

# Disappointment With God

## Acts 16 1-8

The division had occurred. The two brothers in Christ had gone their separate ways. Barnabus reached out to John Mark and together they traveled to the island of Cyprus, the home country of Barnabus. Paul and Silas traveled eastward over land to the regions of Syria and Cilicia, “*strengthening the Churches*” (15:41).

So from this point on in the book of Acts, we don’t hear from Barnabus or John Mark again. It’s not that they went against God’s will, and their ministry became insignificant; it’s simply a case of the information about the travels of the Apostle Paul now becoming first hand to Luke (the writer of the book of Acts), as he soon joins the missionary team.

We see this happening in chapter 16, between verses 8 and 10, with a major change in pronouns. Prior to verse 9, as Luke wrote about the ministry team he writes about them in the third-person plural, “**THEY**” – in other words, he was speaking of someone else. Then, beginning in verse 10 he changes and begins using the first-person plural, “**WE**” and “**US**”. Luke was now writing about the movement of the team he himself was a part of.

But let’s not get too far ahead of ourselves. We need to back up to the beginning of chapter 16, where within the first couple of verses there is another individual joining the Mission Team – a young man by the name of Timothy.

Ac 16

<sup>1</sup> *Then he (the Apostle Paul, along with his new traveling companion, Silas)... 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.* <sup>2</sup> *He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.*

<sup>3</sup> *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.*

<sup>4</sup> *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.* <sup>5</sup> *So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.*

Derbe and Lystra are two of the cities they had ministered to in the first missionary journey. During the earlier mission trip, with Barnabus at his side Paul had gone to Derbe after being left for dead in Lystra where the people had stoned him, “*and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead (Acts 14:19-20).*”

If you remember, it was in Lystra where the lame man had been healed and everyone thought Barnabus and Paul were the Greek gods: Zeus and Hermes (14:8-18). Then, once they found out they weren't, that's when the Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuaded the multitudes to stone Paul, the main speaker of the two (14:19).

As bad of a reception as Paul received the first time he came to Lystra, it didn't deter him from going back again and ministering to the people of the city. And now, coming back to Lystra, a city immersed in the pagan religions of the Greek and Roman culture, Paul comes in contact with a **young man by the name of Timothy**.

Luke gives us a short biography of Timothy there in verses 1-3. In those verses we find out some particular things about this young man:

- Vs 1 - He was a disciple of the Lord Jesus at this time.
- Vs 1 - His mother who was a Jew also was a Believer
- Vs 1 - His mother, at some time in her earlier life had gone against her Jewish heritage and upbringing and married a pagan Greek
  - From that, we can assume Timothy was raised in a home divided by religious belief
- Vs 2 - Yet he, himself now had a good reputation with other believers in the city of Lystra and in the neighboring city of Iconium

This young man Timothy became a **trusted companion** of the Apostle Paul, as a matter of fact as Paul writes of him we find more about who he is and his impact in the work of ministry and in the life of the Apostle.

- In 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul refers to him as “*my beloved son*”
- In 1 Timothy 1:2 he calls him “*my own son in the faith*”

It's passages like this that have led many to believe that perhaps Timothy had come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ during Paul's First Missionary journey in the area. Perhaps he had the opportunity to lead the young man to Christ personally.

Others, speculating that his natural father had passed away some time prior, simply feel that Paul took him under his wing, "as a son". Whatever the case, by the time Paul makes contact with him here in chapter 14, Timothy is considered a disciple of the Lord, and well thought of by his peers.

Undoubtedly, there had been spiritual growth going on in the young man's life and Paul himself points to the impact Timothy's mother and grandmother had in his young life –

- Writing in 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul writes to Timothy about the *"genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice..."*

According to the passage in 2 Timothy 3, the young man was also very aware of the trials Paul had suffered, possibly even seeing what had happened particularly in Lystra his home city.

- In writing in 2 Timothy 3 Paul states –

2 Timothy 3

*<sup>10</sup> But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup> persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra--what persecutions I endured.*

- Paul shared about the gratefulness of the ministry of Timothy with other Churches like Philippi.

