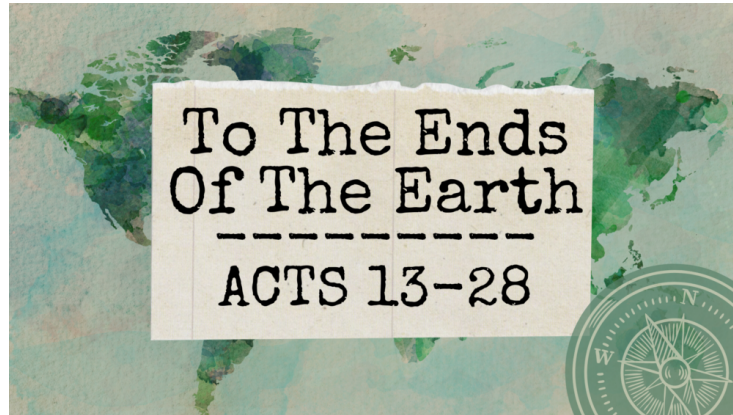


Finding God's Will



Acts 16:1-15

Bro Kory Cunningham

When I am on a plane seated beside someone, the conversation usually gets around to what do you do? I say I am a pastor. Usually that goes one of two ways. Either the person grabs for headphones really quickly to tune me out or they lean in for a long overdue counseling session. The last time I was on a plane it was the latter. When I told him I was a pastor, he responded, "Oh really! I have some questions." For the next hour and fifteen minutes we discussed this guy's life. His big question kept coming up. "How do I know if I am doing God's will?" This guy was about 45 and his work required him to travel all the time. He was always on a plane going to some city. He was in the financial industry and he was going to make deals and cut checks. He seemed to be doing very well. From the stories he told me I could assume he had made a lot of money. He had a good living and a good career. But he kept going back to his big question. "How do I know I am doing God's will? What if I am just working to work? What if I reach 80 and look back at my life and say, I think I missed it. I don't know if I am doing what the Lord intended for me to do." For about an hour, we dug into his life to try to find God's will for his life.

Perhaps some of you have the same question. How do I know God's will for my life? Maybe you are a middle schooler and just starting to ask that question. Maybe you are in high school and thinking about what college to attend. Maybe you are in college and are thinking about what major to choose or what career to pursue. Maybe you are out of college and in your first job wondering if you should stay or leave for other employment. Should I leave Mom and Dad and travel somewhere. Maybe you are 40 and have been in your career for 20 years. You have come to the place where you ask yourself if you want the next 20 years to look the same. Maybe you think the Lord may have something else for you. Maybe you are 60. Maybe you are 80. Looking back, you ask if this is what you want to do for the rest of your life and you wonder if you have missed something. Is this how I want to end my life? Have I lived in the right place? Should I have moved somewhere? Have I, somehow, missed the will of God?

I think that all of us as Christians have asked that question, am I following God's will, at some point in our lives. As believers, we all want to follow God's will. None of us would say *I don't care. Whatever...I am going to do whatever I want to do, I don't care about God's will.* All of us believers want to do God's will. If God showed up and told us what He wanted us to do for the rest of our lives, we would all say yes. But it doesn't always work like that. God doesn't always visit us in our room, give us His plan, and instruct us to go follow it. The question is how do we know God's will? How do we find God's will? How do we discover God's will? How do we know when we are actually outside his will? What does that look like?

I remember reading a quote that I thought was really insightful. The guy was talking about leadership and he said if you want to learn how to be a great leader, don't read leadership books; instead, read biographies of great leaders. That is how you learn about great leadership. You look at people who are leading well and follow their leadership style. I think when it comes to finding God's will we can apply that same kind of wisdom. We don't just look at what the Bible says about finding God's will because we do that, but sometimes it is very insightful to look at people who are in the process of finding God's will and learn from them.

In Acts chapter 16, we will find a few different people who are having to make big decisions. They are having to find God's will. They are asking questions. What does God want me to do next? Where should I go? Where should I not go? What should I do? What should I not do? I hope in looking at these examples of people making big decisions, life altering decisions, and trying to fulfill God's mission and will for their lives, that we will process our own lives as we look at them and we would keep asking this question. Am I doing God's will?

