

**Text: Acts 16:6-15**

**Theme: Guidance (Come Over to Macedonia and Help Us)**

**Sermon delivered by Revd Dele Agbelusi during Morning Service on 05/05/2013 at 10:30 am**

You may not have noticed that one of the very important truths we have covered in our study of the book of Acts is that God GUIDES and directs His people. In fact, many scholars refer to the Book of Acts as "The Book of Guidance" because there are so many examples of God's specific guidance recorded within its pages. Think of it-the book begins with the apostles being GUIDED to go to Jerusalem and wait until they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. Twice when apostles were imprisoned, God sent an angel to GUIDE them out of jail. In Acts 6, before appointing the first deacons, the apostles sought and received God's GUIDANCE. Philip was GUIDED by the Lord to a specific road where he met and ministered to an Ethiopian official. Because of that GUIDANCE the Gospel was taken to the African continent.

And the fact that God **leads and directs** His people down the road of life is good news for us. I mean, in so many ways, we are all lost sheep in need of a Shepherd.

Well, the question is, how do we access the ever-perfect guidance that our Good Shepherd offers? How do we discern God's will when it comes to life's decisions? These are the questions I want us to answer this morning as we come to another example of God guiding His children in the book of Acts-specifically His direction of the Apostle Paul on his 2nd missionary journey.

But before we get to it let's review our text a bit. In Acts 15:36-41, Paul and his fellow-missionary, Barnabas had parted company. Remember? They had a heated argument over Barnabas' recommendation that they give John Mark a second chance and take him along with them on this second mission trip. They couldn't or wouldn't resolve the issue and it ended up causing a permanent break up of that missionary dream team from Antioch. Barnabas took John Mark and went on mission to Cyprus. And Paul chose Silas and headed toward his hometown of Tarsus-stopping along the way to visit and encourage each of the churches they had founded on their first missionary journey.

Now, I think that as he journeyed along, Paul must have thought about his disagreement with Barnabas. These guys had been close friends. How could he not think about it?! In fact, I think Paul's thinking eventually led to his repenting-as he followed Jesus' command in Matthew 18. I think he eventually prayed and asked for God's forgiveness as he took responsibility for his contribution to their quarrel. Perhaps he remembered how Barnabas had stood up for him with the believers of that day who didn't want to give Paul a second chance after his years of persecuting them. And, this must have led Paul to see that Barnabas was right-John Mark deserved a second chance-the same second chance that God had given Paul. And I say all this must have happened because we know that Paul did eventually did change his opinion of John Mark and wrote approvingly of Barnabas' ministry. (See 2 Tim. 4:11; 2 Corinth. 9:6). And I'm sure Barnabas must have acknowledged his part in their dispute as well.

At this point I feel led to point out that we can re-discover and re-align ourselves with God's will in our repentance. It is never God's will for us to argue to the point that our Christian fellowship is destroyed. But when Paul and Barnabas realized their sin and repented, they were able to once again join God in His will and work. I say this, because good eventually came from this "split". For example, AFTER this dispute, the missions' effort was doubled. Instead of just Paul and Barnabas going out-ONE Team, TWO teams departed: Paul and Silas, as well as Barnabas and John Mark. Well, all this shows that when we stubbornly disobey God-in those times when we wilfully disregard His will, if we repent we can rediscover His guidance and rejoin Him in His work.

So, “How does a person find God’s will? How do we access His much-needed guidance in life?”

### **1. You must be a believer in Christ.**

Romans 8:14 says, “...those who are LED by the Spirit of God, are the SONS of God.” You see, when you accept Christ as the Saviour and Lord of your life God adopts you as His child and when that happens His Holy Spirit comes to dwell within you. One of the Holy Spirit’s purposes is to reveal the will of God to you. Remember? Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit comes He would speak in ways that would, “...guide us into all truth.” (John 16:13) So, we must have this “inside help” if we are going to be able to hear God’s guidance clearly.

E. Stanley Jones tells of a missionary who got lost in an African jungle-nothing around him but bush and a few cleared places. He found a native hut and asked the owner if he could lead him out. The native said he could, “All right,” said the missionary, “show me the way.” The native said, “Follow me.” They walked and hacked their way through the unmarked jungle for more than an hour. The missionary got worried and asked, “Are you quite sure this is the way? Where is the path?” The native said, “Bwana, in this place there is no path. I am the path.” Well, Jesus is the path to the will of God. There is no other way to access it. So, to take full advantage of God’s wisdom in life you must know this Wonderful Counsellor personally.

Now, if you’re a Christian you may be wondering exactly how God speaks through the Holy Spirit. Basically, this inner guidance is a product of spiritual growth. I mean, the longer we walk with Jesus-the deeper our relationship with Him becomes and the more we are able to recognize His guidance. Think of it this way: The longer two people are married, or work together, or are friends, the more they get to know each other-to the point that they can almost read each other’s minds. They sense what the other may say or do or want in certain situations. For example, I know that my wife always likes to pray by her bedside immediately after returning from school. 35 years of marriage has taught me this and other things about her and she’s learned the same kinds of things about me. We know the way each other thinks. That’s how it is when you are attuned to the Spirit of God. The longer you walk with Him, the more you develop a sense of what He wants you to do and not to do.

