

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
15th June 2021

READINGS

How do I know God's calling for my life? How will I know where I am supposed to go and how will God make that clear for my family? These questions I am pondering as I am beginning to explore charges in Scotland.

The idea of God's guidance or calling is not a new one. Through the ages Christians have been motivated and directed by an inner sense of God's desires for them. As Christians we all have callings that God places on our lives. God longs for us to follow after him and serve his kingdom, which is of course one of the callings we all share. It has been clear to me over the years that God has special plans for each of our lives. He gives us gifts, abilities and opportunities to use for his glory. We have the job of discerning those situations and deciding how we will live out our callings.

Some of us are called to nursing, teaching, parenting, hospitality, medicine, engineering or some other occupation or gifting that can share God's love with the world. All believers have that opportunity to be a servant especially when they are not in full time ministry.

⁶They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; ⁸so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' ¹⁰When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

Acts 16:6-10 (NRSVA)

REFLECTION

In our scripture in Acts we see that Paul and his fellow co-workers are guided very directly by God. The scripture tells us they are “forbidden” to speak in Asia and that they attempt to enter other places but the Spirit of Jesus “did not allow them”.

Sometimes, when plans do not work out the way we intend or when a door is shut before we even had a chance to try to open it, we may feel confused at first. How does God lead us and are not all our desires from him? God leads us through our experiences and our inner convictions. God even uses our emotions and our feelings to imprint on us his desires. Yet sometimes we just need a solid “no” from God because we are heading in a direction that may not be beneficial for us. The people, who Paul thought he should bring the gospel to, were different than he imagined. He wanted to go into Asia but those doors all began to close.

Maybe you have been there before. Perhaps you thought God wanted you to start in a particular profession or marry someone you were dating or take on a particular role at work and then, all of a sudden, the doors began to close. Those times are not easy because we do not like to be told “no”. We would all prefer that our initial instincts prove to be God’s plan for us. Sometimes we might even try to force these plans because we want them so much. Yet if we are truly walking with God and asking him to guide us, I believe he will do so. He has always done so for me! Yes, there have been some tightly shut doors and there have been some that God has had to pry my hands from... but always when I seek his guidance, God continues to speak, until I get the message! I am so glad God does not get give up on us!

What do we do in these times when our hopes and dreams are on the line? We keep trusting our God! Paul did not give in even though I am sure he was disappointed. He continued to wait.

I love that old saying “Until God opens the next door, praise Him in the hallway!”. Sometimes we feel like we are waiting for God’s direction and filled with uncertainty about what to do next. As we have seen with Paul, God will give you next steps. You might have to consider “the next right thing” and keep on waiting. In Paul’s case, his next right step was revealed to him through a vision of a man in Macedonia pleading for help. Now in truth I have not experienced God’s guidance in this way and most of us would likely say the same. Our logical minds have trouble with the mystical and we rationalize away many of the ways God might be trying to speak to us. But that does not mean that God fails to direct us. No, there are many ways God helps us to see his path before us.

I find that God speaks to me through people. What they share with me sometimes affirms a direction I believe is from the Lord. God also uses scripture and what I read on a daily basis to teach me. When a theme develops in my life, then I know I am starting to head in the right direction. Circumstances will usually yield clear open or closed doors and opportunities. Finally, God uses my inner peace to give me a sense of direction. It is true that when I seek God he usually confirms and affirms multiple times that I am heading in the right direction. I know this may surprise you, but I need this help because I can be a bit dense!! I often tell God “Please write it in the sky for me or put it on a big sign on the motorway”... these situations do not usually happen! Though, I did once see a big sign on the side of the motorway from a church asking for a new pastor! I did not feel led to go there, but I hope somebody was led there!

If you are like me you might feel a bit wobbly when it comes to discerning God's will in life decisions. That is why I always seek for God to confirm what I believe he is saying to me in multiple ways - and God always does so. Some people might think it sounds like reading tea leaves but that is not at all the case. It comes from a heart that knows I like to wonder and I often cannot trust my own desires alone. Yet the closer I come to God, I find he grows his desires in my heart.

Oswald Chambers writes in *My Utmost for His Highest*:

"The call of God is not just for a select few but for everyone. Whether I hear God's call or not depends on the condition of my ears, and exactly what I hear depends upon my spiritual attitude."

As we see in this above quote by Oswald Chambers we need to be open to God's voice in our lives and by faith we need to be willing to take risks to test those callings.

Sometimes we do not want to step out because we are afraid. We do not think we have the ability or the aptitude for something God is calling us to do. If we did feel confident where would our reliance upon God come into play? Would we not then be depending on our own flesh rather than God's Spirit?

Brother Andrew writes:

"God does not choose people because of their ability, but because of their availability."

Are you available to God today? Are you willing to serve him where you can be of best use? These are the questions before us as we look at a world that is in need. God will supply what we need to answer his call.

Today he may ask you to love someone who is unlovely...will you do so?
Today the Lord may ask you to give when you feel tired...are you willing?
The Lord may plant a dream in your heart that takes years to reach fruition...will you wait?

Yes, we might become discouraged in waiting and it is likely that others may not understand our desire to serve God who they cannot see...but as we listen and look we will see the signs of open doors, waiting hallways and closed windows all around us. We are not alone in trying to discern the plans of our God. He will keep speaking his will for us if we are open to seeking it. He will not give up on us, just like the shepherd pursues the lost sheep. We will find growth and spiritual development in these uncertain times.

It was not easy for Paul to walk into God's calling. In Macedonia it was not too long before he was imprisoned for trying to help someone and sharing God's love. God does not promise us an easy path, but he does go with us on the journey, and he gives us tremendous partners along the way.

I am grateful to have journeyed with you in this past year. I am thankful you have been a part of my hallway as I have waited for the next door to open. The journey is filled with potential for all of us and we are impacted by everyone we meet along the way.

I have some ideas of what God might be saying but nothing certain yet. In faith I am still listening and walking forward and waiting. Thank you for your prayers in this time and I too am praying for you to flourish in God's calling for your lives and for the ministry of South Holburn parish as you walk and wait as well. God will not disappoint us! The plans he has for us are amazing!

PRAYER

Guiding Jehovah,
You provide for our needs,
You plant dreams in our hearts,
You offer us new opportunities...
To serve you,
To love you,
To work for good in the world.

Thank you that we partner with Christians from around the world,
Listening, Hoping, Waiting
Stepping into the unknown
and walking toward a faithful God who has brilliant plans for each of us!

It will not always be easy,
Many times it will be hard and taxing,
But you are ever beside us Lord and for that we are eternally grateful.
Help us to see, hear and respond to your calling on our lives today and always.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

