

Let's open our Bibles tonight to the book of Acts 15:36 as we continue together our journey through the book of Acts.

Certainly the key to a good Bible study is to correctly learn biblical principles - both from direct statements that we read in the Bible (those theological books that kind of direct us to think that way) and then to be sure that, from the narrative portions of the Bible where we are told stories and given insights, we can learn in the settings and in the circumstances that you find that narrative. And certainly that's how the book of Acts is written; it is God's record to us through Luke, by the Holy Spirit, of thirty years of the early church history. And so we find ourselves looking at, if you will, what God wants us to know about what took place in the first generation of the early church. And, because of that, we want to ask the Lord, by His Spirit, to teach us the principles so that, in our generation, we might find ourselves doing exactly what God would want us to do and be effective in the years that we have to serve Him upon the earth. So that's really why we have the book of Acts. We get to model ourselves after the church that you find in the 1st century - after the people that God used - and the principles that we can then apply to our lives.

We're going to begin tonight in verse 36. We have finished (if you were not with us last week) the meeting that took place in Jerusalem about fifteen years into the life of the early church; and the discussion began to be had - how can Gentiles just go to Jesus directly? Shouldn't they first become Jews? It is the basis for the argument of salvation by grace alone. And what did it mean for the Gentile believers who had heard the gospel, been open to hear what God had to say, turned to the Lord in faith, were given the Holy Spirit, and yet there were these Judaizers? And a lot of these Jews - that's all that they had ever grown up with - were not letting go, if you will, of that idea that if anyone ever came to the Lord, they'd have to come to the synagogue, if you will, first. And so when Peter was sent by the Lord to go preach the gospel to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house, or as what was going on 300 miles to the north in Antioch (as these folks that had run away from Jerusalem when Stephen was murdered), they had begun to share their faith with Hellenists (those kind of half-Jews, half-Greeks in practice, anyway), and God honored their faith. And so they had a meeting to once and for all put an

end to these Judaizers. Now this wasn't an end. Paul will, for the next fifteen years, have men following him from city to city trying to persuade those who had just gotten saved that that's no way to get saved - by grace alone. But they officially (in chapter 15) came to that realization that it was indeed the way that the Lord had worked. Peter stood up and told his story; Barnabas stood up and told their stories with Paul - as to what God had done with them; and the wonders Peter saw at Cornelius' house; the miracles that Paul and Barnabas had seen as they were preaching on the road in that first missionary journey out of Antioch, there in the south. And finally James, the half-brother of Jesus, stood up and, having heard everything, said, "Look, we believe and agree that God's will and His Word make clear that His desire is to save by grace and that His plan was always to save the Gentiles by faith. And so, as long as they believe in Christ, they don't certainly have to do anything else. We can't put any kind of demands on them that we couldn't keep." And so the decision was made - to the joy of everyone except the Judaizers - that the message of the church would be salvation that comes by grace.

The conflicts that came out of this whole thing - rather than weakening the church's message - kind of strengthened the early believers. They wrote a letter from that meeting. They gave it to Paul and to Barnabas; they took it back up north. They were going to go and tell all of the churches that they'd been involved with planting, and the ones that they would be, that this was the official position of the church (the apostles and all). They sent a couple of guys with them from Jerusalem to kind of bear witness that it wasn't just Paul that said so. But these representatives - a guy named Barsabas (his name was Judas, they called him Barsabas) and another guy whose name was Silas - came to Antioch (the church that was planted there in the north where Paul had pastored for a while now), and the Gentile saints were just thrilled to hear that they had this great liberty. The only caveat that came from the meeting was that, "We Gentile believers should be sensitive to some of the considerations of the Jews who, in their liberty as believers, were not yet able to give themselves over to." So, "Don't eat rare steaks, and bleed thoroughly your food; don't be getting and serving the food that had come from these idol temples" (which was nothing to Paul). He will write that in several places. But, "Just be sensitive to the weaker brethren as you go out and you enjoy your liberty." Well, the results of this decision was great joy. If you read the last five or six verses before this, beginning in verse 30 or so, everyone was just so encouraged to hear what God had to say. The two boys that came from Jerusalem: Barsabas eventually went home; Silas really liked the ministry amongst

the Gentiles - he decided to stay in that place and serve rather than going back to Jerusalem.

Well, that brings us up to verse 36, and tonight we begin Paul's second missionary journey. It runs from here to chapter 18:22. I know we've mentioned it to you; I'll mention it again. Paul's first missionary journey ran from only 46-47 A.D., just two years. He stayed in Antioch (with all of these other things that we've studied) until 50 or so A.D., which is when this begins, and it will run through 55 A.D. So, for six years Paul will be out on the road. He'll come back for just what seems like weeks, maybe a month, before he just can't stand it, and he wants to go out again. And he'll do his third trip from 55-57 A.D. We have maps. Hopefully you have them by now. If you don't, grab one on the way out at the counter, or ask an usher for one.

