

When God Seems Silent or Says No

Acts 16:6-15.

Fellow Believers in Christ, haven't we all experienced times when it seems, or feels like God is not giving us directions or any answer to situations we are facing. Or even better, when we know God will endorse such and such a thing and then we realize, many times the hard way, the answer was no. We were so sure it was HIS WILL that we were trying to kick open doors that He had shut.

I have yet to meet someone that has a special (red, bat) phone with God. Most of the time the Holy Spirit doesn't say, "Cecil, take the next left at the next road, drive 5 miles, park in front of the red house with the white pillars and inquire of a lady about such and such."

There have been times I have been in the fires of life, and it would appear to me that the Holy Spirit is on vacation. The Holy Spirit is part of the trinity, (Father God, Son God, and Holy Ghost God) and He indwells, lives in the heart and conscience of every believer. He convicts, enlightens, illuminates our hearts when God's Word is spoken, remembered, or read. He is the one that when we are so full of pain, or confusion and have no words, only cries that takes all of that to the throne of God the Father, and advocates for us.

Our relationship with the Holy Spirit should be the most intimate, closest, realist relationship we have. He will tell you the truth about you even when you won't listen (quite sure He has called me a knuckle head a few times). He will overwhelm you with emotions when you try to put into words what being saved, forgiven feels like.

What are we to do when God seems silent or says, no?

Can I speak honest? Too often you and I don't seek His direction, His will, or His ways. I know I would rather do things the way I see fit and God just rubber stamp it. I have even tried to make deals with Him, like He doesn't know that I will not hold up my end of the deal.

This brings us to today's scripture. **Acts 16:6-15.**

Before we get into this, remember Paul was a "chosen vessel" of God's to bear God's name before Gentiles, kings, and children of Israel. Plus, the verse ends with, "**I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.**" (Acts 9:15)

If I were Ananias, I would be like, DANG!!! And then wonder what His plans for me were. My point is God has a plan for each of our lives, not all will be directed the same.

Read Acts 16:6-8.

I. God WILL tell His Followers NO.

- Let's look at the map of Paul's 2nd Missionary journey. **(Click on map)**
- Covers **Acts 15:36-18:22**. 3 years, 2700 miles, 1,290 by sea, 1,410 by land.
- Look again at **verse 6**. Paul started at Antioch, picked up Timothy in Lystra/Derbe, and now they are traveling northwestern into modern day Turkey. **(Click on modern day map)**
- Paul, Silas, Timothy travel (walking) **(back to bible times map)** through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia and as they entered Asia to preach the Word. They were busy doing the work of the

Lord.... but wait, what does God say about that plan? "...**they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit...**" umm, anyone else get the confused dog look when they read that? They weren't forbidden by any enemies, but by God. They were forbidden by God.

- Keep reading, they tried to preach more western, Asia and, nope! "Ok, ok, we will head to the north, to Bithynia." NOPE! Maybe they can preach the word as they travel through Mysia heading towards Troas. NOPE!
- Notice God's Word says, "**they tried to go into...**" The roads/paths from Antioch Pisidia to Troas were 380 miles. The path that Paul and his companions traveled was 450 miles. If we were to estimate their travel, 12 hours of walking a day, if they walked 30-36 miles a day, it would take 13-14 days to get to Troas.
- Many ladies probably see how this could happen. They are men, they don't stop and ask for directions. (ha-ha, bad joke)
- They were traveling, communicating with God, no one was in sin or living contrary to God. They were out diligently searching to do the work of God and His answer was NOPE!
- God, ruler of everything, Lord of our salvation, Sovern King, had every right to tell any of us NO.
- After driving 12 hours, from N.C. to N.Y. with 3 kids, 2 teenagers, and a wife, I can tell you the Apostle Paul is THE MAN! And I knew how long it would take and where I was going.
- I have argued, spit and fought God about things, most of the things I fought Him about benefitted me, they were all about Cecil. Paul was trying to preach the Word.
- Can you imagine if I was up here one Sunday and said I was speaking to so and so and about to give them the gospel, but God told me no. I was right there, about to and I heard, NO!
- Many if not all would be looking for a yellow referee's challenge flag. This is clearly against the rules.

This leads to the second point, what do we see missing besides, "Are we there yet?" God's Word doesn't record any complaining, reverse of course or quitting.

II. How will God's followers respond to being told NO?

- It is important to be reminded of Paul's heart, his passion.
- Turn to **1 Corinthians 9**, lets pick up in **verses 16-23**.
- In **Romans 9:1-3** Paul stating his desire, if it were possible, to give up his life and his ministry within the Kingdom of God if such a sacrifice would help Israel come to the knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah.
- If God told us, no or forbid us from preaching the word to certain people or regions, we might be ok with it, maybe even celebrate. But not Paul. I wonder, could he have felt confused or frustrated? I can say there is no record of him complaining or quitting.
- How do you respond to God telling you no, or not moving fast enough or in the direction you "feel" you should? Wait a minute, let's pause and allow the Holy Spirit to remind you. (Some of you I could give examples, not mentioning any names...)

