



2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Sept 26th - Oct 2nd

Sermon: September 25th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus

September 26

Deuteronomy 29:29

God's Providence in leading us is an amazing and complicated subject and it is also a common topic of conversation and thought. In fact, of all the interactions I've had in my ministry, dialogues about discerning God's will in life's decisions is perhaps the most popular. Christians naturally, and rightly, want to know and discern God's leadership in their decisions. We crave direction and supernatural revelation about our life's choices, but those lightbulb moments don't always come when we desire them. The reality is that the Scripture gives us great insight into many of our situations, but there are still unanswered questions at times.

In yesterday's text, we see an example of God supernaturally leading His disciples away from one area of ministry and to another location. It is important to note that Paul and his companions were not doing anything wrong as they traveled to Asia, but their journey was redirected by God for His greater purposes. What are we to make of this kind of event? Is the lesson simply that we are to wait until God supernaturally communicates to us through a vision to discern our next steps?

The simple answer to the above question is "no"! We don't believe that God always, or even typically, communicates in such a magnificent manner. Instead, we believe that the general method God uses to direct and guide us is His Word as illuminated by His Spirit. God's Word gives us certain principles and promises that inform what we should do, and those precepts form the basis upon which we make specific choices. In this instance, Christ was crystal clear that all His disciples, to include Paul and Silas and Timothy, were to be busy witnessing about Him to all localities and this is exactly what these men were busy doing! Their attempt to enter Asia and preach the Gospel wasn't sinful, it was an act of obedience! This means that the text is not condemning Paul and his counterparts, but it is showing us that God is Sovereign over our steps. While they were busy pursuing an obedient lifestyle, the Lord was busy guiding them to the right place. While it had been revealed to them that they were to be missionaries for Christ, the Lord had a secret plan that He would execute that superintended how they were going to accomplish their purpose.

This is the teaching of Deuteronomy 29:29. In this wonderful verse, we learn that God has revealed things to His people. These revelations come chiefly in His Word. They are the precepts, principles and promises that "belong to us" which means we have them as our possession. They guide our decisions, and they dictate our actions. However, there is plenty more about life that we simply don't know. These things are the hidden plans and purposes of God. While they will be carried out, they will be brought to fruition not by our own discovery and effort but by God's supernatural will and means.

The point that Moses is making is illustrated nicely in our passage from Sunday. The people of God are not responsible for God's hidden will. They aren't accountable to bring it to pass because they have no way of knowing what it is! This is encouraging! Folks, it's not your job to know what situations God is orchestrating or how He may redirect you, it is your job to be faithful in doing what He has called, and it is His job and joy to intervene and direct you to accomplish His secret will. So, what will God have you do? He would have you be obedient to His revealed will in the Word and to trust in Him to Sovereignly intervene when He desires for your efforts to be channeled in a different direction. Obey the Word of God and trust the character and plan of God to guide you to the right places.

September 27

Psalm 37:23-24

My guess is that you were probably left with some questions after yesterday's devotion. Should you take that job promotion or not? Should you move to this city or stay? Should you serve in this capacity in the church or devote your time to other ministries? There are many decisions that we must make that are simply not explicitly laid out for us in the Scripture. Are those "secret" things or "revealed" things? The answer is both!

God has a will for your life that He will bring to pass but His will includes a revelation that He has given to us (the Bible) which we are to cherish and follow. Your responsibility is to love and search that Word for principles and truths that guide your decisions and, as you search and obey the Word, you can trust that the Lord will lead you where He wants you.

Notice in our text for today how this fits together nicely. In this Psalm we learn that the Lord establishes the steps of men when we "delight in His way." His way here is a shorthand method of describing the delight we take in the path of the Lord as directed by His Word. The point is that the Bible gives us many things to consider as we make decisions. There are biblical teachings that should guide every decision we make. Will this step bring me closer to the Lord? Will it allow me to be a faithful husband/wife/father/mother? Will it allow me to worship with my church and serve her? Will this step better leverage the gifts God has given me for His glory and the good of my fellow man? All of these questions are in keeping with biblical teaching and they serve as roadmaps for our collective decision making.