The first journey that Paul took was about 1235 miles or so. The second one (that we are beginning tonight) is about 2700 miles. So quite a venture out. He will stay on the road, like I said, for six years. He'll find himself staying in places longer just to see the growth continue. And, if you have a map, you can follow along with us else make sure to get one for next week. Paul, in this second journey, goes back to the places he went on the first journey but in reverse order. He goes back up the coast on this side through Antioch and then back and around. So he's going to go visit the churches that were planted three years earlier, four years earlier. And, led of the Spirit, he will then find himself kind of stuck in the middle - not knowing where to go and trying for months, it seems, to go north and south without any kind of help at all, before he ends up on the coast where the Lord will eventually send him and the gospel to Europe.

Tonight we'd just like to read through chapter 16:10. It'll kind of get us to that place where the Lord is calling him to go to Europe. I'd like to give you, from our verses tonight, six principles of evangelism that I think you'll find in these missionary journeys that we haven't pointed out to you in going through the first one. But I think they'll reflect what God would like to do in your life and mine - through us - even as He did with Paul and Silas.

And we'll take it kind of out of the text that we are given this evening, beginning in verse 36 with this first point. If you're going to be a good evangelist or a vessel, you're going to have to have the right passion. This is what it says in verse 36, "Then after some days" ("after some days" would be Paul having returned from

Jerusalem and teaching and all, and he'd been there for quite a while) "Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.' " God certainly uses busy people, and Paul and Barnabas were busy people. They were pastoring the church. They were teaching regularly. They had at least made two trips - 300 miles south and back again - to Jerusalem. Imagine you 1200 miles, and you don't get a car or an expressway. They had gone early on to bring relief to the Jerusalem church when a famine was coming that they had been told about by a prophet, and they, as a Gentile church, sent money of help to the people in Jerusalem. They had returned recently to have this meeting about salvation by grace alone. They had been gathering week in and week out (verse 35 - teaching and preaching), and they had gone on an extended two-year trip to plant the churches in Galatia. And the churches had been planted, but there had also been some knots planted on Paul's head. I mean, they beat him up and left him for dead.

You could look at Paul and say, "Well, gosh, maybe he's a little tired of this. I mean, this has been a full life in a couple of years." But you don't find any discouragement here nor is Paul tired of his labor. His passion is to love the saints. He wanted to know how they were doing. In some places, he had just been able to stay for a little while before he had to move on because they were chasing him down. He didn't know what the condition was in many of these places, but he was absolutely interested in being sure that they were doing well. "Let's go back and see the people." God uses people that are interested not in their own selfish interest but in serving and helping others. Often the church is viewed by people as a place where we go get our needs met. "What are they going to do for me?" And we shop churches by convenience. "Is the meeting at 10:48 because that's better for me than 10:45?" And we select things not based on the Lord moving but what is it good to me? What will it do for me? And you look at Paul here, even in his initial motivation of this passion in his heart, and you saw that he hungered for much more than that. I mean, he wants to go back to the same place they'd stoned him and left him for dead. "Let's go see how the people are doing." I might have just avoided that place. But he wanted to go see, "What is God going to do with my life?" And if you really want the Lord to use you to reach the people around you, then you've got to look with Paul to the souls around you and say (as we contemporarily say "Everything matters") souls matter to God. That's what He's interested in. And Paul had a heart that loved the believers that he had reached and the churches that he had planted, and he longed to go back and find out how they were doing. He was driven by a passion for the church, for the people, for

the saints, and a great desire for the lost. He must have believed that the Antioch church was in a good position for him to be gone for a time (because he and Barnabas were, in fact, the *O.G.s* in this church; they were the original kind of founders). But that seemed to fuel him all the more. "What is God doing in Galatia? What is God doing in Pamphylia? What is God doing in Pisidia?" Those were the counties in Galatia that he had gone to minister to, and he desired to go. Chapter 16:4-5 say that one of the things Paul wanted to do was deliver this note from the council that, "Hey, we've all agreed that salvation is by the grace of God alone. So anybody that shows up here" (and they had shown up there, following Paul) "to try to dissuade people from the gospels," Paul wanted them to know that they were "free in God's grace."

And so Paul has this passion for the souls of men. And everything that you read about what Paul writes in the letters that will come after these trips (or because of them) has to do with Paul's awareness of the fact that his passion was borne out of the understanding of the grace that God had given to him. He mentions it a lot; that, "I have this ministry because I have received mercy. And because I've received God's mercy, I'm not going to lose heart," he writes to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4:1). Or he said (2 Corinthians 5:14), "The love of Christ compels us because if He died for us then He died for all of us. And so we are driven by this love that God has for us to tell others." And that was Paul's passion. And you might want to ask yourself - what kind of passion level do you have in your life for the lost? And if you say, "I have lots of passion for the lost," how does it manifest itself? In other words, how could we see that looking at you? Are you the fella out in the street handing out tracts? Are you the one at work that's always opening your mouth, with a Bible in your hand, to share the gospel with somebody because you believe God's Word will change lives? Or is it just a secret between you and God? Paul had a drive and an awareness of God's love and mercy that motivated his willingness to pay the cost to bring the gospel to places that otherwise would not have heard it. So, how's your passion? And if you say to yourself, and I won't ask you to tell me, "I don't really have the passion I think I need," then the question becomes, "How do I have it? How do I get it? How do I get ahold of the passion?" And I'll tell you where you don't get it. You don't get it in a class on evangelism. That won't give it to you. It might give you tools on sharing, but that passion won't come from there. You won't get it in seminary. You won't get it in an emotional pep talk, "Come on! You can do it!" It only comes by spending time with Jesus. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:2), "I just want to know Him. I just want to know Him." He wrote to the Corinthians (2

