



Global College of Ministry

EXPLORE

**The Christian & the
Will of God**

Avoid Accidents: Obey the Traffic Lights

Part One

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.”
(Acts 16:9-10)

Paul, in obedience to his missionary call in Acts 13 established a number of churches in the faith and was seeking the will of God for his life. Finding the will of God seems to be one of the major areas where people struggle. Paul thought that he would go to Asia but he was “...forbidden of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 16:6) Then his team considered going to another place “...but the Spirit suffered them not.” (Acts 16:7) Finally Paul had a vision of a man who stood on a distant shore and called across the sea, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us!” (Acts 16:9)

“The dream gave Paul his map. We went to work at once getting things ready to cross over to Macedonia. All the pieces had come together. We knew now for sure that God had called us to preach the good news to the Europeans.” (Page 274, The Message.)

The purpose of this lesson is to assist you in knowing how to determine the will of God for your life. This lesson will show you how to make sure that what you feel is the will of God, is in harmony with the Word of God, and is God’s way for your life. Eugene Peterson suggests (and the King James Version seems to back up his thinking) that Paul and his team felt that all of the pieces had come together to the Will of God. There seems to be a process that they went through to determine this since they knew for sure that it was God’s will. Their assurance was not based on the vision alone. Christians often ask, “How can I be sure of God’s will for my life?” To many, this is a difficult question and one that many Christians struggle with.

A story is told of a farmer who was working in his field one day and saw in the clouds the letters “P.C.” He thought to himself, “God is calling me to Preach Christ.” The man left farming and started preaching in the pulpit. He was not a good preacher and caused many of his members to fall asleep. One day a deacon asked him, “Pastor, how did you ever get called into the ministry?” The farmer told him about his experience in the field and the letters “P. C.” appearing in the sky. To this the deacon replied, “Oh Pastor, you made a mistake. That meant, Plant Corn.”

A story is told of a minister who was seeking for the will of God to be done in his life. As he was driving along and praying about God's will his car broke down in front of the Nigeria High Commission. He took this as a sign that the Lord was calling him to Nigeria as a missionary. These illustrations reveal to us a faulty and risky way of determining the will of God. There is a safer way!

Dr. Bill Hamon in his book *Prophets and Personal Prophecy* suggests that there are three "W's" in decision making when it comes to the will of God.

- ⇒ God's Word (on the matter.)
- ⇒ God's Will (about it.)
- ⇒ God's Way (to fulfill it.)

Traveling the Road of the Will of God

Dr. Hamon (whose book was very helpful in the preparation of this lesson) compares the three "W's" to three sets of traffic lights.

You must make sure that you have a green light on all three before proceeding. (Instructors may want to draw three different traffic lights to illustrate and label them as above.)

Three colors are normally used on traffic lights. They are: Red - which means to "Stop." Yellow - which means to "Yield, get ready to stop, or Caution." Green meaning "Go."

God's Word

The Bible is God in print. It is the revelation of God in written form. The Greek word is "Logos", which refers to the Word of God in general. Another Greek word is "rhema" which is a specific "word from the Word." It is a personal word from the Lord giving us direction and a command. If you could summarize up the Bible in one word it would be "submission." We need to submit to the will of God as revealed through His Word.

One story reveals that a deacon was considering studying for his Bachelor of Theology degree and become a pastor. He really wanted the degree but struggled with whether or not it was God's will, and a sound investment of his time and money. One afternoon he found the answer he had been looking for in the Word of God. He felt that this Bible verse confirmed his desire. The verse said, "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree..." (1 Timothy 3:13)

It is wrong to decide what you want to do and then make the Bible conform to it. People have the habit of doing this. They make their plans and then they expect God to go along with it. Doctrines have even been formed using and/or abusing one isolated Scripture. When determining the will of God the first traffic light that you drive up to is called "**God's Word.**"

What you feel is the will of God for your life must be measured up against the Word of God. The Word of God has been provided as a "...lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119: 105) Most of God's will is revealed through His Word.

We cannot base our decision on one Scripture alone.

"This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." (2 Corinthians 13:1)

The Spirit will never speak to us; even through spiritual gifts, and tell us to do anything that would be contrary to the Word of God. God's will for us conforms to the principles of His Word. The Spirit guides us in agreement with the Bible.

Is every portion of God's Word for us to obey today? Some will quickly answer, "Yes!" It is true that the entire Word of God is for us and is relevant. All Scripture is written for a purpose. However, not all of the Word of God should be obeyed by us today. The personal prophecies directed at different men of God in the Bible may not be required for us to fulfill. (However, they do teach us to be obedient to the voice of the Lord.) God told Isaiah to "go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot." (Isaiah 20:2) This prophecy is part of the Word of God and has been fulfilled by Isaiah; it is not meant for us to do today. He was to do this in order to act out a parable of what would happen in that day.

Many today isolate Scriptures and take them as the will of God and make doctrines out of them. God spoke to Moses and said, "...put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place wheron thou standest is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5) There are churches that even ask their people to remove their shoes at the door because they are entering into the presence of God and will be standing on holy ground.