Nevertheless, these questions don't bring us to a specific answer! Should I take job 1 or job 2? Well, there is no chapter and verse for those things but, as we delight in the Word and seek to make wise decisions, we trust that God will direct our steps accordingly! We know that He is able and willing to lead us, even through supernatural means, as we obey Him and desire to be in line with His revealed will.

This is what happened to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. These men truly delighted in the Lord, and they were busy attempting to accomplish what He had commanded! They had taken the revealed Word and applied it to their lifestyle, and, through their obedience, the Lord was faithful to direct their paths.

The point I am making today is that your job is to love the Lord and love His ways. Its not to know everything about everything, its to simply trust in God's goodness and believe that His ways are best. This leads you to search His Word and it inclines His heart to intervene in moments when you need redirection or a signpost. Your job is not to know all things, its to know and love the One who does and to seek His will in every respect. If you are faithful to do those things, He will absolutely lead and guide you to the right place... every time.

September 28

Proverbs 14:12

In a vacuum, all that we have talked about to this point makes sense to the believer. I hope that you agree that the Word of God is to direct our steps and that it is important for us to delight in the ways of the Lord! Those affirmations are very basic and integral to our confession as believers in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, there are times in which the Word of God, and what it teaches, flatly contradicts our sensibilities. What do we do when we disagree with God's leadership or when the Lord begins to lead us in a direction we were not already heading?

In Paul's case, he was ready and passionate in his pursuit of obedience through the continent of Asia. He saw an opportunity and wanted to take it only to be led in the opposite direction by the will of the Lord. He obviously was headed to Asia because he believed it was the right step and in keeping with God's will, but the Lord made it clear to him that this was not the way forward. There was a way that seemed right to Paul... but it wasn't.

Now, to be fair to the text. This is not the only, or even primary application of the passage. The truth is that Proverbs probably has in mind more sinful, carnally minded people. The main truth is that we are hopelessly misguided and careening towards destruction when we make our decisions in the flesh, devoid of biblical reasoning and principles. It seems right to men to pursue all kinds of things that are simply destructive to them.

It may seem right to: have the affair, launder the money, lie on the taxes, pursue that foolish relationship, make decisions based on greed or pursue some kind of perceived material blessing to the detriment of your soul. There are many things that "seem right" to foolish men and this is the word of caution.

Folks, when the Word of God contradicts your opinion or desires, what wins in your own soul? Are you willing to admit that God knows more than you do, and that God's plan is bigger and better than what you aspire to on your own? Do you agree with the Lord that there are things that seem right, but their end is destruction?

We simply don't know what would have taken place if Paul and Silas and Timothy chose to push through God's direction, but we do know that all the good that came from their work amongst the Philippians would not have taken place. God had better things in store for these men than they knew, and it was their job (and ours) to listen and heed His wisdom and direction for their own well-being and the growth of the Kingdom of God globally.

September 29

Philippians 1:3-5

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were redirected by the Lord to the locality known as Philippi. In that town, the Lord was preparing to do marvelous things and we read about several of them in the rest of chapter 16 in the book of Acts. The Lord had planned marvelous conversions, miracles and displays of His redemptive power and the Lord had matchless blessings planned for Paul as he entered that little city. In fact, it has been said that the Philippians proved to be one of Paul's greatest blessings and encouragements in his ministry from that moment forward. The church that God led Paul to begin would be a marvelous encouragement and a necessary resource for the Apostle. In fact, he wrote a book to these dear people and in it he details many glorious truths regarding how dear they were to him and how much their support meant to his ministry.

Over the next four days, I'd like to look at a passage from each of the four chapters of Philippians. Our goal will be to see how God's redirection of Paul led him to a place that blessed his heart and supported him from that moment forward. If Paul had been disobedient or if the Lord had allowed Paul to go in the opposite direction, these blessings would have been missed but, in Paul's obedience, we are allowed to see how God blesses those who are faithful.