I think, big picture, what we will learn from Paul, Silas, Luke, and even from Timothy is that if you want to find God's will, you have to push the gas. You can't just sit back and wait. You have to push the gas. As you push the gas, God will be the one who pumps the brakes if you need to make a change. When we think about discovering God's will, we need to lean into it. We need to do something. We should push the gas and allow God to pump the brakes. We will see this happen in the life of Paul.

We will read Acts 16, verses 6 and 7. This will be a little strange. What we will see from these verses is the Spirit of God stopping Paul from doing the mission of God. That sounds strange.

Scripture

"And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them."

Obviously, God is pumping the brakes on Paul and Silas. He is forbidding them preaching the gospel to win people to Christ. That seems like a very strange thing. What do you do when God pumps the brakes? We will see that you keep pushing the gas. This is what we will see from the example of Paul and Silas.

Before we get to them, we will go to another guy who had to make a big life decision. He must discern God's will for his life. We will get some information but not a lot. His name is Timothy. He is one of my heroes in the faith because I love the two letters that Paul wrote to Timothy. I find

them so comforting and instructive. I love Timothy. He is one of my heroes. Here in the scriptures, we get to meet Timothy for the first time. We will get some information about him. We will see that, in order for Timothy to follow Paul into missions, he must make a life altering decision. He must make a big decision. The question he must ask is what is God's will for my life? What do I do next? As we think about Timothy, we can consider our own lives.

Acts 16:1:

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.

This was Paul's second missionary journey where they retraced their steps to the places they had preached the gospel and planted churches. They are going back to those places to further the gospel proclamation to other nations that have not heard about Jesus. But here we have some information about Timothy. He is a disciple, a believer in the Lord. We learn that his mom is a Jew. She is of the lineage of Abraham. She can trace her lineage back to the people of God. She is an Israelite. She is a Jew. She is not just a Jew; she is a Jewish believer. She has come to faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ. She has believed the gospel. She is now a Christian. We get additional information about his mom from other scriptures. For example, in 2 Timothy 1:5, we read, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well." Timothy's mom's name is Eunice. She is a believer who instructed and helped Timothy become a believer. We know this from chapter 3 of 2 Timothy where verse 15 reads, "...and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Timothy is a believer, for one, because his momma raised him in the Scripture. His momma and grandma made sure he knew the scriptures. They raised him in the scriptures, showing him that all the scriptures point to Christ. He has been raised in the gospel. He is now a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. His mom is a Jew from the lineage of David.

Then, we have this “but.” His mom is a Jewish believer, *but* his father is a Greek. Notice that it is not ‘and.’ It doesn’t say *and* his father is a Greek; it says *but* his father is a Greek. That means there is a contrast and we should note the difference. His mom is a Jew, but his dad is not. His dad is a Greek, a Gentile. We are given some information that would have caused the culture of that time to raise some eyebrows. We have a Jewish woman who probably did not follow the advice of her mom and dad. A Jewish woman was expected to marry a Jewish man. Instead, she fell in love with a Gentile. As you know from reading the New Testament, typically Jews and Gentiles did not get along that well together. They were seen as different groups of people. We have a Jewish woman who is married to a Gentile. Presumably, he is a guy who eats meat that has been sacrificed to idols. He is one of those guys who is barbequing ribs. This would be a little awkward since we have this girl of Jewish decent. I am guessing that Dad did not like his son-in-law very much. There were probably issues in the home. So, we have Timothy whose mom is a Jew and a dad who is a Gentile, and then you have Timothy who is now a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must remember that tension as we see what happens in the near future.

Acts 16:2:

He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.

Timothy was well spoken of by the church. By those believers in the Lord, Timothy had a good reputation. Timothy is presumably following the Lord and showing the fruits of the Spirit. He is a good guy. He has a good reputation. I think all of us want to be a Timothy. We want to be that person in the church that people would say, “She is a good girl,” or “He is a great guy.” They are pursuing the Lord. They are following the Lord. They are showing the fruits of the Spirit. They are someone you can trust. They would be someone you would pick if you were going on a mission trip, or need a baby-sitter. They would be the type of person you would pick because of their good character. This is Timothy. He is a good guy. He has a good reputation. He seems to be following the Lord and it is showing through the fruit that is produced in his life. Because of all he is believer with a good reputation, we see this in verse 3.