Then, when we are outside of His will there is a feeling of unrest in our hearts that tells us we need to slow down and listen for God’s quiet promptings.

Another thing...as Christians we must understand that God’s main concern-is to grow us spiritually so that we are conformed to the image of His Son. Our human tendency is to focus solely on our calling-on where we should go and how we should get there and what we should do when we get there. But God’s main concern is the process that He is taking us through to mature us and make us more like Jesus.

### **2. To access God’s guidance, we must admit that we need it.**

Do you remember Proverbs 3:5-6? “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.” I think that in these familiar words God is cautioning us to be wary of pride. You see, the problem is, we tend to go to God only after we’ve stubbornly gone our own way and failed. This almost always causes problems because human perspective is limited so we need God’s input in the decision-making processes of everyday life.

The story is told of an old Scottish woman who went from home to home across the countryside selling thread, buttons, and shoestrings. When she came to an unmarked crossroad, she would always toss a stick into the air and go in the direction the stick pointed when it landed.

One day, however, she was seen tossing the stick up several times, “Why do you toss the stick more than once?” someone asked. “Because,” replied the woman, “...it keeps pointing to the

left, and I want to take the road to the right.” So often, we’re like this old woman. We know what God’s will is—we hear his still, small voice loud and clear, but we don’t want to follow it. We stubbornly think we know what’s best for us. Well, the fact is no one knows what is better for us than God.

### **3. The third thing we must do in order to discern God’s leading is to simply use the guidance TOOLS that He has given us—and He has given us several tools.**

#### **A. First there is the Bible.**

Guidance from the Lord is ALWAYS in accordance with His written Word. He will never lead you to do something which conflicts with the perfect wisdom of the Bible. Now, this Scriptural wisdom is found in the form of both principles and precepts (command, instruction) to guide us through life’s decisions. **Precepts** are clearly marked statements like “You shalt not steal.” That’s like the signs on Hornsey Lane that say, “Speed Limit 20”. There are also **Principles** in Scripture. These are general guidelines to apply to various situations in life. For example, Jesus said we are to love our neighbours as ourselves. This is a principle to be applied to all of our relationships with other people. It is like the signs in the neighbourhood that say, “Drive Carefully.” This may mean 25 miles an hour when the road is clear, or it may mean 10 miles an hour on an ice-covered curve or when kids are playing near the street. The principles and precepts of God’s Word will never steer you wrong. Hear this: the most effective way to receive God’s guidance is to study His written Word! Now, I imagine most of us would prefer something flashier—we want clouds to part—we want a visit from an angel or two. We want to hear God’s booming voice in the night—well, those things may or may not happen but the fact is the surest, most effective way to receive God’s guidance is from the Bible. As Psalm 119 says, “His written Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path!” and it is! We ignore it at our own peril.

#### **B. Okay, the second tool God has given us is Common Sense.**

This is what Paul was doing when he circumcised Timothy. His actions might seem inconsistent in view of his recent stand against the legalizers at the Jerusalem council, but it was not. You see, Paul’s concern was for the defence and propagation of the gospel and he knew that in order for Timothy to have access to the synagogues where Paul went to share the gospel he would have to be circumcised. This little bit of surgery made sense. As a missionary Paul had enough God-given sense to know that he had to be willing to, “...become all things to all men...so that by all possible means, he might save some.” (1 Cor. 9:22)

There is this story that has been told in different forms: *One day a man in a jeep drove up and said, “This area is about to be flooded. You need to get out of here.” The man replied, “I’ll just stay here and trust the Lord to take care of me.” And very soon the water was swirling around his front porch as he sat in his rocking chair. Soon after that, a man came by in a boat, saying, “You need to get out of here. The water is getting higher and higher.” The man replied, “I’ll be okay. I’m just going to trust the Lord.” Finally, the man ended up on his roof because of the rising water. It had already flooded his house. Suddenly a helicopter appeared overhead and lowered a chair, so he could be taken to safety. He shouted back, “It’s okay. I’ll stay here. I’m trusting the Lord to take care of me.” Well, the man drowned and when he got to heaven he complained to the Lord that He hadn’t taken care of him. And the Lord said, “I sent you a jeep, a boat and a helicopter. What else did you want me to do?”*

You see, seeking guidance from God does not mean we are passive. No, God wants us to learn to use the brains He has given us. He wants us to become wise followers.

#### **C. And then, the third “guidance tool” is the Wise Counsel of others.**

Proverbs 12:15 says, “The fool is right in his own eyes but he who heeds counsel is wise.” This is what was done at the Jerusalem Council, as they tried to decide what to do about whether the gentiles should be circumcised or not. God often uses other people to guide us to the centre of His will. So, when you face a decision, follow the example of all those people

who played “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” Use a “lifeline” and call on someone whom you know to be a mature, experienced disciple. But be careful of people who love to inflict their opinion on others.