Today's text is a basic one as it details for us how Paul thought about the church in Philippi. In verse 5 we read that Paul celebrates these dear folks as "partners" in the Gospel. What does that mean? Well, it means at least two things. First, we see in the book that the Philippians partnered with Paul in their "concern". This concern was doubtlessly shown in a myriad of ways that almost certainly included constant prayer. They loved the man who brought them the Gospel and they dedicated their congregation to his support by lifting him up often. He was someone who was cherished, respected, and prayed for often... what a marvelous blessing!

Second, we see that they partnered with Paul financially (4:15-16). Little did Paul know that the place the Lord was leading him would be a foundational pillar of support for his missionary journeys from that moment forward. God knew that Paul would need money and resources to complete his task and He led him directly to the place that would provide it for him.

Folks, the simple truth is that we often don't fully grasp what God is going to do in directing our steps. I imagine that Paul was confused, he may have been frustrated or discouraged or even angry when God closed one door, but he would find out on the flip side that God had a far greater, more marvelous and blessed task for the Apostle to accomplish. Trust the Lord in the difficult, trying, and confusing moments, you may well see the Lord's grace in your lives in ways that you would never even dream.

September 30

Philippians 2:19

The book of Philippians was written some years after Paul's first journey into the area as recorded in Acts 16. At the time of Paul's writing, he was in prison and, more than likely, awaiting his imminent death. This means that his book is one of heartfelt gratitude towards God for the blessing of the church in Philippi and it is full of weighty and meaningful statements as the Apostle knows that these words may well be his last to his beloved congregation.

The book oozes with gratitude even as it serves to encourage and strengthen a church that the Apostle so obviously loved and appreciated. One of the interesting components of this book is that it contains very little in the way of correction. Instead, it is overwhelmingly positive and upbeat as Paul cheers on his children in the faith and tells them how much they mean to him.

Within this book, we have several indications of God's grace and the Apostle's love as expressed towards his children. We have many passages which demonstrate to us the great joy the church has been to him. One of the wonderful little glimpses into the joy that accompanied Paul's thoughts and relationships in Philippi is found in this verse where the Apostle tells the church that he is sending Timothy to check on them so that Paul may be "cheered by news of you."

Essentially, the Apostle is utilizing his knowledge of the progress of the church in Philippi to cheer him during his time in prison. Stated differently, Paul knew that the quality of life of the Philippians was just what he needed to raise his spirits in difficult times. Years prior, as the Lord redirected Paul from Asia to Philippi, He was sending Paul to a place that would serve as a marvelous encouragement and joy to him for years.

You can imagine Paul's immediate discouragement and even frustration when his plans were disrupted by the Lord. The missionaries set out on a noble task to take the Gospel to a place that desperately needed it only to find that God's will would lead them in a totally different direction. I wonder if Paul didn't quietly ask the Lord why he had wasted this time and what it was that was so important in Philippi as opposed to Asia! I'm sure that Paul did not have this kind of long-term blessing in mind... but God did.

Years later, the Apostle looks at the congregation that arose from his ministry efforts at the end of this redirected journey and expresses thanksgiving and hope that they would encourage him in his time of struggle! My what a marvelous and matchless God we have who can take situations and mold them into wonderful and undeserved blessings.

Are there situations in your life that are frustrating to you today? Perhaps you have your heart set on one direction only to see that the Lord has shut a door and guided you somewhere else. If so, take heart in Paul's example. The Lord has marvelous blessings for His children but they sometimes come after longer than usual journeys and unanticipated twists and turns.

October 1

Philippians 3:17-21

We are covering a familiar verse today, but I want to do so in a rather unorthodox manner. I realize that this passage says some glorious things about eternal joy and the hope we have in the Gospel but that is not my focus for the day. Instead, I want to focus on two words, one a noun and one a pronoun, that express something about the joy that Paul gained from his obedience to go to Philippi when instructed to do so by the Lord.