Acts 16:3:

Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

Because Timothy was a believer with a good reputation with a mom who was a believer and had raised him in the ways of the Lord, Paul identified Timothy as a young guy with a future. He has potential. So, Paul invites Timothy to join him on his missionary journey. One thing we see in Paul. He is always trying to raise up the next generation. Paul is always looking for people he can pull along. Paul is not going on mission by himself. He wants companions. He wants disciples so that when he dies one day, there will be a group of guys who can carry on with the mission. He is always pulling others. I think a real practical note we learn from Paul about the Christian life is to try to make disciples. Paul is making a disciple. He is inviting someone to join his life, inviting someone to come along. He is pulling Timothy with him into the mission of God.

Do you have anyone you are pulling along? Do you have anyone a few steps behind you in the Christian faith that you are meeting with, checking on, asking about them, giving them advice? Part of the Christian faith is being a family. The older in Christ should be helping the younger in Christ to mature and have those life questions answered. If you are not pulling another, you should pray about identifying someone as Paul is doing in this text. He is asking Timothy to come along with him.

Of course, we know that if Timothy chooses to accept Paul's invitation, it will change his life. If Timothy wants to experience accelerated growth, then he should follow Paul around because he will probably grow in Christ if he follows the Apostle Paul into the mission he is to accomplish. Timothy must make the decision of whether he wants to go with Paul. This is a life decision for him. This is not told from Timothy's perspective. It is told more as a narration, but there is a decision that Timothy has to make — Am I going to leave my home? Am I going to leave my comfort and go with Paul into the mission that God has called him to? Is God calling me to that mission as well?

This is a decision point for Timothy. We will see that the decision point for Timothy did not come without cost. It did not come without discomfort as we see in the next line of the verse because it says Paul took him and circumcised him. Wait! What? Did I read that right? Is that what your text says? Does your Bible say that same thing? Does anyone find that to be rather strange? The reason we find that to be rather strange is because we have just been through Acts chapter 15. The whole subject of chapter 15 is this very question: Do Gentiles have to become Jews to become Christians? Do you have to receive the covenant mark on your body? Do you have to obey all the law? Do you have to do all these things to become a Christian? As we have seen in the last three sermons, the answer is no. It is not necessary. You no longer have to receive the covenant mark. You no longer have to keep the laws because all those things were pointing you to Christ. Christ is here. Christ has come. What does that mean? We are free from those things. They are no longer necessary. So why, when Paul chooses Timothy to go on a mission with him, is the first thing required for joining the mission trip is to receive the covenant mark on his body? Talking about a 'what to bring' list! *You need your passport, a little cash, and your bag, and oh, by the way, one more thing, Timothy...* This is a big ask, right? This is a little bit uncomfortable for Timothy. Why would Paul require this from young Timothy? It seems that has already been settled as not necessary. What is going on? Is it necessary? Has Paul changed his mind? Is Paul acting hypocritical? What do we do with a text like this?

Usually when you get to a hard text, you keep reading your Bible. By continuing to read, we will see why Paul did this. There are two key words, "because" and "for." These are very instructive words. They are purpose words. They say this happened for this reason — "...*because* of the Jews who were in those places." The reason Timothy must receive the covenant mark is because of the Jews in those places, the surrounding areas they were in. Why would Timothy undergo this procedure because of the Jews in those areas? "...*for* they all knew that his father was a Greek." That is the reason. This is the key verse to understanding why Timothy had to receive the covenant mark in order to go on mission with Paul.

Think about Paul's journeys. Paul always went to the synagogues first. He always went to the places where the Jews were first to proclaim the gospel to the Jews, to proclaim Jesus to them. He always went to the Jews first, then he went to the Greeks, then he went to the Gentiles, and then he went to those pagans to tell them about Jesus. Paul's missionary journeys always included the Jews first to tell them about Jesus, to tell them the Old Testament they had was all about Jesus. Then he would go to the Gentiles and say do you know that creator, God? I know Him and I can tell you who He is and I can tell you of His Son, Jesus Christ. That was Paul's mission.

