heading to Derbe and Lystra, just the reverse of the first journey.

Paul and Silas immediately start seeing the same kind of fruit in salvations, miracles and healings. Since they were visiting familiar churches, I wonder if anyone asked where Barnabas was? What did Paul tell them?

⁴ As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. (Acts 16-NIV)

Paul returns to the town where he was heralded as a god and then got stoned. The fruit from Paul's days in Lystra was starting to ripen.

As Paul and Barnabas are teaching and preaching again in Lystra and describing how the Jerusalem church had solved the question of whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised.

The answer was NO!

Paul also gave the call to those who wanted to join the new Paul and Silas team that was heading for Rome. Remember, Paul will travel over 17,000 miles in his lifetime of travel.

Several people approached Paul and described how a young teenager, about 15, was showing Pauline-like promise. Intense. Christ centered. And loyal to grace. His name is Timothy, these church leaders from Lystra announced to Paul, Timothy was one of your converts from your first trip.

Paul adds Timothy to the team to assure Jews that following Christ does not mean you have to stop being Jewish. (Acts 15:1-5)

Paul is open to meeting Timothy, Timothy passes the vetting process and becomes more than a replacement for John Mark, years later Paul tells the Corinthian church, he is my son in the faith.

How about you? Anybody willing to join team Jesus and move out of your comfort zone and go on a mission's trip. Maybe not for 3 years, but what about a week, a couple of weeks?

In the next season of the life at Bethel, you can join some teams that will be forming for disaster relief in January, as south Texas valley near Mexico spring break missions and in a year and half/two year from now a team will depart for Ethiopia made up of women. Each of these trips will be microcosms of the book of Acts trips that are recorded in Acts 13-Acts 21.

Ok, let's continue through Acts 16. Timothy played a critical role in Paul's life over the years. He aided Paul when a church needed Paul's presence, and Timothy offered that support.

Timothy would take over the ministry for Paul, while he was in prison during the later years before his beheading.

Finally, Timothy would become the pastor of one of Paul's most noted churches- Ephesus where Jesus' mother lived out her old age days.

Question? Is your life being shaped by the word of God? Every time you study God's word, understand what the text is telling you and drop the football in applying it to your life, you are aborting the process.

Keep in mind, to know God's word and not do it, is to know nothing at all. Jesus said to the most learned group of people of the day, have you not read the scriptures. Yes, they were experts on the scriptures and so Jesus chided them with, "why do you call me Lord, Lord but you do not do the things that I tell you."

What is Jesus' point? Either stop calling me Lord or start doing what I tell you. Kind of rough for those falling on their face because of disobedience.

As we continue to follow Paul on the beginning of his second missionary journey, we are about to see how God's supernatural work of "openings" takes place. As Revelation says, "there is an open door, no man can open and an open door no man can shut."

(1) God will open a way (vs 6-9)

(2) God will open a heart (vs 13-15)

(3) God will open prison doors (vs 16-40)

Now, Paul is entering new territory. Places he had never stepped before. Think about the feeling when you travel to a new state, or a new country. It is easy to think, never been here before.

Up to this point, every place and event that Paul had engaged in was a big success. Then suddenly without warning Paul ran smack into a closed door. This calls for a question. Will you serve God with your whole heart, even if He rarely explains the 'why'?

God's work is a blend of faith and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. In the next 5 verses you can see a roadmap for how to serve God and do his work. Sometimes God wants to move you along a certain path, **so he has to turn you**. Paul does not end up going east to Asia, the Holy Spirit directs Paul west to Europe.

Along the way to your destination with God, be it growth or service, you need more help and support in your life. In these verses we meet Dr. Luke who joins the team. In the future, the work of God was so important that this team traveled with their own physician. Why? More jails? More beatings? More exhaustion.

God's work is not for the faint of heart. While Paul was spending time in prayer, and listening to the Spirit's guidance, God provides a personal vision of a Macedonian man standing in Europe pleading for Paul to cross the Aegean Sea and bring the life-giving message of Jesus Christ and forgiveness of sins.

When Paul sorted out in his heart what God was saying to him through the vision, he sat down by the fire and told Silas, Luke, Timothy **start packing your bags, Europe has called for help**.

The team of Paul, Silas, Luke and 15-year-old Timothy slept one more night on the beach of Troas. The team headed for the dock to take the next boat west with stickers on their luggage that read.

"Europe or Bust!"

Ok, let's read the text.

⁶ 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. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ After 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. (Acts 16-NIV)

It is comforting to know that even the apostles were unsure of God's plan for a season. God planned for the message to go to the region of Phrygia and Bithnia another time. Paul and

Silas were kept out of forbidden regions. Why? Because God is sovereign. Rather than assume this coincidental or accidental, Paul and Silas accepted the sovereign hand of Christ guiding them where he wanted. Few verses spell this out as clearly as Rev. 3.

When I open a door, no one can close it. And when I close a door, no one can open it. Listen to what I say. (Revelation 3:7c-CEV)

When doors close, it is easy to wonder what we did wrong. Play the victim. Or compare ourselves to others who seem to live in a world of constant open doors.

Paul and Silas accepted the reality that the Lord has every right to open and close doors. When you are following the Lord closed doors are never mistakes. I want to ask you a question. How do you know when the providence of God is your destiny, a detour, or a destructive decision? Detour? Destiny? Destructive decision?

We all experience them. After the team arrives in Philippi and begins to experience God's success in evangelism, the supernatural to include deliverance and earthquakes that set Paul and Barny free, and persecution all of the detours and destiny begins to make sense.

Destiny is a prepackaged and custom-made life God has given each of us that accomplishes his sovereign will.