Philippians 2

*<sup>19</sup> But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. <sup>21</sup> For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. <sup>22</sup> But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.*

As I shared earlier, some believe that his Greek father had passed away long ago. But one of the other things we see in Luke's description is that even though his mother and his grandmother were Jewish, for whatever reason Timothy had never been circumcised. It's for this reason that Luke shares with us here in 16:3

*<sup>3</sup> 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*

Some might have **a lot of confusion** about why Paul would have Timothy circumcised – particularly considering the decision of the Jerusalem council. But you need to remember, the Jerusalem Council dealt with the requirement for **Gentiles** to be circumcised. It had nothing to do with Jewish Christians still following the rite of circumcision. Paul does deal with this issue later – particularly in light of the belief by some of the Judaizers who still believed that you have to be circumcised to be a Believer.

But for Timothy, the fact that he was Jewish, and it was known throughout the region that his father was a Greek, there would have been **problems and perhaps even closed doors** to be able to minister the Gospel to the Jews in light of Timothy's situation.

You might ask, how would anyone really know? But, you're thinking with a 21<sup>st</sup> Century mind set. Even as perverse as our culture is in many ways, the privacy or modesty of the general public in our culture is much different than it was in the First Century Roman Empire. They had public bath houses and open latrines, without modesty panels. It wouldn't have taken long before this issue was well known. So, Paul had Timothy circumcised.

You need to understand, Timothy was **already saved**. This had **nothing to do with HIS salvation...** but it had **everything to do with not being a stumbling block** for the message of the Gospel.

So now, with the rite of circumcision being taken care of for Timothy, the Missionary Team moves forward... and so shall we. I think that's enough on that painful subject!

Acts 16

*<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.*

This had to be a time of great rejoicing. Luke doesn't write about any persecution at this time, although there certainly might have been some sort of pushback. But, by and large, they were moving through familiar territory, speaking to friendly crowds and the **Church was being strengthened and continued to grow daily.**

The next portion of this passage has a **bit of peculiarity about it**. It deals with being “**blocked by the Holy Spirit**”. When you honestly commit your way to the Lord, and ask Him to direct your path, have you ever found times **when He actually DOES begin to direct your path...** and in doing so, **puts roadblocks in your way...**

Let’s look how the Apostle Paul handled that situation –

Acts 16

*<sup>6</sup>Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup>After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. <sup>8</sup>So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.*

First of all, Phrygia and Galatia are two major regions in the area we now know as modern day Turkey. As Paul, Silas, Timothy, and the others ministered to the Churches and are being led by the Holy Spirit, there is no doubt Paul had some sort of plan of where and when they would be going. **Undoubtedly he submitted those plans** to the Lord and **fully understood** the words of the writer of Proverbs –

Proverbs 16

*<sup>9</sup>A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.*

Because suddenly, the plans that **he thought were right**, were somehow **blocked**. Somehow the Holy Spirit brought a **blockade against the plans of Paul...** not allowing him to do what apparently **he thought the Lord was calling him to do**.

You might think you have the right plan, and following the mind of God... but then, **BAM**, everything falls apart or there’s some **insurmountable barricade in front of you**.

Have you ever experienced that? In your personal life or in ministry.

I’ve had it happen **multiples** of times, both personally and in ministry. I wish I could tell you that in all of the cases in my life and ministry, I was able to simply sit back and say, “*Okay Lord, if that’s not where You are leading me, speak to my heart and let me hear what Your Spirit says.*” That’s the way we should handle it!!

But no, more often than not, I was like the ***kid in the grocery store***, asking mom for a piece of candy. She denies me and then I spend the rest of the time **kicking and screaming wondering why my mother doesn't love me** enough to give me everything I want.

Have you ever been there? As the kid I mean... not the mom.

But here, understand, it's not that you're **wanting something that is bad for you**, you **feel that the Lord is directing** and **you move that way** and suddenly the door slams shut! **Hard and loud!**

I won't bore you with all of my experiences, but I can tell you that every day I am so glad that the **Lord said "No!"** with a slammed door in a particular situation, and then He sovereignly led me to the **one woman He had chosen for me for life**. The woman, I believe He has chosen for me **since the foundation of the earth**. Oh, for a season I thought the other one was the right one... until through God's **wonderful ways and directions** He actually directed my steps to **met THE right one**.

**On another occasion**, years ago, when we were a young Fellowship, I just knew the Lord was leading us to **purchase or lease a particular spot** here in town for the Church's home.

- I **knew** He had directed me to this **very spot**.
- I **knew** it was His vision that He had given me even on how **the building was going to be laid out, where the auditorium walls would be laid out, the nursery, even the bathrooms**.
- I **knew** beyond a doubt that this was **the place of His favor**.