Corinthians 3:18) that he was "being transformed by the image that he saw as in a mirror of the glory of God by the Spirit of God." "I just want God to change my life." You'll get passion as you sit with Jesus - that's where it comes from - as you realize what God has done for you. Until that happens, it's just a big obligation that's hangin' over your head. "Oh, I should share more. I should minister more. I should reach out more. Oh, I'm a worm. I'm a loser. Ahhhhh." Until you realize what you have in Christ.....and then, man, you can't shut up. Everyone likes to brag about what they have. You have a lot to brag about. But without an awareness, that's not going to continue. So passion is borne out of relationship and a keen awareness of God's love. Paul never lost sight of God's mercy and grace. He mentions it in literally every book that he writes. "I am who I am because of what God has done for me." He never stops. The song is the same. So, it isn't a surprise to see Paul saying to his buddy, "Let's go back and see how the brethren, how the family, how God's people are doing in places that we've been able to preach the Word. And let's just see how that's working." Right passion is vitally important for the church. We should have a passion for the lost. You go to the grocery store, I hope you can't walk through it without looking at people and going, "These people may be going to hell. If I'm not talking to them, I should be praying for them." It's a spiritual warfare for sure.

Second of all, you should have the right priority. The focus of evangelism begins with reaching the lost. That would be the target. Right? We want to talk to people that aren't saved. But it doesn't end there because ultimately - in the Bible and in the church - what you find is the preaching of the cross followed by the teaching of the Word; so, discipleship in the Bible (after evangelism) takes center stage. It's one thing to bring people to the Lord, but it is quite a different responsibility (and far greater in responsibility, in many ways) that you then begin to teach those who come to know the Lord about the Lord that you want them to walk in and serve. In Antioch, Paul's heart longed to go help the brethren in various cities. "Let's see how they're doing." The top priority for them in the mission field was to preach, but in terms of care he prayed all the time for folks to do well. He wrote to the Philippians (in chapter 1:3), "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Paul was forever praying for the churches he had helped to plant or to foster. He mentions it constantly. He says to the Thessalonians, where he literally spent just a few weeks, when he finally wrote a letter to them, he said (1

Thessalonians 2:19), "What is my hope and what is my joy and what is my crown and what is my rejoicing? I'll tell you what it is. It's you standing in the presence of Jesus at His coming. That makes me happier than anything else. I want to present you to the Lord. I want you to do well and get there from here." So, by His Word, in prayer, in fellowship, and then sharing the gospel, Paul found himself with the right priorities. He wanted to help people to grow. Let me ask you another question since we're talking about characteristics - who are you discipling tonight? Or who are you looking to to disciple you? Who are you setting an example for? Who are you getting up in the morning and praying for? Who do you get on the phone when you don't see them in church and go, "Hey, dude, I missed you today. Join me. Come sit with me. Come learn. What're you readin'?" We need to help each other spiritually because we have an enemy that doesn't sleep, and he wants to destroy. We need discipleship. Right? We need to get people into church and find an example that they can follow. Jesus spoke to large crowds a lot in the gospels, spent His life with twelve guys. Twelve. Eleven of them turned out okay. With them, He would touch the world.

On this second trip that Paul was going to go do, he wanted to encourage and help the saints to grow. He'll do the exact same thing on that third trip. He'll go back again to all of the places he'd been so that he could talk to them again and say, "How're you doin'? And what are you learning?" Paul was all about the people. "Let us see how they're doing." So, it's the right passion, but it's also the right priority. The priority for the church should not be filling every pew and seat with people, although God will do that as the gospel gets preached. But we should establish every soul. We should make sure that everyone makes it down the road; no one stagnates or falls along the wayside, and we just kind of step over them as we go. Discipleship.

Thirdly, you need the right personnel. Look what it says in verse 37. "Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia," (on that first trip) "and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God." These two friends, who had gone through so much together, now find themselves at an impasse of heart. Remember, this is the narrative God gives us so we can learn how we should function as a church and get along or not get along. John Mark was Barnabas'