If what you feel passes the "Word Test" then you have received a green light and can proceed to the next set of traffic lights on the road to discovering the will of God.

Study Questions

1. What are the three (3) "Ws" to be used in decision making concerning the will of God?

2. What are the three (3) colors of traffic lights and what do each mean?

1)

2) _____

3) _____

3. If you were to sum up the Bible in one word, what would it be? _____

4. According to Psalm 119:105, what is the Word of God to us? _____

5. According to 2Corinthians 13:1, what principle should be followed in establishing doctrines and the will of God for our lives? _____

Additional Notes

Avoid Accidents: Obey the Traffic Lights Part Two

“...If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”
(Acts 5:38-39)

God's Will

*P*eople today feel that they are quite able to find the Will of God on their own and do not need the help of men. They even say, “I’m not going to listen to men but only to the voice of God.” First of all, it will be a very lonely life if you determine not to listen to men. Secondly, this attitude is very dangerous.

Five Fingered Ministry

God has provided us with a five-fingered leadership in the church to assist us. These five fingers found in Ephesians 4:11 include:

<input type="checkbox"/> 1.	Apostles
<input type="checkbox"/> 2.	Prophets
<input type="checkbox"/> 3.	Evangelists
<input type="checkbox"/> 4.	Pastors
<input type="checkbox"/> 5.	Teachers

These men of God are capable of confirming and providing counsel in the area that you feel is God’s will for your life. It shouldn’t be felt that they are enemies and will destroy God’s plan if it is exposed to them. Others feel that if the Will of God is voiced then the devil will send his demons to destroy the plan of God. Jesus came to destroy the work of Satan. Satan cannot destroy the plan of God; and neither can man.

Gamaliel was a man that was honored by everyone. In Acts 5 he advised, “Keep your hands off these men. If what they are doing is their own idea, it will fall apart. But if it is of God, you can’t stop it and you don’t want to be fighting with God.”

**Wise and Godly Counsel Provides
Safety on the Road**

The will of God will stand up to the examination of spiritual men of God. They will be able to give you wise and godly counsel. We can go to men of God that have been seasoned in the ministry and are mature.

The Wise Man said, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." (Proverbs 11:14)

"Private revelation must stand the test of public examination."

"Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." (Proverbs 15:22)

"For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety." (Proverbs 24:6)

Hearing the Voice of God

- Another way that we can hear the voice of God concerning His Will is through the "still small voice." Elijah stood upon the mountain and waited for the Lord to pass by. The wind came and broke the rocks but God was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake.

After the earthquake there was a fire, but God was not in the fire. Finally, after the fire there was the "still small voice." (1 Kings 19:11-12)

We need a close relationship to the Lord that will allow us to hear and know His voice. Paul came "declaring the testimony of God." (1 Corinthians 2:1) Paul knew this because he determined "not to know anything...save Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2) He later mentioned that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit..." (1 Cor. 2:9-10)

- The Holy Spirit will "guide us." (John 16:13) The Lord is compared to a Shepherd in John 10 and we are His sheep.

"...The sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out...he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." (John 10:3-5)

When God speaks to us with a still small voice; we can hear it, and we will have a deep assurance in our heart that God has spoken.

Gifts of the Spirit

The Will of God can be confirmed to us through the Gifts of the Spirit. The revelation gifts that reveal something are especially helpful.

Desire

Another way to confirm the Will of God is whether or not we have a desire in our heart to do what we feel God is telling us.

“Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” (Psalm 37:4)

“What you enjoy doing most is usually the will of God for your life.”

God gives us the desires of our heart because He puts the desire there in the first place. However, desire alone, is not a safe way to determine the Will of God.

Clearance From Road Control

Dr. Hamon mentions “the witness, clearance, or restraint of the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 16:6 Paul was “forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia.” In Acts 16:7 “the Spirit suffered them not.” Paul also testified “the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city.” (Acts 20:23) Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:40, “...I think also that I have the Spirit of God.”

We should never ignore the prompting of the Holy Ghost, because it will dull our spiritual senses. It can also change the green light into a red light.

A missionary traveling back to his home in the night passed through a city. He was traveling with two nationals. Anxious to see their families they continued on toward their home. Soon armed robbers ambushed them. The vehicle was shot many times with a gun and the missionary and national preachers barely escaped with their lives. Later each one testified that they had thought that they should not go on, but did not tell each other. It is better to listen than to regret it later.

Did You Pass the Test?

When you pass the majority of these tests, you have a green light and can proceed on to the next light.

God's Way

"God's Delays Are Not God's Denials."

You have passed through the first two traffic lights and have now come to the third light. You may have the mind of God but will need

to wait on the correct timing.

Confusion usually indicates that the timing is not correct. The Will of God normally falls into place at the appropriate time.