Detours-Paul's prepackaged, and custom-made life is full of twists and turns.

Destructive Decision -God is not the author of evil, but he is the author of a story that includes evil.

From Troas the Paul and company sail to Neapolis and travel by land to Philippi. Philippi is a Roman colony, which was a Rome away from home. The emperor invited retired military to settle all over the Roman empire to ensure a strong pro-Roman influence in strategic cities. Though the Roman citizens often lived on foreign soil they were loyal to Rome. Pay taxes. Worship the Caesar. Keep the peace.

Jesus' atoning death penetrates deep into the Roman world as we see how Jesus' message of forgiveness changes hearts: Timothy, Luke, Lydia, a female demon-possessed slave girl and a Roman jailer.

With the last few minutes, we learn that God uses all types of servants to reach all kinds of sinners. On Paul's team are Timothy and Luke.

Timothy will become Paul's protégé and help keep the message of Jesus' atoning death available to both Jew and Gentile. (Acts 15:1-5)

Dr Luke joins Paul's team at Troas and now Paul can offer supernatural healing and medical healing. (*Acts 16:8, 10*)

Paul and team arrived in Philippi and headed for some R & R, down by the river. While God has called them to this region, they needed to refill their spiritual energy banks.

While at the river Paul found a prayer meeting and a woman in charge of the local clothing guild who opened her heart to Christ and she and her whole family were saved. She boldly followed Christ by being baptized and offered wonderful hospitality to the team. Since there was no synagogue in Philippi this was one of those destiny meetings. Paul and the team knew nobody in town and now they had a place to stay.

Lydia is a wealthy businesswoman from Philippi and Paul's first convert in Europe. (*Acts 16:11-15*)

No sooner are lost people saved but the devil hits the fan. Next, we meet a female demon-possessed slave who is making her master rich by telling fortunes. As Paul and team go back and forth between Lydia's hospitality and the river they are intercepted and interrupted by this girl who is repeatedly shouting...

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future.

She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."

A female demon-possessed slave attempts to join Paul's team. (*Acts 16:16-21*)

¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. (Acts 16-NIV)

Instantly, the mental anguish ended the possession, and the evil spirit came out of her. The slave girl was free of her bondage! This young lady also, like Lydia likely became a follower Christ, even though the text is silent. In just a few days, the gospel has begun to take root in Philippi. When the evil spirit flew the coop, so did the financial profits that went along with the girl's fortune telling. The owners hit the fan.

A little Greek to help you appreciate Luke and the Holy Spirit's inspiring Luke. Luke uses the same word in verse 18, for the departure of the evil spirit in verse 19 for the departure of the owners' profits.

Their ill-gotten gain was literally exorcised along with the tormenting spirit.

After all she was not only a person, but she was also property.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. (Acts 16-NIV)

Suddenly the owners of the girl played the race card. They told the neighboring crowd that Paul and his team were anti-Roman. If the truth won't sell, you might as well try hogwash!

Without an investigation of the charges, the city police ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten. Thrown in jail. They were locked up in maximum security, making their miraculous deliverance even more supernatural.

Philippi's maximum security was no holiday inn. It was colder than a Kansas January. And blacker than the ace of spades. And smellier than roadkill. The stocks were designed to not only keep prisoners from escaping but to inflict pain and suffering on the legs and arms.

This kind of Roman torture was often used on early Christians. Such were the accommodations for Paul and Barnabas. Backs bruised and beaten. All for an act of mercy. These on-fire followers of Christ had no time for self-pity. Paul and Silas began to pray and worship. About midnight the maximum security lit up with the presence of God, because of worship and prayer.

Paul sang tenor, Silas sang baritone, and God joined in with a thundering sound of bass that shook the cell block to its foundation. Stocks fell off. Locks shattered. Doors flew open. And prisoners' chains dropped to the ground. All might has escaped but none did. God was not only setting his servants free, but he was also setting those without chains free.

A Roman jailer on a journey of faith is influenced by God's powers to deliver, an earthquake and even his own suicidal attempt. *(Acts 16:22-40)*

The jailer knew according to Roman military law, that if prisoners escaped, he would be given the punishment the fugitives would have received.

His property would be confiscated leaving his family bankrupt. To protect his family from such a loss he grabbed his sword and was ready to take his life.

Just in the nick of time, Paul shouted, "We are still in here." And in Acts 16:29-30. We see the next convert and family to Christ, a jailer who knows what Paul has done to get thrown into jail. Knows that worship of his God, shook the jail and opened the bars, and finally that Paul cared more about the jailer's safety than his own freedom.

²⁵⁻²⁶ Along about midnight, Paul and Silas were at prayer and singing a robust hymn to God. The other prisoners couldn't believe their ears. Then, without warning, a huge earthquake! The jailhouse tottered, every door flew open, all the prisoners were loose.

²⁷⁻²⁸ Startled from sleep, the jailer saw all the doors swinging loose on their hinges. Assuming that all the prisoners had escaped, he pulled out his sword and was about to do himself in, figuring he was as good as dead anyway, when Paul stopped him: "Don't do that! We're all still here! Nobody's run away!" ²⁹⁻³¹ The jailer got a torch and ran inside. Badly shaken,

he collapsed in front of Paul and Silas. He led them out of the jail and asked, “Sirs, what do I have to do to be saved, to really live?” They said, “Put your entire trust in the Master Jesus. Then you’ll live as you were meant to live—and everyone in your house included!” (Acts 16-NIV)

God’s work by the Holy Spirit can accomplish amazing acts of grace in a short period of time. Is this true of you?

In the dark dungeon, the Lord Jesus Christ touched people who could be reached no other way. If you need that kind of deliverance today, stand all over this place and call out to God in prayer and worship.