The healthy approach is to talk to several people who we know are wise and godly, people we admire because we know they have been around the “spiritual block” so to speak and ask them for input. Proverbs 24:6 says, “In a Multitude of counsellors there is safety.”

**D. The final tool I want to mention is clearly seen here in Acts 16-the tool of Providence.** Providence is simply God opening the doors for us to do His will and closing the doors that lead to things that are NOT His will. It’s the kind of Guidance Jesus was talking about in Revelation 3 when He said, “I have placed before you an OPEN DOOR that no one can shut...” (Revelation 3:8b)

If God is calling us to do something, He will open the doors for us to do it at his own time. Here in Acts 16 we find a perfect example of this principle. After adding Timothy to their team Paul and his companions travelled from town to town visiting Christians in the churches he had started. Verse 5 says, “The churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number daily.” So, things were going wonderfully. Paul and his companions were in a pagan region where idol worship was prevalent, yet people were coming to Christ and churches were being founded. Then they moved on toward the Phrygian/Galatian regions with high hopes. But look what happened. Verses 6-7 says, “And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia...and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go to Bithynia and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.” Now, remember-they had great successes up until this point: open doors, green lights. Things were working! But when they moved into the more central and southern regions, God closed the door. They assumed then that God was leading them north, so they headed for Mysia and Bithynia. But once again the door was closed.

So they wound up on Troas. And when they arrived and prayed for God’s guidance Paul had a night vision of a man from Macedonia saying, “Come on over to Macedonia and help us.” (Acts 16:9) Think of what this call would require of Paul and his companions. They were in Asia. Macedonia is all the way across the Aegean Sea on the European side. This is another culture, another language, another continent. But Paul still responded to God’s providential guidance. He didn’t force his way through closed doors. He humbly allowed God to guide him and went through the only door open to him. Look again at Acts 16:10, “After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

Here is the Macedonian call - "Come over and help us." It is a call that has application to the church of God today. There is much for us to learn from this call and Paul's response to it about the evangelistic, missionary responsibilities of the church.

First, **Men and women who do not know the Gospel of Christ are lost, perishing in ignorance, under the wrath of God.** The lost condition of perishing sinners is, to the people of God, a cry for help. This man of Macedonia represented a people who had everything imaginable in a natural sense. The Greeks had every advantage socially and economically. Yet, like the rich young ruler, they lacked one thing. They had no knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were ignorant of soul-saving gospel truth. The lost condition of the refined Greeks demonstrates one fact with clarity - All who are ignorant of the gospel of Christ are lost, perishing in their sins under the wrath of God! The ignorant barbarian is lost (Rom. 1:18-21). Our religious and irreligious relatives, neighbours, and friends who know not the Lord Jesus Christ are lost (Rom. 10:1-17). Their lost condition is a cry for help. It is our responsibility to preach the gospel to them.

Secondly, **the greatest blessing God can ever bestow upon and people is to send them a faithful gospel preacher** (Isaiah 52:7).

Thirdly, **it is the responsibility of believers, individuals and collectively as local churches, to preach the Gospel of Christ to eternity bound sinners** (Mark 16:15-16). You cannot make anyone believe the gospel. That is not your responsibility. But you can see that they hear it. And that is your responsibility (Acts 1:8).

Fourthly, **God will both direct and honour the efforts of this people for the furtherance of the Gospel**. God always honours those who honour him (I Sam. 2:30). You do not labour in vain, if you seek to serve Christ (I Cor. 15:58). When Paul went to Macedonia he was thrown in jail, but God honoured his labour in the saving of two precious souls, Lydia and the Philippian Jailor. His ministry there was a great success! He did exactly what God sent him there to do. Be faithful to the work God has trusted to your hands, whatever it is. You will not fail. God is with you. His Word, which he sends out through you, will not return unto him void (Isaiah 55:11).

When they arrived they met a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. This led to the beginning of the church at Philippi, the church at Thessalonica, and the church at Corinth. This was the first work of evangelism in Europe recorded in the New Testament and God guided Paul to this wonderful ministry by providentially closing and opening doors. Well, He guides us the same way today and if we can learn anything from the apostle Paul here, we learn that closed doors is negative guidance. It's a form of guidance that keeps us from going where we are not called so that in God's time we might come to where God is calling.

This morning if you are at a crossroads-I encourage you to seek the Lord's will in these ways. Claim His promise in Psalm 32:8 where He says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." It may be that God is guiding some of you to make public decisions. Perhaps He is guiding some of you to join this church and serve Him here with us. And if you are here and are not a Christian, then I know that even now God is guiding you right now-drawing, inviting you to become a believer. I know this is God's will. After all, 2 Peter 3:9 says that God, "...is not willing for anyone to perish but for all to come to repentance." Won't you follow His leading and decide today to make Him Saviour and Lord of your life? I urge you to heed God's guidance this morning.