So Paul is now inviting a young man to go on that mission that always started in the synagogue, but there is a problem with Timothy. We don't know who he is. Is Timothy a Jew or a Gentile? Nobody knows. That question has not been answered. On his mom's side, he is a Jew from the lineage of Abraham. He has all the rights and privileges of a Jew from his mom's side. In fact, if you look at this from a cultural context, the Jews of that day would have considered Timothy a Jew because of his mom. When a Jewish mom had a baby, that baby was automatically considered a Jew because they are in the descendant line. But, he had a daddy who is a Gentile. For whatever reason, it seemed the daddy protested when the time came for Timothy to be marked as a Jew and it didn't happen. Presumably, his dad did not want him to become a Jew; he wanted his son to live like him, a Gentile. So it wasn't known if Timothy was a Jew or a Gentile, and Paul wanted to take him on a missionary journey that includes both Jews and Gentiles. Here is the stigma...the Jews would have considered Timothy to be even worse than a Gentile because he was of the lineage of the Jewish people but he did not have the covenant mark. He would have been an apostate. He would have purposefully said no to being part of the covenant people of God. He would have said no to the Jewish people, wanting to live as a pagan. That is how all the Jews would have considered young Timothy. So Paul wanted Timothy to go with him, but all the Jews in the area would have considered him unable to go to all the places Paul wanted to go. Paul would be going to the synagogues, and guess who couldn't go into the synagogues with him? Timothy could not enter the synagogues because he was an apostate. Timothy would be in active rebellion against the Jewish people. When Paul would go into the

temple Timothy would have to stay in the courtyard of the Gentiles. Paul's missionary journey would be significantly hindered if Timothy accompanied him as a Gentile who has a Jewish mother. There would be all sorts of cultural issues. A decision must be made. The decision was for Timothy to lean into his mom's heritage and become an actual Jew by receiving the covenant mark. Why? So that he could then go into all the places and spaces that Paul could go into as a Jew, as well as all other Jews, as part of their culture. See, this was not a gospel issue. Timothy was a saved man. He was right with God, but he was not right with the Jewish people. He was not seen as right with the Jewish people until he received the covenant mark. Then he was acceptable to the Jewish people. This act, then, was a cultural thing, not a gospel thing. It was a missional thing not a salvation act. Timothy had to endure a lot of discomfort to join Paul's missionary journey.

For us, this is hard to think about. We don't get not being able to go into certain places and do certain things. How are we to know such things? There are a lot of cultural aspects it is hard for us to wrap our minds around. Consider a modern-day example to help us see what this might look like. It might not correlate perfectly but it might help us understand what happened that influenced Timothy to go along with this and why it is not anti-gospel but just pro-missional. Let's say there is a girl, Imira. She lives in Yemen and is a Muslim. She grew up in that religion but came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. She is now a Christian. She is a believer. No longer does Imira have to submit to Sharia law. No longer does she have to wear a head covering. No longer does she have to wear the traditional Muslim clothing. She can take that off because she is now free in Christ. She does not have to obey the cultural norms of her family because she has now identified with Christ. But Imira, living in Yemen, decides she wants to be a missionary to her family, her friends, and her co-workers. So she decides to leave her head-covering on. She knows that if she takes it off she can't go into any of the places and spaces that her Muslim and sister friends go into. She would be offensive. She would be an outsider. She keeps her head-covering on so that she can enter any of the places though she is no longer required to because she is a Christian.

Imira meets a girl named Amy. Amy's mother is a Muslim but her father is an atheist. Amy has never worn a head-covering because her father wanted her to be a Western woman. He wanted her to be free. He wanted her to be independent, so she has never worn a head-covering in her life. Let's say Imira leads Amy to Christ. Now Amy is a Christian living in Yemen. Imira invites Amy to come with her and help her reach more and more women living in Yemen for Christ. For that to happen Amy must put on a head-covering. Amy must wear the traditional Muslim clothing. Amy could not go into the places and spaces that other Muslim women go to without wearing these articles. Without the Muslim clothing, she would be very offensive. She would have been seen as an outsider. She would have been viewed as someone protesting to the people she was going to witness to.

