

N U R T U R E  
**F A I T H**  
with  
Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

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Plan B

**READ:** Acts 16:7, 8 (Common English Bible)

*“When they approached the province of Mysia, they tried to enter the province of Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus wouldn’t let them. Passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas instead.”*

**MEDITATE:**

From the Riverside Church pulpit of New York City, Harry Emerson Fosdick began a sermon, “Even in ordinary times few persons have a chance to live their lives on the basis of their first choice.”<sup>1</sup> The sermon was preached in 1944 and remains as timely today as it was then. A distinguished preacher, Fosdick’s sermons reached a broader audience than the Riverside Church. Once identified as one of America’s towering religious leaders, pastors from around the nation would travel to New York City to be coached toward more effective preaching in their own pulpits. Quite simply, Fosdick would teach that effective preaching met the pressings needs of the person in the pew. That morning in 1944, Fosdick did exactly that in grand fashion. His starting point was a common human condition – having to do the best we can with our second and third choices in life.

Fosdick found a natural place to begin in the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Acts. The apostle Paul, along with his traveling companions, most urgently desired to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Bithynia, “but the Spirit of Jesus wouldn’t let them.” Declaring the Gospel of Christ from a pulpit square in the middle of Bithynia was Paul’s first choice. Denied his first choice, Paul traveled to Troas instead. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There was a man of Macedonia standing before Paul, urging Paul, “Come over to Macedonia and help us! (Acts 16:9)” Paul had not planned that! Paul had not intended to go to Europe. It would be a stretch to say that Europe was Paul’s second choice – so focused he was on Bithynia. Paul had not considered a second choice. But a second choice is what Europe became.

Well, wanting Bithynia and getting Troas is a familiar experience, declared Fosdick. Each of us set our sights on our own Bithynia and there is nothing wrong with that! Perhaps it is pursuing an education at a particular college, aspiring to a particular career, or entering a deeply meaningful and fulfilling relationship with another person. Casting our sights on something purposeful demonstrates hopefulness and energy and joy in living. But for many of us, our expectations are disappointed. Our eyes are directed toward Bithynia and we find ourselves in Troas.

Paul was not permitted to enter Bithynia, to have his first choice in life and in ministry. And his response to receiving second best is instructive to us. Paul did not slump in defeat and disappointment. Paul was not immobilized by despair. A man from Macedonia came to Paul in a dream and urged him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” And when Paul received this vision, he went immediately to Macedonia, concluding that this is God’s call and claim upon him. In this brief and simple act of obedience, Paul changed to course of the Christian faith! That is because Paul’s ministry in Macedonia set in motion particular opportunities that resulted in nearly two-thirds of our New Testament. Paul believed that if God led him to Troas instead of Bithynia, there must be something in Troas worth discovering.

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<sup>1</sup> Halford R. Ryan, *“Handling Life’s Second-Bests”* **Harry Emerson Fosdick: Persuasive Preacher** (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 117.