nephew. You might remember, if you were with us, that when they set out on the first trip, they were able to go around Cyprus, and then they made the sail over to the mainland. And then the decision was made to go over the hills and the mountains - that very dangerous place. Paul, it does seem, maybe had malaria, as most commentators believe. It was dangerous, it was difficult. Paul was sick. You hang around with Paul, you usually got in trouble. And John Mark - I don't know what his ambition was, going with his uncle. But he decided this was enough, and when they got to the mainland, he didn't go north; he headed around the coast and just went right back home to mom's house. And Mark was still living in Jerusalem at his mom's house (Barnabas' sister - her name was Mary). It does seem that the early church met at Mary's house. And notice that, remember from chapter 15, Barnabas had just been to Jerusalem for that big council, and I don't doubt that he stayed with his sister. So in those discussions in the evening, John Mark said, "Hey, I'd like to go back. I think I can do it this time. Sorry I bailed out last time." And, being his uncle and loving his nephew, he said, "Yeah, you can go with us. That'd be awesome!" And then he went and told Paul, who went, "Are you kidding?! That quitter? There's no way in Hades" (I believe that's the word he used) "that he's going with us!" Barnabas said, "Well, come on. He feels really bad. It's not gonna happen again. I'm sure that he'll serve the Lord better. He's a couple of years older now. He understands what's involved. Come on! We're supposed to love people." And Paul said, "You love him!" And notice, here in verse 37, the word "determined" is in the imperfect tense which means that Barnabas had his mind made up. He wasn't about to back off, but he also knew that he was going to run into some trouble with Paul. I don't doubt that Paul was looking forward to this kind of conflict. Paul was a driven man. He viewed John Mark as a weak kind of liability. "We don't need a guy who's going to bail out at the first sign of danger." Remember, Paul's the guy who got stoned to death and went back in to look for a hotel. Paul was a determined guy. He's a scary man in the Bible in many ways. The road was too rough for Paul, as far as he could see, for this young man. The mission was too important to take a chance. He didn't see John Mark as having the passion or the courage. He didn't want a kid with him that they'd have to wipe his nose all the time, and so he's just as determined. He says, "No!" And verse 39 says a "sharp contention" arose between them. The two words in Greek that are translated "sharp contention" are words that literally speak about screaming at the top of your lungs in debate. So this wasn't a nice discussion. This was a yelling across the table. This was two guys entrenched and their heels dug in. You can almost hear the.....here's what I hear when I read it, "Paul, do you remember when, fifteen years ago, seventeen years ago, you showed up in Jerusalem after

you'd been killing Christians all your life, and no one would even meet with you? But I met with you. I risked my life to come and see you. I got you a meeting with Peter and with John. The rest of the apostles wouldn't even talk to you! But I interceded on your behalf. Do you remember that? I was your friend." And Paul said, "Yeah." "Well, remember what happened when Peter was there with us in Antioch, and he was eatin' with the Gentiles, and then when those guys showed up from James' church and how he got up and went and sat at the kosher place and had the hot dogs?" (the Hebrew National hot dogs) "And you joined in the error. It wasn't me that joined in the error. It was you. I had to tell everyone you were wrong, man! You weren't helpful to me at all! I had to straighten both of you out." And whatever the conflict, and however it grew, and the experiences that they had on that first trip, and seeing God's hand, they couldn't resolve it. They went their own way. No handshake. No hug. Two strong men with God's conviction in their heart, not budging an inch. Barnabas went home to Cyprus. That's where he was born and raised. He took John Mark with him, and their first trip together began. We have no report of it at all. Paul decides to take Silas with him. They're going to head north to Galatia. They're going to retrace their steps that he and Barnabas had taken on the first journey, except backwards, if you will.

Now looking ahead, because we have the benefit of reading the rest of the Bible, John Mark would grow up, under Barnabas' care, to be quite a man of God. He would befriend Peter. We don't know where they really got to be good friends because Peter is now off the pages, if you will, but he would sit down with Peter and hear the gospel. And the gospel of Mark in your Bible was written by John Mark, and it was written as a testimony that came from Peter to John Mark. We know that from the Scriptures. So John Mark hung around; he didn't go anywhere. While Paul, later, was waiting to be executed, and he knew that his time had come, he wrote his last letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:11), and he acknowledged in that letter John Mark's ministry and even said, "Could you bring John here? He would be very useful to me in ministry" (John Mark). Earlier on, when he wrote the book of Colossians (in chapter 4:10), Paul mentions him among a group of fellow laborers, and he mentioned that he had written to the Colossian church earlier to say, "Please be sure that you support John Mark if he shows up on your doorstep. He's one of us." So, the relationship down the road will, at least, be amiable. At the end Paul's life, it seemed to be really thankful, but there were years in there where it was nothing but confrontive and caustic.

On the other hand, Silas (and we'll read of him now starting off with Paul) was definitely the right guy for the mission field where they were going. As a Jew who had Roman citizenship, he was perfect for the land where they were headed. John Mark would have had all kinds of trouble there. He was extremely courageous. He was filled with passion, as we're going to read as we go. And pretty soon, we're going to see Timothy, who will join as God's choice of John Mark's support, and these two will go on to greatness. But God had it all planned out and worked out. I say all of that to you just because (we're not quite there) I think that there is room in the body of Christ for unresolved division if the parties involved really feel like they were being led of the Lord. Not petty, not personal, not sinful, not fleshed out. But just.....here're two guys that, "I believe this is what God wants me to do, and I'm going to stand on my ground based upon God's calling upon my heart." I don't know what they said to each other. I don't know if Barnabas accused Paul of hard-heartedness or, "You're not very kind." I don't know if Paul said, "Bring your family. They're a bunch of losers." I don't know what happened, but I know they went like this. (Pastor Jack spreads his arms to signify separation). And yet, in that, now God has two ministry teams running around - the work is being done even greater.

