

The God Who Opens Doors and Hearts

Acts 16.6-15

Sermon Handout

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.” Proverbs 16:9

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’ – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then, vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’” James 4:13-15

“It’s not always easy to see the interruptions in our days as God’s sovereign plan for us, but if we don’t view them that way, we’ll end up frustrated and annoyed instead of useful and grateful. We’ll resent people for interrupting us, rather than looking for divine appointments. Yet we neither created ‘our’ time nor earned it. We cannot keep it, store it up, or take it with us when we exit Earth. The time God gives us on Earth is a gift to be used in service to Him and to others.” Randy Alcorn

“When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.” 2 Corinthians 2:12-14

We can’t always fully see or figure out God’s rationale for how He leads us but we can be assured that He always leads His children in victorious procession.

What do you do with the interruptions and even frustrations that come into your life as you live for Christ?

I. A Very Active Trinity: The Father, Son, and Spirit Actively Direct the Mission. Acts 16.6-10

“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 to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.” Acts 16:6-7

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”
A.W. Tozer

“Clearly this is the triune God’s mission.” Patrick Schreiner

“What a wonderfully different salvation the triune God offers! ... First, if God is not triune and so not essentially loving, then he is not the sort of God inclined to show mercy. Take Allah: in Islam there is no word for ‘salvation; since Allah has none to offer; the closest one gets is the concept of ‘success.’ With Allah, paradise must be earned. Naturally. Second, if the Father had no Son to die in our place, he would have no substitute to give us. We would have to provide the perfect offering for our sin – and that is neither grace nor possible. But the shape of the triune God’s salvation is also beautifully unique...The triune God does what no other could: the Father sends us what is most precious to him, his Son; and the Son, uniting us to himself by the Spirit, brings us back before his Father to share the relationship he has always enjoyed. This God shares himself; we are brought into the very life of this God; we are given the Son’s own Comforter to be our own, and given the Son’s own right to cry 'Abba'.” Michael Reeves

- The Holy Spirit is controlling the direction of the mission.

“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.” (Acts 16:6)

- Jesus is directing the mission of the church.

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

- God calls Paul and Silas to go to Macedonia.

"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."“ The doctrine of the Trinity isn’t optional gear. Instead, understanding and teaching the Trinity is essential to the missionary task, because without our triune God there is no Christian mission ...” Matthew Bennett

II. Embracing God's Sovereignty: God Both Frustrates and Fulfills. Acts 16.6-10

The challenge for anyone seeking to serve God is to be willing to serve a God whose ways are not our ways. We plan. We plant. We pray. We pour ourselves out but God alone gives the success.

Mission isn't about succeeding. It's about submitting. We submit to the One whose purposes and power cannot fail.

- The Holy Spirit says “no” to their plans to travel to share the gospel in certain regions.

“having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.”

- The Spirit of Jesus forbids them to go into Bithynia.

“When they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them.”

- God calls them in a vision to come to Macedonia.

“And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

“We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. We may pass them by preoccupied with our more important tasks, as the priest passed by the man who had fallen among thieves, perhaps—reading the Bible.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Need for Humility:

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” Deut. 29:29

A Life of Expectancy: Remember God is working all things together for the good of those that love Him.

III. A Right View of Our Responsibility: Be Faithful, Flexible, Intentional. Acts 16.11-15

“In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies. They are not uneasy neighbors; they are not in an endless state of cold war with each other. They are friends, and they work together.” J.I. Packer

“Not only does God’s sovereignty undergird evangelism, and uphold the evangelist, by creating a hope of success that could not otherwise be entertained; it also teaches us to bind together preaching and prayer; and as it makes us bold and confident before men, so it makes us humble and importunate before God.” J.I. Packer

Our responsibility is to be faithful, flexible, and intentional.

God's responsibility is to do the impossible... to change hearts.

"One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." Acts 16:14

"And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again." Philippians 4:15-16

Study Questions:

- **Read Proverbs 16:9 and James 4:13–15.**

What do these verses teach about God's control over our plans and daily lives?

- **According to Randy Alcorn's quote**, how can interruptions in our schedules actually be part of God's plan?

How might this perspective change the way you respond to frustrations?

- In Acts 16:6–7, Paul and his companions were **forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to go certain places. What does this teach us about the Spirit's active role in directing God's mission?
- How does Acts 16:10 show that God's mission is **Trinitarian** (involving the Father, Son, and Spirit)? Why is the Trinity essential to Christian mission, as Michael Reeves explains?
- The Holy Spirit said "no" to Paul's plans more than once before opening a new door to Macedonia.

What can we learn from God's "no" as well as His "yes"?

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God."
- What are some "interruptions" in your life that could actually be **divine appointments**?
- In what ways does **God's sovereignty** both *frustrate* and *fulfill* our plans (Acts 16:6–10)? How can humility help us trust His timing?
- In Acts 16:14, we read that "The Lord opened Lydia's heart."
What does this reveal about God's role versus our role in evangelism and discipleship?
- J.I. Packer said that divine sovereignty and human responsibility "are friends, not enemies."
How can this truth encourage you to be faithful, flexible, and intentional in serving God?
- What specific step can you take this week to trust God more fully with your plans—and to stay open to the doors and hearts He might open before you?