Why did Timothy receive the covenant mark? Without it, he was offensive to the Jewish people. He would be considered a Jew that had not leaned into his Jewish heritage. He had a decision to make. His decision was to submit to a law he did not have to in order to free those under the law with the gospel of Christ. He submitted himself to a law he did not have to so that he could walk into a people that were bound to a law and tell them they no longer had to submit to the law. They were free in Christ. He took on bondage to proclaim freedom. That was his cost for following the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the will for his life. Timothy did not receive the mark to satisfy the old covenant. He received the mark of the old covenant in order to take a new covenant to old covenant people. He declared a new covenant, a new covenant in Christ. They didn't have to have these things any longer because Christ has come. Timothy did not have to do this. This was not about his relationship with God. This was about his relationship with his culture. How could he walk into spaces and places he wanted to witness? He had to receive this mark so that these people would accept him. It was a discomfort he was willing to endure in order to proclaim Jesus.

Timothy had a decision to make. I wonder if we would be willing to do the same? Would we be willing to experience discomfort if it meant proclaiming Jesus to others? Here is a practical question. Let's say the Apostle Paul

came here today and announces he has a plan. He says we are going to do a one-week missionary trip to the northeast. We will be going to a few cities and I want you to go with me. There is only one requirement. The places we are going, the people are a little different from us. To go, you must wear a mask the whole time, even in your room. The only time you can remove the mask is when you go to bed and when you eat. You will be required to wear your mask the entire time because of the people we are going to minister to. How many of us would say no Paul? *I'm not doing that! I am free and no one can tell me what I have to do.* I would probably be tempted to do that. I had to check my own heart this week. You know what Timothy did for the sake of the gospel? He gave up certain freedoms. He said bring them on. I will be in bondage if it means I must succumb to certain things in order to reach this particular people and place for Christ. How many of us would be willing to experience this discomfort? That is really a silly example, because we know what Timothy went through. It was a lot worse than that. It was a lot bigger deal. But let's evaluate our own hearts. If we were asked to do something that costs us, would we be willing to be a little uncomfortable to accomplish it? Sometimes following God's will, as we see with Timothy, is uncomfortable. We may be called to do things we don't have to for the sake of those we are trying to reach. That is what we see from the life of Timothy, and God used him in an amazing way. Let's notice what happens when Timothy links arms with them.

Acts 16:4-5:

As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

So Paul brought the message that they no longer have to become a Jew to be a Christian. That was good news for the Gentiles. Do you also see what this means for Timothy? He didn't have to stop being a Jew to become a Christian either. He didn't have to stop with his cultural identity as a Jew to become a Christian. He could have the covenant mark. It is OK. Paul is saying you don't have to stop being a Jew to be a Christian, but there are

things within Judaism that you can't do anymore. You can't bring a sacrifice to the temple for your sins. That would be against Christ. You can't do that. You don't have to lose your Jewish identity to become a Christian, nor do you have to become a Jew to be a Christian. That is good news for all of us, right? That is good news for Jews and Gentiles that the gospel goes to all of us. It is an all nations, all tribes message that we are one family, Jew and Gentile, collectively worshiping God together. That is what we see beautifully in chapters 15 and 16.

So on this missionary journey, we see Paul, Silas, and Luke trying to fulfill the will of God, but God keeps saying no, over, and over again. So, what do you do when God keeps saying no to you? We have already seen Timothy having to make a decision — Is this God's will that he will lean into, be uncomfortable for the sake of bringing Christ to others? He responded yes to that and joined Paul on this mission, and now we see this missionary journey.

Acts 16:6:

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

Think how strange this is. Paul knew God's will, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." I can imagine that Paul gets out an atlas and since he knows God's will is to take the gospel to the nations, he determines to go to Asia and preach the gospel. So Paul mashes the gas. They are going to do God's will, but the Holy Spirit forbids them from speaking the gospel in Asia. That seems very strange, right? The Spirit of God stopped them from fulfilling the mission of God. Have you ever had God tell you not to share the gospel with a person? That would be very strange. We are supposed to share the gospel with all people, but the Lord was forbidding them to share the gospel in Asia. God said no to Paul's plan. As the leader of the group, Paul might have found this a little frustrating. I can imagine Silas asking Paul... *Where are we going? I have this good plan. We are going to Asia and plant a church in this city, spread out, and plant churches here and there.* Silas says, *sounds good let's go!* Then Paul says, *just kidding, we are actually going to do something different because God*

just said no to my plan. That would be quite awkward for the leader of a mission trip. You have to come back to the team and report that God had said no to your plan. Everyone would be wondering what they are going to do now. Would everyone agree that going to Asia to share the gospel is a good plan? That is a good plan, right? For some reason the Holy Spirit forbid them speaking in Asia. We really don't know why. The Bible doesn't say and we won't speculate, nor do we know how this happened. Did God actually show up in the Spirit and tell Paul he couldn't go? Was it an angel of the Lord? Was there an audible voice? Was it an intuition? Was it a groaning? We are not sure. We simply know that these men were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak in Asia.