- How about when God directs a Nathan into our lives to help us in our sins? **(Explain who Nathan was)**
- We want to punch them in their face, defend ourselves, even villainize the person. Often, we will take it out on God by complaining and even quitting.
- Things are going to happen; the world is on fire. If you are familiar with golf, we (the world) are on the back nine of the 18-hole golf course. The only thing we can control is how we respond.
- **Read verses 9 & 10.**
- So, they arrive at Troas, they had walked between 380-450 miles in about 2 weeks, with no opportunities to preach the word, because God said so.
- Paul has a vision in the night, a Macedonia man pleading with Paul to come and help. **(Back to the map)**
- Macedonia isn't a hop, skip and a jump away from Troas. From Troas to Samothrace is 70 miles and Samothrace to Neapolis is another 70 miles and its by ship.
- According to **verse 11** it was another 2-day journey. Oh, but wait, look back at **verse 10**. Paul got the vision and they slept peacefully until morning, right? NOPE! God's Word says, **"immediately we (Dr. Luke is jumping into the trip) sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them."**
- If I were on this trip, I would be wondering if Paul ate to late and it was causing him to dream.
- After two weeks of traveling being told no, Paul shares the info with Silas and Timothy and as a group they conclude God is saying, go instead of no.
- How did Paul, Silas and Timothy respond to being told no? He kept chugging along, kept his eye on God, actively waiting to spring into action. The Bible says, **"immediately"**.
- Are you and I actively waiting to spring into action...immediately? Many of us said, I can't wait to get back to fill in the blank after covid starts letting up. Have you got back to it?
- Some have even said, this whole thing has put things into prospective, and to prioritize the things that really matter. Have you? Where does the things of God rank in those prioritizes?
- I want us to pause for 30-45 seconds and ask God, the Holy Spirit to reveal in our heart, in our conscience, what was it that mattered the most when things were unraveling?
- Maybe you and God had a sweeter fellowship in those scary and uncertain moments and now you are back to living your best life, ok with God sitting in the stands and only listening for cheering. **(Pause for 30 seconds)**

III. How God's followers respond shapes where and how God can use them.

- **Read verses 12-13.**
- They traveled inland another 10-12 miles to Philippi. They were there a few days and the Sabbath they went out to where they heard people who sought after God were at. To establish

a place of worship, they would need 12 Jewish men to begin it. So, Paul who traditionally went to the synagogue to give the gospel had to try something different.

- God led them to a woman's prayer group. Not only Jewish woman but Gentile woman as well. I can only imagine if God would have sent Peter to Gentile woman, in a primarily Gentile region.
- **Read verses 14-15.**
- Lydia overheard Paul preaching the Word and giving out the gospel. I don't want us to miss something...who opened Lydia's heart? (**Verse 14**)
- **Verse 15** will get you excited if you have ever done anything for the Lord, presented the gospel and witnessed Lydia's response.
- Lydia and her household were baptized, and then she begged and persuaded them to stay with her at her house. To this day I have never had anyone beg me to stay at their house.
- NOTE: First recorded conversions on the continent of Europe.
- Paul, Silas, and Timothy didn't get sidetracked, didn't give up, they kept forging ahead.

Conclusion

God's servants should/must be led/controlled by the Spirit of God.

- Too often followers of God aren't even looking for God's plan for their life. Just looking for endorsement.
- Could God's silent be because He isn't in it?

When God seems silent, keep moving forward doing His business.

- What is God's business in each of our lives? To mold us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Too often we can get caught up in the work of God and neglect the worship of God. His first and most important work is in our personal lives. Maybe He seems silent because we are busy making busyness noise. (Busy work)
- I have learned to trust in God during the slow, quiet times, searching for that still small voice.

When God seems silent or says no, seek counsel from God's people.

- Once you are prayed up, studied up and covered up (sins confessed), seek out God's people.
- **Verse 10**, Paul had a vision, but he confirmed it with Silas and Timothy. He didn't just jump.

Proverbs 11:4, Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

When God seems silent or says no, don't attempt to kick the door down!

- Can I say there have been times in my life where God has said, NO, and I have argued with Him. I even put together a list of why. No means no.
- How much time, energy and emotion has been spent/wasted by us trying to force the closed door open or looking for a side window.
- God will move when He is ready. Our problem, especially in America is we don't like to wait for anything. We want it right now!

Are you in a place where God seems silent?

- Who is in control, you, or Him? Is there something blocking communication? Is there some unconfessed sin? Do you need to forgive someone? Do you need to be forgiven? Maybe you have offended God.
- Are you in His Word? How much time is spent seeking to please Him? Are you speaking to Him? Does God have first place in your life? He won't take second. We can say all the, ya buts, but God deserves full surrender.
- Have you reached out to His counselors, spiritual leaders around you? Are you willing to listen? Or do you dismiss counsel.

Has/Is God said no?

- Don't continue to try and open the doors He has shut. Look at the path He has or is revealing and go that way.
- God knows what is best for us and we must learn to surrender to it. I know it is tough, but He knows what He is doing.

Have you placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ? That is the first step to knowing God, personally.

I often think of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. When Jesus asked Paul, "why do you persecute me, it is hard to kick against the goads." Now, Jesus was challenging Paul regarding him persecuting the church.

But I apply it to my life whenever I kick against God's plan for my life. I hear the spirit say, Cecil, you sure are a stubborn and slow learner. How long will you kick bare foot against the spurs?

It is surrendering time!