There is a downside, as well, to division. The division that I have experienced in the church over the last forty years, for the most part, is personal attacks on individuals, not leading. I think most of us would be glad to support someone who feels God has called them wherever he is. Go with God, man. Praise the Lord! We had sixty families move this summer, most of them for retirement reasons where they could afford to live. And we miss these folks! I mean, we're sorry to see them go. And some of them call, and, "We're watching you online....." Others are just sad to leave. And then there are those who don't like you, they don't like something about you, and they pack up and go; and it's hard to support that kind of underhanded personal issue. You can't deal with that. I don't know how to fix that. I just say, "Goodbye. See you later." Let the Lord work it out. So we live in a part of the country where church switching is a gift. People seem to run from one church to the other when they don't find something they like. If you were living in the middle of the country, and especially in the South or in the Northcentral part of the southern portion of the country - right in the middle there - it's hard to change churches because you might only have one church in town that's teaching the Bible. We have hundreds. You can leave out of here angry, yelling and screaming and cursing at someone, and be leading worship somewhere else next week or be the head of the ushers. That'll happen here. That's self-serving, it's

demanding. At that point, to me, blessed subtraction is great. Thank you for leaving. But, if the Lord moves you on, we want to be supportive of that. God has a way.

So, this seemed caustic in the relationship, but apparently both men handled it pretty well spiritually and did what God told them to do. And that's all you can really do anyway. You're going to have to answer to the Lord for your decisions. Right? And nobody else. So it's an interesting picture. God says, "Look what happened," but we're gonna go with Paul. And interestingly enough, if you read verses 39 and 40, it almost suggests that Barnabas and John Mark just kind of got up and left the church, whereas Paul went in front of the church and was sent by them. They commissioned him. They commended him to the grace of God. And every time that Paul goes out you should know he comes back to give a report to the local church that he is involved with as to what God has been doing. So he comes back and goes out several times. But the way verse 39 and verse 40 read, it's almost like Barnabas said, "Fine!" and he leaves the church that he helped start; and he heads for Cyprus with a young man that needs encouragement, and that was what Barnabas was good at. Paul maybe wasn't the most approachable guy or the easiest going, but we all have our gifts. Right? And so Paul took off with the grace of God, "being commended by the brethren, and he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches." So, if you look at your map, they went up the coast towards Antioch and beyond, around the horn of Cilicia there towards Tarsus where, by the way, Paul was from.

So, chapter 16 then says this. "Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek." We told you about that mixture. Right? "He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek." This time, if you look at your map back to Derbe and to Lystra, just in terms of travel, it's about 140 miles from Antioch (there on your map) to that little turn - the Cilician Gate. It is still called that today. Another 100 miles to go to Derbe. So that's 240 miles. Thirty more to go to Lystra, thirty more to go to Iconium. So, if you add all that together, almost 300 miles of travel to get to those two cities. The first time Paul and Barnabas had come to Derbe, which was the end of the line for the first trip, they had found the only place where they could really rest. Great success. Nobody was trying to kill them. It was the end of their journey. I

don't know how long they stayed there, but they were happy here. It was the end in a good way, if you will. In Lystra, which was the place they had come when they came from the other direction, God had healed a man lame from birth; the people had sought to worship Barnabas and Paul as gods that had come down to them. They were stopped. Then the people were embarrassed. Meanwhile, those folks who had been in Antioch in Pisidia (the other Antioch - in the middle of your map there) had come all the way here to try to get at Paul again. And so they talked the people into dragging him outside of town. They stoned him. They thought he was dead, and off they went. So, that was a troublesome area. But this is where they find themselves now. I think that, just trying to put myself in Paul's shoes, I believe that when Paul got to these cities, it must have thrilled him to no end to know that the climate of persecution - that would have strangled the church - hadn't strangled God's work. It was a hard place to minister, but the church was still together. They were bearing fruit. God had remained. There's that Scripture, "If your work is enduring, then you'll get a reward" (1 Corinthians 3:14). Paul realized that this was God's work. Right? God had saved, and people had stayed. And when they got to this area - 300 miles away - they found a new member for the team, a guy named Timothy that you're pretty aware of. He was raised by a Jewish mother. He had received Jesus, we believe, when Paul came to town the first time; probably in his teens, young guy. And we believe that because Paul (in 1 Corinthians 4:17) calls him "my beloved son in the faith." He calls him (in 1 Timothy 1:2), "my own son in the faith." So he's kind of claiming ownership of his new birth, if you will. Right? "He's my boy in the Lord." He was raised by his grandmother, Lois. His mother's name was Eunice. We know that from 2 Timothy 1:5. He had learned the Scriptures since he was a little boy (2 Timothy 3:15). His dad was Greek and probably dead because the word "was" here is in, again, the imperfect tense, which would imply his dad was Greek but he's not around anymore. So, God had been preparing this young man in his teens, and Paul seemed to notice it right away. And the qualification for Paul (in taking this boy as opposed to John Mark) was that this boy had a great reputation, a good report, not only in the church but in the community. It was a rough place to speak for Jesus, and somehow this guy was able to do both. There's that qualification for elders (in 1 Timothy 3:7) where Paul, in writing to Timothy his first letter, said, "To qualify as an elder, you should have a good testimony among those who are outside," being outside the church. In other words, in the community, amongst the lost, you're an honest, reputable kind of guy; and Timothy was that. He had history, he had reputation, he came highly commended of his brethren. He would become Paul's favorite disciple. In fact, when Paul writes to the Philippians (in chapter 2:19), he