My question is – what do you do when God hits the brakes? What did Paul do when God hit the brakes? He hit the gas. When God hits the brakes, you hit the gas in a different direction. That is to be our approach when trying to find God's will. When going in one direction and God hits the brakes, you stop, turn, and go in a different direction. You don't just stop and stand there. You do something. You move. You hit the gas in a different direction. How do you find God's will? You have to pursue it. You have to keep going. When God says no, you turn and try something else until God says no. You turn and try something else. Eventually you will find His yes. This is what I want you to do. This is what we see in Paul's life. So then, they all sat down and prayed a lot. That is not what we read in verse 7.

Acts 16:7:

And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

Do you see what happened? God said no, you can't speak the Word in Asia, but Paul didn't just stop and wait, and whenever you reveal your will we will go. No, Paul got his Atlas out again. He developed a new plan. If we aren't going to Asia we will go north, we will go to Bithynia. So they packed their bags to go north, (metaphorically) driving with their foot on the gas. They are headed north and the Spirit of Jesus said no, don't go there either. Can you imagine Paul, being redirected again? He didn't know

where he was going...God knew but He wasn't sharing. So what happens this second time God says no? Paul has tried to go in two different directions, with God saying no both times. What do you do when God pumps the brakes twice?

Acts 16:8:

So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

It doesn't say they stopped the bus. It doesn't say they decided to go home because God is not in this. When God pumped the brakes twice, Paul said we are not supposed to go north so we will turn around and go south. He hits the gas, goes south, and keeps driving...*I guess we will go to Troas. I guess we will keep driving until God says no.* This is what Paul knows. He knows the general will of God. He knows the general will of God for his life is to go therefore and make disciples of all nations. That is the general will for our lives. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Jesus told us as followers to do that. Paul knows he is to get the gospel to all nations. Paul is driving in circles trying to go to different nations and God said, no, not that one, no, not that one. Instead of stopping, Paul turns and tries something else. He goes through a different door when one closes. Paul is on the move. Paul is pursuing. As God pumps the brakes, Paul turns and mashes the gas to go in a different direction. To find God's will you must pursue God. You can't find His will sitting down. You can't find it sitting still. That is not what Paul did. He kept moving, leaning into the mission of God, knowing that at some point God would say yes.

When I was looking at this text, I couldn't help but think of my dear friend, Aaron Thompson. I love Aaron Thompson. If you know him, you love him too. He is an awesome guy. For the last two years I have met and prayed with him because he knew God's will for his life. God's will is for him to be a missionary. He signed up with the IMB (International Mission Board). He was going to go to training to get prepared to go somewhere in the Middle East to be a missionary, a difficult place to take the gospel. But he was ready and willing. When the time for training came, Covid happened and derailed everything. My friend Aaron knows God's will is to take the gospel to the Middle East, but the brakes got pumped. He can't go. His team is

not there. Things have been shut down. For a year, he was teaching 9th grade math at Graves County, and every day, he was thinking that he was supposed to be in the Middle East sharing the gospel. He was supposed to go but God has pumped the brakes. But Aaron did not stop. He kept pushing the gas. He started a new Sunday school class here at Hardin with fifteen college guys and girls. He wanted to teach, to serve, to be on mission where he was. He was not where he was supposed to be but while he was here, he kept going and doing. This led him to Southern Seminary where he is now. Rather than being in the field in the Middle East, he is being trained. He is not waiting. He is not sitting down. But he is not just training; instead, one night each week he goes to a refugee camp doing Bible study and sharing the gospel. Another night he goes to the University of Louisville to share the good news of Jesus. What is so unique is most of the people in these places and in these spaces are from the Middle East. We have someone who knew as a little kid that God's will was for him to go to the Middle East to share the gospel. But God pumped the brakes. But Aaron did not sit down nor did he stop. He kept mashing the gas. He kept the wheels turning. He knows God's will, to make disciples of all nations. By continuing to mash the gas, God has him in Louisville where He brought the Middle East to him. He is having an impact by sharing the gospel with so many people. What do you do when God says no? You try something else until God says yes. Let's look at what happens next in the life of Paul.