"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Walking and Driving in the Will of God

God has a way that He wants us to walk in order to fulfill His will. "...This is the way, walk ye in it..." (Isaiah 30:21)

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way." (Psalm 37:23)

God's ways are not our ways. Therefore we must wait on Him to reveal the correct timing, direction, and the manner in which we will accomplish the will of God.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." (Isaiah 55:8)

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." (Jeremiah 29:11)

The Light is Getting Ready to Change

Once you have a green light at each of the three traffic lights you should move quickly. You must obey the light when it is green, knowing that it can change colors at any moment. You need to act WHEN God wants you to act.

"...Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you..." (John 12:35)

"To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge;
To find the will of God is the greatest discovery;
To do the will of God is the greatest achievement."

Anonymous

"Being Out of the Will of God Stinks"

Jonah's Testimony

There is such peace being in the perfect will of God. However, when we run from the call and will of God it is a different story. God sent Jonah to preach to the city of Ninevah. Instead of passing through the traffic lights on the road to the will of God, Jonah changed roads all together and started running from it. Jonah's failure was not delighting himself in the Lord. Instead of running to God; he was running away from God. This took Jonah down.

- ⇒ **Down to Joppa. (Jonah 1:3)**
- ⇒ **Down into the Ship. (Jonah 1:5)**
- ⇒ **Down into the Sea. (Jonah 1:15)**
- ⇒ **Down into the belly of the Big Fish. (Jonah 1:17)**

It was in the belly of the big fish that Jonah started praying for the will of God to be done. God can put us into situations where we will become delighted to do the will of God. We need to make sure that our heart is right with God and that it is ready to do the Lord's will. This means that we must first surrender our own will and bring it under subjection to His will.

Don't Give Up; Things Could Get Worse

An article entitled, Resignation Fever, by Oliver Price appeared in The Parson Page in April 1982. This article mentioned an interesting story about a pastor who was experiencing criticism from some people in his church. (This story has been adapted for use in this lesson.)

*"Stand strong in God...
For after winter, summer comes; (i.e. after the
rains, the sun comes) after night, the day
returns; and after the storm, calm is restored."
(Thomas a'Kempis)*

The pastor wrote, "Two deacons used to meet me after church every Sunday and mercilessly lecture me." This pastor went home discouraged each week.

"Why don't you leave the church?" his wife suggested.

"Well," the pastor replied "there was one deacon who made me miserable in my last church I served. Now there are two who attack me here. I'm afraid if I run from them there will be four in the next place."

Problems in the ministry or in your personal life do not necessarily mean that you are out of the will of God. We can minister where God has placed us with the assurance that we are doing what God has asked us to do.

"Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." (John 2:5)

Study Questions

1. Who makes up the five-fingered leadership? _____

2. Provide Scriptures that prove that we need to receive wise and godly counsel. _____

3. Private revelation must stand which test? _____

4. List some ways that we can determine and confirm God's will for our lives. _____

5. What is the greatest knowledge, discovery, and achievement? _____

6. Jonah's refusal to do the will of God brought him down to four places. What are they?

Additional Notes

Lord, What Do You Want Me to Do?

“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do”
(Acts 9:6).

Knocked down on the road, Paul asked, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” He never stopped asking this question throughout his life and ministry. It is the same question we should ask.

In earnest conversations among believers, the “will of God” is often discussed. In each step of our Christian walk, we want to be confident that we are doing the Lord’s will. Christians have a true longing to please the Lord.

The will of God is not a destination or an end in itself. It is a progressive journey experienced daily throughout a lifetime.





Daily we should ask, “Lord, what is your agenda for today? What is Your plan?”

**“The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps”
(Proverbs 16:9 NASB).**

Paul told his friends and followers, “I will return again unto you, if God will” (Acts 18:21).

James advised, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that” (James 4:14-15).

Dan Southerland in *Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change* gives a working definition of God’s will.

-  Doing the right *thing*
-  In the right *way*
-  For the right *motive*
-  At the right *time*

The writer of Hebrews calls us “pilgrims” on this road called “life.” The Christian life is often referred to as the Christian walk, a journey. As we journey, many times we see only as far ahead as the road will allow. We do not see what is around the next bend, or what is beyond the roadblock. However, we know there is a God leading us who does see. He knows the way because He is “the way” (John 14:6). We must stay on His road

“Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be!
Lead me by Thine own hand,
Choose out the path for me.”
(Horatius Bonar)


and keep going, even when we cannot see far ahead. We must continue walking in the will of God though the view may be short. We persist to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).


“You don’t need to see the way if you stay close to the one that does.”

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

Preparing to Take a Trip


Preparing for any journey requires groundwork. This includes the daily journey in discovering and obeying the will of God.

 Daily present your body a living sacrifice. Visualize placing yourself on the altar of sacrifice surrendering yourself and your will to God (1 Corinthians 15:31, Matthew 10:38-39). Someone has said, “In God’s service, our greatest ability is our availability.”


 Don’t be conformed to this world. The world’s thinking and solution may not apply in spiritual situations. Let your heart be fixed on the Lord (Psalms 57:7). Focus your attention on Him. Get the Lord’s thoughts (Isaiah 55:8).