said, "I want to send Timothy to you. I have no one with me who is as like-minded with me as Timothy. He sincerely cares for your state. While everyone seeks their own, he doesn't. He's a proven character, he's a son with his father, and he has served with me in the gospel, and I hope that I can send him to you so that he can love you like I would if I could come." That's how Paul loved this guy. Six times in his letters Paul mentions Timothy in his greetings to the churches. "Hey, Timothy is with me." To Paul, he couldn't have been prouder of this kid. He was so happy to pour himself into this man, and yet he didn't want anything to do with John Mark. It's interesting. Paul saw Timothy as sharing his heart for ministry, and like I said, he loved him. So Paul says to Timothy, "Why don't you join us? Here's what we're planning on doing. We've just gotten started. We're 300 miles out." And Timothy, just thinking through what God has given us, had probably heard if not seen what happened to Paul the last time he was here - that bloody mess outside of town who could barely walk away with his head bashed in with rocks. "Hey, Timothy, you want to join us?" "Yeah, no! I heard about you. That's a dangerous thing." But apparently Timothy had what Paul had - a passion for Jesus. And rather than saying "no," he jumps at the opportunity that is given to him. According to the letters Paul will later write to Timothy, the churches in Lystra and Derbe officially gathered to send Timothy on the way. You can read it in 1 Timothy 1 and chapter 4 as well. So everyone was really excited that God was going to raise this young man from a local guy to the ministry of preaching Christ. And so, third point, they had the right team. Right? Hearts that God had touched. They were men of passion, they were men of priority and discipleship, and they were ready to go.

Fourth one, they took the right precautions. Verse 3 - they took Timothy and circumcised him because of the region and the Jews there; they knew that his father was Greek. Paul had Timothy circumcised. Well, just a couple of things. If you're a teenager facing circumcision, I'm thinkin' that might be a good reason to not go to the mission field. "No, thank you." (Pastor Jack makes the "time out" sign). "Mom, I'm stayin' with you for the rest of my life." It also seems like a bit of an odd decision, I guess, if you think about it in terms of the recent Jewish decision in Jerusalem that, hey, it's all about grace. Yet for Paul, this wasn't about salvation; this was a matter of ministry to the Jews, where he often was led of the Lord to go first, and the area that they were in - there were still a lot of Jews around. And because Timothy's family was well known, his father was Greek, they would very well have maybe made the assumption he was raised as a Greek not as a Jew, which is apparently what had taken place, at least in terms of circumcision

and the things that go with it. So, if he is a circumcised young man, now he's more acceptable in the Jewish community; it's going to be easier to hear him, and Paul saw these concessions that he's asking of this young man as an act of love. In fact, Paul wrote (in 1 Corinthians 9:22), "To the weak I become weak, so I can win the weak. I just become all things to all men so I can be able to save some." Paul was willing to make the right concessions in order to reach the people that he wanted to reach. And sometimes you can cut yourself off in ministry just by, "I'm not gonna do that. I'm not gonna sit there. I'm not gonna be.....I'm not talkin' to that guy." And you don't. So you just sit and do nothing. You know, there are things that you can certainly come across the aisle for, if you will. And Paul was willing to do that and, maybe to our surprise, so was Timothy. Now when, later on, Titus joins him, and they asked him about circumcising Titus (in Galatians 2:3), Paul said, "No way. Titus is a Gentile, and we just leave him alone. That's not the issue." But for Timothy - half Jew, half Gentile, and all of that admixture that they were balancing with - Timothy agreed to being circumcised, and then he went out to tell the Jews about Christ. And the message was, "Circumcision is of no benefit. That's the message. It's faith." Right? "What I did to come talk to you won't save me. But I'll do it if I can get to talk to you." That's an interesting picture. Pretty interesting.

I remember having to go sit in a Catholic church with one of our family members because we were all raised Catholic; but he would only meet me in the Catholic church. And then when we walked in the door, he said, "There's some holy water. Are you gonna cross yourself?" I said, "All right. How's that? Okay, good." I don't think it mattered to the Lord much; it mattered to him. But at least I got to talk to him.

So there are times when you just have to kind of take the, I think, right precautions, and these three guys were willing to go the extra mile. And when it came to matters of doctrine or conscience, Paul will not bend in the least. He said to the Romans (chapter 12:18), "As much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men." But you can only go so far. Right? And this is how far Timothy was willing to go. So they had the right precautions taken.