Acts 16:9:

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

They found it! They had found the will of God. God finally revealed where He wanted them to go. He wanted them to go to Europe, to Macedonia to preach the gospel there. He wanted them to connect with a place called Philippi, a Roman colony, preach the gospel there, and plant a church there. And now, they would be invading Rome, and there would be a letter to come to the Romans soon. God had a plan. Paul had a plan, but God

had a better plan and He revealed His plan at a most unexpected moment. His plan was revealed in a dream. Paul went to sleep. Note that Paul was not sleeping the whole time God was revealing His will to him. Paul did not say 'I don't know what God wants me to do so I will just stay put and sleep all the time.' No, God revealed his vision in a dream, but Paul was not sleeping all the time. Paul was going, moving, doing, visiting places, trying things, trying to determine God's will. God pumped the brakes here and Paul mashed the gas there. God, then, got him exactly where He wanted him to be to show him where He wanted him to go.

Why would God do it this way? I think God wanted to remind Paul that he is not in control. Timothy had to lose comfort to find the will of God. Paul had to lose control to find the will of God. Paul had a good plan. God had a great plan. You have a good plan for your life. God has a great plan for your life. For some of you, it means giving up comfort as Timothy did. For others of us, it means giving up control as Paul did in order to lean into the mission of God and the will of God. Paul eventually found the will of God, and they all concluded this was it. By the way, Luke had joined them on this journey and now this band of four guys, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, were going and doing to find God's will.

How do you find God's will? You don't stand still. To find God's will you pump the gas until God hits the brakes. When God hits the brakes, you change directions and push the gas again. We know, in general, what God wants us to do. In general, we know God's will for us. He wants us to be sanctified. He wants us to grow. He wants us to be part of the family. He wants us to live out the Kingdom. He wants us to share the good news of Jesus with others. We know the general will of God. Pump the gas and lean into those things. By doing that, God will reveal His specific will to you.

How do you find the will of God? That is a big question. We have not read a text about how to find the will of God; instead, we have seen two guys who figured out the will of God. They did it by getting uncomfortable and by losing control. They did it by moving, going, and saying yes. I am afraid that some of us in this room are sitting still. We are standing around asking God to reveal His will to us. God is saying if you want to find my will,

pursue it. Take a step. Take a leap. Hit the gas. If you are going in the wrong direction, God will pump the brakes and get you where you need to be.

The biggest question of the guy on the plane was — Am I doing the will of God? The man was 45 and he doesn't want to miss it. He doesn't want to live his whole life not knowing the will of God. He had tried some strange things. The strangest thing might have been that he had just returned from Phoenix where he had gone to all the places where the energy fields of the earth are the strongest and he stood in the energy field at just the right spot, hoping to connect to God so God would reveal His will to him. I told him, "You don't have to go to an energy field to find the will of God. It is not that hard nor that mystical. Do you want to find the will of God? Open your Bible and put your nose in the Scripture. You read it. You pray it. You do it." See, God's will is shown to us in the Scripture. As you read the Scripture, you pursue the Spirit through His Word, you walk by faith, and as you do those things, you are pushing the gas. I couldn't know God's will for that guy. Maybe, as I shared with him, fulfilling God's will was not quitting his finance job. It seems that in his flying all over the country to various cities, meeting all kinds of different people on someone else's dime (and he was being paid for it), he had a good missionary gig. I told him that maybe he should walk into those meetings filled with the Spirit. Maybe he should be walking into his meetings shining the light of Christ to those around him. Maybe God's will is not for him to quit his job but lean into it. Maybe God has him exactly where He wanted him to be. He simply needed to do the things God wanted him to do.

I don't know where you are. I don't know if God wants you exactly where He has you. I don't know if He wants you to move somewhere or do something different, make a career change or stop dating that person. I don't know God's will for your life. Here is what I do know. God reveals His will to those who pursue it. He is not trying to hide it from you. He wants you to lose comfort and He wants you to lose control. In losing comfort and control, you will surrender to the Lord and follow His lead.