 Trust the Lord for direction.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

 Do not try to work out His will with your limited understanding. Ask for the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16-3:1).

 Acknowledge Him through prayer, fasting, and reading His Word (Jeremiah 33:3).

 Develop a listening (spiritual) ear to hear the Lord’s voice (John 10:3-8, 1 Kings 19:12, Mark 8:18).

 Wait until the answer comes (Lamentations 3:25-26, Psalms 130:5, Isaiah 40:31).

 God will order and direct your footsteps.

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way” (Psalms 37:23).

 Finally, “whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (John 2:5).

You may be thinking, “That all sounds so simple, yet finding the will of God has been difficult for me.” The longest journey begins with a single step. God reveals His will as we walk with Him

from day to day. We place a lot of emphasis on the journey ahead. This results in worry—needless worry. Concentrate on doing what God has revealed to you. Proceed as far as you can see. When you get to the bend in the road, God will be there. He will let you know all you need to know about the next phase of the journey. Happy traveling!

Study Questions

1. What question(s) did Saul (Paul) ask on the Damascus Road? _____

2. Explain the will of God by relating it to a journey. _____

3. What should we ask on a daily basis? _____

4. What is the working definition of God's will? _____

5. What does the writer of Hebrews call us? _____

6. How can we present our bodies as a living sacrifice? _____

7. Why should we not be conformed to this world? _____

8. Quote Proverbs 3:5-6. _____

9. What kind of mind should we ask the Lord for? _____

Are You Open?

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul”
(Acts 16:14).

*P*aul was single-minded in his determination to do the will of God. He knew that for the Gospel to spread speedily calls for church planting in strategic commercial centers, and among receptive hearts.

Philippi, like other places where Paul started churches, was a major commercial city located on a favorable trade route. Paul often chose such locations to establish churches. The advantages are obvious.

- People come from the villages and surrounding areas to transact business and work in the cities. Once they receive the gospel they take it home. Thus, it quickly spreads.
- The bulk of finance is usually available in the commercial, trade centers. This is strategic for building strong, indigenous, self-supporting churches.
- Paul typically started his evangelistic efforts in the Jewish synagogue. Ten men were required in order to have a synagogue, and it would be more likely to find ten Jews in a city rather than a smaller town.
- Cities are heavily populated allowing for more people to hear the Gospel.

Receptive hearts are necessary for fruitful evangelism. Paul usually spoke first to the Jews, and his venue, as already mentioned would be the synagogue. Here he would find three types of people.

Jews—not usually receptive but there were occasional conversions.

Proselytes—unlikely to convert since they paid dearly to become Jews.

God-fearers—were usually ready for the Gospel. These people were seeking truth. And they would quickly take the message of salvation to other Gentiles.

Is there anything else that Paul would consider in selecting a location to preach the gospel? Yes, and it is the most important. He would seek God’s direction through prayer and fasting.

Paul and his faithful companions moved as the Spirit directed. Let’s join our progressive church planter on his second missionary journey. Hurry to catch up as he moves from town to town strengthening his baby churches. The result: “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (Acts 16:5, *NIV*).

Traveling along they were “kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (Acts 16:6-7).

Why did the Holy Spirit not permit them to preach in these areas? Good question. Ask, but He may not comment.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8).

Perhaps, the timing was not best. Later God did miraculously open the door for all of Asia to hear the message. Have you ever heard that phrase, “strike while the iron is hot”? It could have been that the people, at that particular time in their lives, were not receptive. Paul and the Spirit were on a search for receptive people so that the fires of revival would spread throughout the world.

The real point is this. The Spirit leads and guides us in the direction we need to go.

Open Door

“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it” (Revelation 3:8).

During the night Paul had a vision. A man from Macedonia was pleading, “Come over and help us!” With that Paul “concluded that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:10). Wise conclusion, Paul! Here is where the story gets interesting, a little humorous, and somewhat perplexing. Since the Spirit and the vision had directed things were going to be problem-free and revival heavy. Fishers of men, get the nets ready for the big catch. Wrong! Several obstacles lurked ahead. But, God’s people are willing to overcome obstacles to see Him move in lives, and save souls. God’s people don’t wait for everything to be perfect before they move (just ask the children of Israel as they’re leaving Egypt en route to the Red Sea). God’s men and women of faith forge on molding obstacles into opportunities (consult Joshua and Caleb for their rundown on advancing into a giant hostile land flowing with milk and honey.)

“...A great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me” (1 Corinthians 16:9, *NIV*).

Here’s the short list of the challenges they encountered.

As they entered the city of Philippi they notice an inscription on the arches. It emphatically states that no unrecognized religion is allowed in the city. Time to turn back? No, they kept on walking.

They soon learned that there was no synagogue in the city. That meant ten Jewish men could not be found. The lack of a building has stopped many from starting a church...but not Paul.