Number five, they had the right presentation. Now I want you to notice just two verses that Luke gives us, and they're summary verses of the ministry in Galatia. It just says this, verse 4, "And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at

Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." That's the extent of the report. Where we had several chapters of the first trip, here're two verses for this whole area. It is the sharing that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ. And he said (down in verse 29 of chapter 15) they were sent off to deliver this letter and to ask them to exercise their liberties in love. So Paul went to preach grace. The result of his preaching grace (in summary verses - verses 4 and 5) is that the churches were strengthened in faith. The word is to be rooted; or they were established, they were doing well. And, notice that they grew numerically. I know there're lots of books out and classes out about growing churches and filling pews and attracting people. And God bless them for trying, but the Bible would say that as God's Word is taught, life follows; really no secret to how the church grows. So numbers follow the teaching of the Scriptures. I guess that maybe is the best way to put it. They were direct, they were simple in their presentation, they sought to build up the church and establish the work of God in their hearts. And, as they did, the church began to grow. People were drawn in. There's a lot of discussion amongst churches (especially in America, which tend to be shrinking) that, "Oh, if we did this and we could do that," and they come up with a hundred different things. But the Bible would say - again, God's narrative to us - that if you preach the Scriptures and put Jesus out there and His Word, the result of healthy sheep is that others are born. Pastor Chuck used to say to us young guys, "Healthy sheep will beget healthy sheep. If you want your church to grow, just teach the Bible to those who come. Don't worry about those who don't come; you can't do anything about that. But teach those that come. Make them the best fed sheep in town. Because if they are healthy, then they will reach out to others, and the church will grow." It's a slower process. You know, raffling off bicycles may very well fill the place. "Row 4, that's meee!!!!" (Pastor Jack raises his arms). There're a lot of ways to get people in church. Giving away money'll do it. But teaching the Bible is the safest and the most proven method that God uses. It's a slow process, but the fruit lasts, and I think that's the key. So, they had the right presentation.

And finally, verses 6, 7 and 8, they were led to the right place, and I want you to look at this. "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia," (and you can find those on your map; Phrygia is that little side county, if you will, right up from the coast of Rhodes on your map - kind of written sideways; and the whole region of Galatia, which is the country) "they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia" (that would have been north). "After they had come to Mysia," (again, a province) "they tried to go into Bithynia," (that would be

up to the north) "but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas." After going to all of the familiar places in the area - and we have no report of it other than we are told what they were going to go do and how the church grew - we find Paul and his merry band of three, now, kind of stuck. If you look at your map and you see Antioch there, which is where they would have stopped last (although we have no report of it - we just get these generalized two verses), we now find, if you go to the west, this big land mass. You can go north, you can go south, you can go to the west; you're not going to go back to the east from whence you've come, but now where does God want you to travel? What is next? It does seem to me, because Paul had this passion, that he tries to go everywhere. He ends up going west and somewhat north towards the Aegean Sea. Up that way, there would be Ephesus and Laodicea and Philadelphia and some of those others. And yet he couldn't get a break to go. Everything got stopped as he tried to go. To give you a little bit of feel for distance, from Iconium (in your map) to Antioch, there, is about 85 miles; from there to Phrygia, that little place in the middle without a city attached, is about 200 more miles; to go from there to the coast at Troas is 200 more miles. So here's almost 300 miles, if you will, of open land. And Paul, "Where do we go?" "I don't know." And they tried to go to the south, and the Lord stopped them. And they tried to go to the north, and the Lord stopped them. We are not told (in verse 7) how the Lord stopped them. I don't know. I don't know if a word from heaven, "Stop!!!!" I don't know. But God did not allow them to go. They couldn't go south into Asia proper. They couldn't go north into Pontus or Bithynia. They couldn't go back from where they came. The only thing they could keep doing is just kind of going west forward until they ran out of land. So, from verses 7 and 8, we get the feeling that they were just moving. The last subject is the right place.

I suspect, putting myself with Paul again, that Paul must have been perplexed. I mean, up to this point, they had always just been led of the Spirit, and it seemed to be an easy trip. Oh, there were plenty of prices to pay, and the route was hard; but you don't find much arguing about, "Where do we go?" They just felt like they were on point with where the Lord wanted them to go. And yet now they seem to be having an entirely difficult time figuring it out, and I'm telling you that because I know that sometimes for you and me, we have a hard time wondering if we're in the right spot or not. "What's God doing?" And you don't see....you're tryin', you want to do good, and yet God doesn't seem particularly clear to you. Nothing was coming together. And in the middle of nowhere, they kept going north a little bit and west, just kind of heading for the sea; and they would end up by the Aegean

Sea. In our "Footsteps of Paul" this last year - the trip we took with a bunch of you from the church - we sailed from Athens through the Sea up to Ephesus. So that's kind of the place. It's beautiful, but if you're not sure where you're supposed to go.....Here's why I'm telling you this. It comforts me to read that these men of God in the 1st century - just an arm-length away from Jesus' resurrection - had a difficult time sometimes figuring out what God wanted them to do. Makes me feel good. I'm thankful that they're confused. Because I think that that's real life, isn't it? We want to do what God wants to do, and yet we're not sure about where God wants us. Later on (because I read ahead), chapters 18 and 19, on his third missionary journey, God will allow Paul to go to both north and south. He'll get a chance to do whatever it seems like is on his heart. But not right now; God had other plans.