First, I want you to notice how Paul addresses the congregants in Philippi. If you look at verse 17, you will see that it begins with this word “brothers”. The term denotes a familial connection and, when used in the Scripture, speaks of those who are brothers in Christ. Paul was speaking to those who were apart of the family of God with him and, therefore, the blessings that the rest of the passage promises are available to them by virtue of their union with Christ.

What does this have to do with the theme of our devotions? The answer is that the fruit of Paul’s labor, by God’s grace and through His Spirit, was the winning of many men and women who were estranged from him and from Christ to adoption in Christ Jesus. Years ago, Paul followed the Lord’s instruction to minister to the Philippians and now the Apostle had brothers as the fruit of his labors. Paul and Silas and Timothy were God’s instrument to change the eternal destiny of a group of folks they would have never met if it weren’t for God’s intervention and direction.

Second, notice the term “we” in verse 20. Now, the Philippians were united with Paul in their earnest expectation of the appearance of King Jesus. Paul was used by God to bring people into the family of the Lord and the result of that was a multiplication of people who shared the Apostle’s convictions and became a source of hope and comfort.

Whereas Paul walked into the town of Philippi with just a few brothers, he walked out with hoards of those who were ready and willing to support him in the future. These folks would have never met Paul and, theoretically, never met Christ if it were not for the change of plans in Acts 16. The effect of Paul’s ministry was a uniting of individuals into a cohesive group for their mutual edification, accountability, and eager expectation. What the Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:10 was true of those in Philippi as well saying “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Once, the brothers in Philippi were not brothers (at least not in Christ) but now they were God’s people because they had received mercy and that mercy came through Christ in a messenger who never would have crossed into the city limits if it were not for God. Indeed, how beautiful were the feet that brought good news and how marvelous was the God who directed the feet to the place where the news needed to be brought!

October 2

Philippians 4:10

All of us love to belong. It used to amaze me to see this phenomenon so clearly play out in student ministry. In those days, I would often hear students talk about being “original” or “not fitting” into the styles or cultural fads of the day. What was always ironic about those statements was not so much that they didn’t like the clothes or music that was “popular” what was amazing was that they inevitably formed groups of people who agreed with them... essentially, they were re-creating the kind of groups they stated they didn’t want! Instead of being a “loner” they simply united with others who said they didn’t want to conform. They conformed with the non-conformers which is a method of conforming nonetheless!

The point I am making is that this is the natural and typical response of all people. We have been created to live in community and we crave others’ presence and attention. We want to be loved, needed, and cared for and this is a good thing. In fact, one of the ways that we so clearly see the image of God imprinted upon man is in our community. Think about this, our Triune God (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) live in perfect and eternal communion with one another. Our One God is the ultimate, true example of community. Likewise, when God stamped His image on us, He did so, in part, by creating us to live with others and giving us desires to be loved by those we are around.

There are few things in life more traumatic than a person who has never experienced love. The lack of concern can cripple a person, but the presence of concern can be a balm that is more powerful and healing than most anything else on the planet. Furthermore, God in His grace has provided for us in this manner by demonstrating His love for us in Christ, communing with us through His indwelling Spirit and providing for us a community of faith that exists, in part, to love and encourage us. Show me a person who doesn’t grasp this, and I will show you a person who is struggling!

The point of today’s devotion is to show you that one of the ways God provided for Paul in this need of his (and all of ours) was through the Philippians. They were one of the groups who showed concern for Paul. They demonstrated this through financial support, prayer and genuine affection for a brother who was also a leader and mentor, and it was in their concern that Paul rejoiced.

Think of the picture of the Apostle wasting away in a prison cell but rejoicing because his people (the church in Philippi amongst others) were still demonstrating concern for him. Think about the encouragement and joy it gave Paul to think about those who were with him and even converted during his ministry caring for him, thinking about him and praying for him. God used this little congregation as a great means of grace in Paul’s life and it was a means of grace that would never have been available to him if he did not follow the Lord’s leadership and instruction in abandoning his mission and submitting to God’s plan.