They heard that a group of worshippers met outside of the city, by the riverside, and they rushed there on the Sabbath. Perhaps, Paul would finally get to meet the man he saw in the vision crying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." Surprise! They walked right into a women's prayer meeting. The Acts 16 thrills don't stop there. The first European convert was a woman. The first radio program is hosted by a demon possessed girl crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved" (Acts 16:17). There was only one remedy (the wrong one) for tired backs and weary bodies. They had them stripped and flogged. Their cozy accommodations included chains for two in a local jail. The entertainment consisted of a midnight duet by the Paul and Silas Singers. The ovation turned into an earthquake. The jailer runs in, fell down at their feet saying, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" A quick Bible study and an early morning baptism conclude the unexpected events. Well, like they say, "first things first." We need to return to the riverside prayer meeting.

"On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there" (Acts 16:13, *NIV*).

God can move anywhere, and can use anyone. He specializes in moving in, through, and because of prayer. Someone has said that when God wants to do something great, He sets His people to praying. Every major revival has been preceded by, and born in the atmosphere of fervent prayer.

The prospect of preaching to a group of women did not discourage Paul. Jews of his day often prayed, "I thank God that I was not born a Gentile or a woman." Rabbis would say, "It is better that the words of the Law be burned than be delivered to a woman!" Paul knew better.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, *NIV*).

Open Heart

"The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14, *NIV*).

Lydia was a business woman who sold expensive purple cloth used by royalty. She did not allow her stature in life, or her business efforts to stop her from worshipping God. She was sincere and had a seeking heart.

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Open Ears

"One of those listening was a woman named Lydia" (Acts 16:14, *NIV*).

This statement is repeated seven times in two chapters in the Book of Revelation.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 2:11).

God has a message for the church today if only we open our ears. Find a place where you can attentively listen to God’s Word. Don’t be discouraged by the local surroundings. It is possible to hear from God under the open skies. Lydia did.

Open Mouth

She immediately shared the good news with her household. She didn’t keep in hidden. Her entire household was baptized.

Visualize Lydia responding like the Samaritan lady.

“The woman left...and went back...and told everyone, "Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did! Can this be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him” (John 4:28-30, *NLT*).

Open Hands

“If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us” (Acts 16:15, *NIV*).

Lydia immediately looked for ways that she could be of help to the kingdom of God. She was willing to open her home and resources to the work of God.

This is often the response of those converted.

Paul himself asked, “Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus...And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:5-6).

Open Church

Because the men of God were obedient to the Spirit’s leading, and Lydia’s heart was open to receiving truth, a church at Philippi was born. Perhaps, it started right in Lydia’s home. We do know that it was established, received the Book of Philipians, and was a sacrificial church.

Paul followed a strategy first outlined by Jesus years before.

Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:37-38, *NIV*).

In Matthew 10 Jesus continues by telling us how to reach a big harvest.

He has given us power to preach, heal, and deliver. He admonished the early disciples that they should not take anything for their journey. This sounded like music to Timothy and Silas. It is tough carrying luggage hundreds of miles. When they entered a town they were to search for a worthy person—someone that had their heart open to truth, and would offer hospitality. They were to stay in their host's home until they left the town. They would leave behind their blessing and a church. We are all open to that.

Study Questions

1. In which way was Paul single-minded? _____

2. List three (3) advantages of establishing churches in cities.
 - 1) _____

 - 2) _____

 - 3) _____

3. What were the three (3) types of people Paul usually spoke to? _____

4. Who were the God-fearers? _____

5. Some assume that doing the will of God guarantees things will be easy and trouble free. What were some of the challenges Paul encountered in fulfilling his vision at Philippi? _____

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

The Journey of the Spirit in Acts

“They...went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

The Book of Acts, in its entirety, is the unfolding of a multiple-missionary journey. Destination: the ends of the earth. Nothing short of accomplishment was sufficient. A pivotal problem encountered today is getting the church to do the same. We need to go back to the beginning of the journey; in the Book of Acts.

The primary purpose, plan, principle, or program, pertaining to power to reach the world is prefaced upon Acts 1:8. The rest of Acts portrays progress. Acts 1:8 is not only a command. It is a promise! The term “power” is used twenty-nine times in Luke-Acts, with most references clearly associated with doing miraculous or supernatural acts. It is derived from *dynamis* which means “to be able” or “to have strength.” Fernando said, “The heart of the power of Pentecost in Acts is power for ministry” (1998, 94). It enables, empowers, and equips us to serve. This Pentecostal power can still be experienced. The church is crippled without it.

The Spirit is the driving, dynamic, directive force behind every missionary journey: Philip’s, Peter’s, Paul’s, and all who follow after them. They, like us, received their missionary manifesto from Acts 1:8. Henry Martyn said, “The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to Him the more intensely missionary we must become” (Gangel, 1998, 22). The Holy Spirit is the key to the entire missionary activity: at work in the call, sending, and sustaining of missionaries.