But, ***suddenly the door closed***. That just **wasn't the place** He had for our Fellowship. But then, through miracle after miracle, He **opened the door for this facility**. And now, when I start complaining about the narrowness of the halls or the smallness of the auditorium, or the lowness of the ceiling, I am reminded **what a miracle it is that we have this at all!**

So, how about you? How do you deal with life when **you think you're doing the Lord's will**, then He says "No"... or closes the door...?

**I believe it all deals with the attitude of our heart  
and our understanding of who God is.**

Phillip Yancey, in his book *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* speaks about the fact that what we see today can't be compared to the majestic overall plan of God's design.

*“No matter how we rationalize, God will sometimes seem unfair from the perspective of a person **trapped in time**. Only at the end of time, after we have attained God's level of viewing, after every evil has been punished or forgiven, every illness healed, and the entire universe restored—**only then will fairness reign...**”*

*“Not until history has run its course will we understand how “all things work together for good.” **Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.**”*

What we all need to see, and what I feel the Apostle Paul found out early in his walk with the Lord and in his ministry; is that whenever God doesn't act **when** and **how** we think He ought to act, it's not because He can't or won't do a particular thing. But rather it's because **He has purposed in His great plan not to do it... or not to do it NOW**. That's difficult for **our finite minds** to wrap around, particularly when it goes against **what we thought ought to happen, where we thought the Lord was leading**.

But that's just the problem... **our minds and particularly our experiences are finite**, while God in His greatness is **infinite, eternal, and omniscient** (all knowing). He knows **the end from the beginning... and all that is between**.

When God chooses to act,

- He does so with **perfect knowledge and with a perfect plan**.
- He does so as He **works out His perfect will throughout all of His creation**.
- And nothing happens or doesn't happen but that He either causes it or allows it for His purposes.

Therefore, I can **rest in HIM** even when things don't go the way my **limited understanding** thinks they should go.

When we don't understand what God is doing,

- We **must still trust** in the **reality that He is God**.
- We **must wait patiently** for **His answer to come...**
- We **must wait** for **His strength to prevail... a**
- And **wait for His Spirit to lead**.

As we wait, He will renew our strength...

We don't know **the beginning from the end**, therefore the one thing we stand on in every situation of life is that **if we are His, whatever** He does and **wherever** He leads it will work out for our **greater benefit** – either here in the world or in the next – whether we understand it all or not.

**William's life** was a mixture of blessings and what appears to be curses. His father was a pastor and his relationship with Christ began at an early age. But as one of only two of seven children birthed by his mother to live past infancy, when he was only 6 he experienced the death of his mother at the birth of his only surviving brother, John. This was only the beginning of a life filled with disappointments and catastrophes.

Although he jumped from school to school in his earlier years, he was an intelligent young man and developed a great love for reading and writing – the writing of poems and hymns being his favorite. While in training to be a lawyer, he would spend his free time at his uncle's home where he fell in love with his first cousin. When his uncle found out, he broke off their relationship due to the closeness of the relations. This plunged young William into a deep, severe depression.

While still a young man, he was offered a well-paying government job, only to have a mental breakdown in the midst of the interview process. Once again he plunged into a **deep depression and was diagnosed with insanity**; even to the point of trying on **three separate occasions to commit suicide**.

Through a strange turn of events, he became a friend of **John Newton**, the former slave trader, who had turned to Christ and was a devoted pastor. It was Newton who wrote the hymn, "Amazing Grace". William himself, through the encouragement of Newton continued in the writing of poetry and hymns.

A short while later he once again had an attack of insanity, imagining not only that he was **eternally condemned to hell**, but believing that God was commanding him to make a sacrifice of his own life.

It was shortly after his recovery from this episode that in the late 1700's, William..., **William Cowper** took pen in hand and wrote these very deep and meaningful words –

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sov'reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.

Are you sometimes disappointed with God and the path you're currently on in life?

We need to stand with the Apostle Paul – who later, by the **guidance of the Holy Spirit**, made that journey into Asia, giving birth to the Churches of Bythnia and Ephesus. It's Paul, who seems to echo the words of Job from the Old Testament as he writes in the book of Romans –

Romans 11

<sup>33</sup> *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!* <sup>34</sup> *For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?* <sup>35</sup> *Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?* <sup>36</sup> *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

And as the writer of Proverbs declares:

Proverbs 3:

<sup>5</sup> *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;* <sup>6</sup> *in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*

*Trust in the LORD!*

Have you surrendered your will to His? Have you given your life to Him in order that He would give you a *New Life* in Christ?

*Trust in the LORD*