Now here's the conflict. If you've read your Bible, you know that Paul is a stubborn guy. You can't stone a guy, and if he gets back up and comes in town, that's not a guy you can get rid of easily. You probably don't get in a fight with this guy because until he dies, he's gonna swing at you. Right? He's a stubborn guy. That stubbornness in Paul's life was often his greatest asset. You could beat him (as he'll get beat in Philippi), and he'll sing praise songs at midnight. Who does that? Not us. We complain if it's too hot, it's too cold, if it's raining. Or if I run out of pistachio nuts. Waaahhh (Pastor Jack makes a crying sound). Paul's a tough guy. It is his greatest.....and his dogged kind of determination helps him to persevere through the toughest of things, and when you read that he spent more than a night out in the ocean just bobbing and hoping he could hold himself up out of the water, he was a tough guy. However, sometimes when push comes to shove, being able to surrender yourself to the obvious will of God can be difficult when you're given to being a tough guy. His greatest strength became his weakness. It became something that he fought with. Had he just stopped and prayed, he probably could have figured it out months earlier. But not Paul. "I'm gonna get where God wants me. I'm goin' north. No, I'm goin' south." The Holy Spirit kept saying "No." And like I said, I don't know how, and the Lord doesn't tell us how. I just know he kept running into doors that were closed. And rather than surrendering, he pushes himself all the way to the sea before he goes, "All right, I guess we can't go any further now." And once he gets there, finally the Lord can say to him, "All right, Paul, here's what I've been wanting you to do all along." But his great strength and determination become his greatest weakness when it comes to determining what God wanted him to do.

Some commentators (because I've read many of them) believe that Paul's ongoing illness caused this months of waiting; that he couldn't travel much because he kept getting sick. And they use the argument from verse 10, where Luke (who is the doctor and who is the author of this book) joins their group; and the narrative changes from "they" and "them" to "we" and "us," and, until we get to Philippi, Luke is going to stay with Paul and take care of him. And then they're going to leave Luke there, finish their entire second journey, go home, come back a couple of years later; and then they're going to pick Luke up (towards the end of the book of Acts, chapter 18 and 19 right in there), and then he'll join Paul all the rest of the way. So, there's probably something to that. It's thin, but I think it's a fairly good conclusion, although I'm not sure. I don't have any idea.

Certainly one way to discover God's will is to keep moving until you've run into everything and then look up. Or, you can just pray. And I love the picture of these three godly men traveling hundreds of miles, not knowing for sure what God wanted until they ran out of places to run. That's interesting to me. These aren't guys in sin, mind you; these are guys out there risking their lives. These are men of purpose and conviction and passion, who have left it all behind for the sake of Jesus; and they still had a hard time figuring out what God wanted. I like reading that because I have found myself in that position more than once - where I wished that the Lord had....."Lord, if You'd have just told me....." And I don't know why He doesn't tell me. I've got a big file of questions, and He'll put me straight when I get there.

Well finally, verses 9 and 10 (we'll end with these), "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision," (and notice how it's written) "immediately" (of course, they've been tryin' for months to figure out where!) "we" (and whenever Luke is with him, he writes - being the writer - "we") "sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them." "Finally. Finally, we got some direction." And God made His will clear to Paul in a vision or in a dream, and there was a call to Macedonia. He was going to go to Philippi, to Thessalonica, to Corinth, to Athens; and they immediately set out. I gather, from just the context of the narrative, that the boys showed up in Troas pretty discouraged; draggin' their feet. "Another day, still no idea." They're not preachin' anywhere, they're not seein' any fruit. We're not reading of any kind of revival, any healing; not even any opposition. Just, "Yeah, we don't know." "Where're you goin', Paul?" "Yeah, I don't know." They finally get there,

and immediately they have some ways to go; all of the cylinders get turned on. And, like I said, the third person plural, "we," as Luke joins them; and he's the doctor, and then he will rejoin them (I have it in my notes) in chapter 20:5, actually, after he leaves them in Philippi.

Right passion, right priorities, right personnel, right precautions, right presentation, right place. That's a lot of "rights" in just a few verses. But I think if we can take them up, let the Lord speak to us, we can.....we've got a lot of work to do. There's a world that needs to be reached, and God's invested Himself in His church, by His Spirit. You might not always know where you're headed, but, man, the Lord has a place for you to go. Doesn't He?

Next week we will pick up in verse 11 in Philippi. If you just kind of read ahead, if you can read the rest of the chapter (we won't take the rest of the chapter by any stretch of the imagination), there are three very prominent conversions that God chooses to give us to study as we go through this portion. So, as you read, keep that in mind, and we will pick up next week.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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