Some writers divide the Spirit’s journey throughout Acts into six parts. Each traces the expansion of the church into new areas and ends with a verse highlighting how successful the journey was. This approach is represented in the following table:

Acts 1 – 6:7	The Journey Begins	Acts 6:7
Acts 6:8 – 9:31	Philip’s Journey	Acts 9:31
Acts 10:25 – 12:24	Peter’s Journey	Acts 12:24
Acts 12:25 – 16:5	Paul’s First Journey	Acts 16:5
Acts 16:6 – 19:20	Paul’s Second Journey	Acts 19:20
Acts 19:21 – 28:31	Paul’s Third Journey	Acts 28:31

Amazingly, almost all the early disciples were available to be appointed, armed, and anointed by the Holy Spirit to actively, aggressively, and ambitiously advance the gospel. With the Spirit’s help, they accomplished their mission. The same power and potential is accessible today. Disciples were first called “Christians” at Antioch. From a small band of church leaders, the Spirit asked for the best they had to offer, and Barnabas and Saul stepped forth to take up the missionary mantle; clothed in the Spirit.

Available: Paul's journey in missions started long before Acts 13. It began with a question, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6, *NKJV*). He later explained his vision was to "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me....I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:18-19).

Appointed: "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2, *ESV*). Paul operated in line with the Spirit's call/appointment, and ongoing direction, which is always in line with the over-arching principle "to the ends of the earth."

Armed: They received power from above, were equipped for spiritual warfare, and operated in the gifts of the Spirit; the power tools of the apostolic church. They were privileged with a perpetual, powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and ministries. The Spirit empowered them for effective service in God's kingdom. "The power promised at Pentecost is still the equipment and enduement of the militant church" (Simpson 1996, 95). The disciples took Jesus at His Word and marched triumphantly throughout the known world. Others testified, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6, *NKJV*).

Anointed: "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay...until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The anointing Jesus applied to Himself in Luke 4:18 was transferred to the early church, and now to us. The Spirit enables the church to fulfill its global mandate as anointed witnesses. "My witnesses" is a recurring theme throughout Acts with the words "witness" or "witnesses" occurring thirty-nine times. The anointing gave them the right words to testify, preach, and prophesy. "...When the Spirit comes on you; you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). This expresses our own inadequacies. We are ineffective, left to our own abilities and power. God never deserts us to our own resources. The Spirit's power always precedes and accompanies extensive evangelism.

Active: The Acts-missionaries were tactical and deliberate. They were men and women of action. Acts shows what the evangelistic, missions-minded church should be like, not only in the first century, but every century. They were not merely involved in activity. They did not—as the cliché suggests—just go around in circles. They went in ever-widening circles. "The direction was of primary importance: Beginning from where you are at this moment, take the message of Christ outward, like ripples caused by a pebble thrown into a pond, not stopping at just your city or state but moving on beyond regional influence to the very 'ends' of the earth. In other words, reach it *all*" (Barton, 1999, 10). A common problem missionaries create is placing immediate emphasis on reaching all. They rationalize that since Jesus is coming soon, the harvest is now ready, and the night is coming that no man can work, that churches need to be started sporadically. They rush feverishly around nations chasing leads and establishing weak

links. A deliberate strategy of building strong indigenous churches in key locations is needed. Serving as Jerusalem or the mother church, they can then branch off into daughter works and preaching points. Foundation is important to success. Paul reached prominent centers with the gospel, appointed leaders, and visited occasionally to strengthen the works (Acts 15:41). Paul selected such locations on major trade routes and in populous areas so the church would continue to multiply. Another calamity in church planting—which is a very effective evangelistic method—is to stay too long or not long enough. Either is equally detrimental to establishing growing churches.

Evangelism is the priority that dominates the Book of Acts. It sets the pattern or pace of how the church should spread the gospel until Jesus returns. The Spirit was also active in every step and aspect of ministry. Each conversion was a result of the Spirit's drawing.

Here's a short list of the activities of the Holy Spirit in Paul's journeys:

Separates	Acts 13: 2
Confirms the call	Acts 13. See Acts 9:15
Sends	Acts 13:4
Supplies boldness	Acts 4:9-13, 31; 13:9-11
Defeats Satan	Acts 13:9
Directs in decision making	Acts 15:28
Forbids; provides spiritual roadblocks	Acts 16:7
Prohibits	Acts 16:7
Selects Overseers	Acts 20:28
Fills	Acts 13:52
Unfolds Vision	Acts 18:9-10
Enables one to do extraordinary miracles	Acts 19:11-12
Baptizes	Acts 19:1-6
Compels, warns, prepares	Acts 20:22-23; 21:4, 11
Speaks truth	Acts 28:25

Aggressive: It is shocking that the contemporary church—at times—is so passive, reactive, tolerant, and recluse. That is a far cry from the militant, strategic, conquering, outgoing, proactive group that traversed the pages of the Book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is a spiritual travel agent. He maps out our itinerary, and selects the best places and people for us to meet. He knows what's best, prepares the way, and sees the big picture (Bickel and Jantz 2004, 111).

Advancing: The essential motivation of every encounter in Acts was “to the ends of the earth.” The watchword for every step was “farther on” (Simpson 1996, 95). There was, and is, always a region beyond (2 Corinthians 10:16). This author is constantly telling Bible school students and ministers “Ghana and beyond.” “Everywhere Paul found himself, no matter how long he remained, was merely a step to somewhere else....He was a man compelled to reach out to the

lost, and he could not rest from that burden for long” (MacArthur 1996, 79). Even at Rome he was making plans to journey on.

Ambitious: They had one paramount aspiration; “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9). The challenge of the church today is to develop congregations with a global-mentality modeled by the church at Antioch. Such churches are not limited or restricted to North America, but should be from everywhere to everywhere.

Accomplished: Acts traces the progress of the advancing Church along the road from Jerusalem, via Antioch, all the way to the heart of the empire—Rome. At every curb in that road, at every evangelistic initiative, the Spirit served as the Director, and victories were won. How? Paul, “witnessed by works which were empowered by the Spirit and by words which were inspired by the Spirit” (Stronstad 1998, 81). The Word and power go hand-in-hand in evangelism. Ministers declare the knowledge of God and demonstrate the power of God. Balance is needed. Here is an example—one of many—from Paul’s journeys: “Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord” (Acts 13:11-12). “The Spirit in Luke-Acts is a power enabling believers to see things they would otherwise not see, speak words they would otherwise be unable to speak, and perform mighty deeds that would otherwise be beyond their abilities” (Michaels 1988, 560). The work Jesus began is carried on through his disciples: “...Jesus of Nazareth...mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke 24:19, KJV). Paul summarized his missionary journeys with these words: “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written, ‘Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand’” (Romans 15:18-21, ESV).

T. J. Bach once said, “The Holy Spirit longs to reveal to you the deeper things of God. He longs to love through you. He longs to work through you. Through the blessed Holy Spirit you may have: strength for every duty, wisdom for every problem, comfort in every sorrow, joy in overflowing service” (Gangel 1998, 22).

Study Questions

1. Describe Paul’s vision. _____

-
-
-
2. Describe your vision. _____
-
-
-
3. Christians were a small group of followers. From this group what did the Holy Spirit ask?
-
-
-
4. What do the six parts of the Spirit's journey trace for us? _____
-
-
-
5. How were the Acts missionaries armed or equipped? _____
-
-
-
6. What word represents a recurring theme throughout Acts? _____
-
7. What does the anointing do for us? _____
-
-
8. What was the purpose of the Acts missionaries being equipped? _____
-
-
9. What is a common problem missionaries create in church planting? _____
-
-
10. Explain what is meant when one suggests that the church expanded in ever-widening circles. _____
-
-
-
11. What is the Spirit's over-arching principle or destination in the Book of Acts? _____

12. Outline the missions or evangelism strategy used by Paul. _____

13. What priority dominates the Book of Acts? _____

14. List ten activities of the Holy Spirit in Acts.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____
- 9) _____
- 10) _____

15. Explain what is meant by the church being aggressive rather than passive. _____

16. How does the Spirit act as a supernatural travel agent? _____

17. What was the paramount ambition of the Acts missionaries? _____

18. Outline how the Word and power go hand-in-hand. _____

19. According to J. R. Michaels, what does the Spirit enable us to do? _____

Stronstad, Roger. 1998. *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology*. Springfield, Missouri: Global University.

[illegible]

Seeds of Eternity in the Hearts of Men

“But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose”
(Acts 26:16).

“I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision”
(Acts 26:19).

Who am I?

Have you ever wondered, “Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose? Does God have a plan for me?” I’m sure everyone has asked one or all of these questions at one point in life.

The Bible clearly answers the question, “Who am I?”

I am...
... A flower quickly fading,
Here today and gone tomorrow,
A wave tossed in the ocean,
A vapor in the wind
(Job 14:1-3; *Casting Crowns* lyrics).
Like the morning fog,
I’m here a little while, and then gone (James 4:14)
I am a breath of air,
A fleeting shadow (Psalm 144:4)
I am a traveler passing through (Hebrews 11:13; Psalm 39:12)
I am a man of numbered days.

"Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be.
Remind me that my days are numbered,
And that my life is fleeing away.
My life is no longer than the width of my hand.
An entire lifetime is just a moment to you;
Human existence is but a breath"
“We are merely moving shadows,
And all our busy rushing ends in nothing.
We heap up wealth for someone else to spend” (Psalm 39:4-6, *NLT*).

Why am I here?

The book of Acts gives a glimpse of our mission (Acts 1:8); vision (Acts 26:19); and purpose (Acts 26:16).

“Mission” is a general, universal declaration of purpose. We often call it the great commission or co-mission. Everyone has a role to play in accomplishing the mission. The reason why we were born; what God calls us to accomplish is termed “purpose.” “Vision” is the faith needed to bring our purpose to pass. Our vision is precise and has definable restrictions. All of these come from the heart and plan of God. He has prepared us for the work He wants us to accomplish. “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10, *NIV*).

Does God have a plan for me?

God has big plans for each of us. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11, *NIV*).

“The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought and planned, so shall it come to pass, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand” (Isaiah 14:24, *AMP*).

God places in our heart what He expects us to do for Him and His kingdom. “I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:12, *NIV*).

What will you do with your split second in eternity?

Our Bible school and Headquarters’ facility in the Ivory Coast was built by one couple that requested that the words on the dedication plaque be limited to, “A man and woman blessed of God, passed by here.” We have been blessed to be a blessing. We are pilgrims passing through this life and need to leave our mark.

Winston Churchill once commented, “There comes a special moment in everyone’s life, a moment for which that person was born. When he seizes it, it is his finest hour.”

Bill Bright said, “None of us has a long time here on planet earth. It’s our split second in eternity when we have an opportunity to invest our lives to help fulfill what our Lord came into this world to do.”

Time on earth is short. What will you do with your “split second in eternity”?

His ministry began in 1952 on the UCLA campus with thirty people responding to the gospel message. By the time of his death in 2003, more than 2.5 billion people had received his pamphlet, “The Four Spiritual Laws.”

Ferdinand Foch said, “The most powerful weapon on earth is the human soul on fire.” What a tragedy to leave this life without a flicker of a legacy, without a flame of a witness.

What has God planted in your heart?

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He also has planted eternity in men's hearts and minds [a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy], yet so that men cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11, *AMP*).

God plants a piece of eternity—His eternal purpose—in each human heart.

1. It is out of this world.
2. It is a purpose or a call that comes from outside this world. Every day it can be heard.
3. It is beyond our human, natural ability. It takes God's help to accomplish.
4. It is eternal. It never dies.
5. It is after the heart of God. It is from the heart of God to the heart of man. Deep calls to deep!
6. It grows through prayer and fasting.
7. It moves from the seen to the unseen.
8. It is a seed. It grows through obedience.
9. It is the portion that will be fulfilled in our generation.
10. It is in your heart, but it is also in His heart too.

What is the Father's business for you?

Jesus said, “I must be about my Father's business” (Luke 2:49). He understood His mission—the reason for being on earth. He came to...

1. Destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8).
2. Seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).
3. Build His church (Matthew 16:18).
4. Bear witness of the truth (John 18:37).
5. Provide abundant life (John 10:10).

Thousands of years later we continue to do the Father's business. The mission has been passed from generation to generation.

What legacy will you leave for others?

Dr. Myles Monroe in *The Principles and Power of Vision* explains the generational nature of vision. He said, “You were born to do something in life that leaves nutrients for the seed of the next generation to take root in and grow.” Monroe believes that life has four seasons.

1. The first season is birth. During this time we depend totally on others for survival. This is a season of dependence.
2. The second season is independence. Here we capture what we were born to do, our purpose in life, and start gathering the resources to accomplish it.

3. The third season is interdependence. We share our dreams and visions with other people. We pass the vision on to the next generation.
4. The fourth season is death. Here we provide the nourishment for the next generation.

“People should be able to flourish on the fruit of the vision you leave behind on earth...You should live so effectively that...your life will be in the hearts and memories of those who could never forget you or what you did...If you live properly, history will not be able to ignore that you lived.” (Myles Monroe)

What are you doing to pass the truth to the next generation?

As Paul completed the race, and neared the end of life, he was able to pass the mission to his son, Timothy.

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

Timothy was encouraged to pass the mission to the next generation.

“And the [instructions] which you have heard from me along with many witnesses, transmit and entrust [as a deposit] to reliable and faithful men who will be competent and qualified to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2, AMP).

Notice the progression in the verse above.

1. “The [instructions] which you have heard from me”—Paul passes this to Timothy (first generation to second generation).
2. “Entrust [as a deposit] to reliable and faithful men”—Timothy is to pass the truth to the next generation of leaders (second generation to the third).
3. “Who will be competent and qualified to teach others also”—third generation to the fourth, and so on.

What a tremendous privilege to be here for a split second in eternity, and to know that God has planted seeds of eternity in our hearts. Our portion of the mission is to be fulfilled in our generation. Like Esther, we have been brought into the kingdom for such a time as this (Esther 4:14). Like the sons of Issachar, we have an understanding of the times and now what we ought to do (1 Chronicles 12:32). Let’s be about our Father’s business!

Study Questions

1. What are the differences between mission, vision, and purpose? _____

2. Quote one Scripture that shows God has a big plan for us. _____

3. Prove, using Bible verses, that a person’s time on earth is short. _____

4. Describe what is referred to by “planted eternity in our hearts.” _____

5. According to this lesson, list three things Jesus came to do. _____

6. Explain what is meant by the generational nature of vision. _____

7. What are the four (4) seasons of life explained by Myles Monroe?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

8. How does the fruit of one's vision allow for others to flourish? _____

9. According to 2 Timothy 2:2 show how the truth can impact at least four generations.

Additional Notes