

The Spirit Leads

by Chuck Smith

In 'The Spirit Leads', Chuck Smith explores how the Holy Spirit guides believers through life's disturbances and decisions, emphasizing the importance of being attuned to God's direction.

Duration: 1:00:55

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, Acts 16:6-7

Topics: "Leading"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares personal anecdotes and stories to illustrate the idea that what may seem like a curse or inconvenience could actually be a blessing from God. He questions whether God still directs people supernaturally in today's world or if that was only reserved for the early church. The speaker also shares the story of a banker who had a vision of an old man calling him to harvest a field in Panama, leading him to resign his job and become a missionary. The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and listening to the different ways in which God speaks to us in order to follow His guidance in our lives.

Transcript

We turn in our Bibles now to Acts chapter 16, beginning tonight with verse 6. Paul and Barnabas had decided to take a trip and to visit the churches that they had established in their first missionary journey. However, contention arose between them over whether or not they should take John Mark. And it became so sharp that Barnabas decided to take Mark and go to Cyprus.

And so Paul took Silas from the church in Jerusalem and they headed out for the area of Pamphylionol, where Paul had before ministered. And so we read in verse 6, now when they had gone throughout Pergaea and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. From Lystra, Paul evidently, with Silas, went on up, would be north, into the area of Galatia.

Galatia and Pergaea are not cities, but they are areas, sort of like, well you could say that they had gone through Orange County and Riverside County and they decided to go on down to San Diego County. But the Spirit forbid them to go. It's interesting that in the book of Acts here, nothing is recorded specifically of their ministry in Pergaea or in Galatia.

But later on, Paul did write his letter to Galatia, and that would be the different churches that were in Galatia that were no doubt established by them in this missionary journey. So the letter to the Galatians is

sort of what you would call a general letter to all of the churches that are there in the area of Galatia. They were forbidden, it says, by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.

Now this was of course Asia Minor, which was south from them at that point, where in Galatia you would go south and you would go west to get down to Ephesus and to Smyrna, Pergamos, Laodicea. In the book of Revelation of course Jesus addresses the seven churches of Asia. And this was Asia Minor.

Paul was wanting to go down there because this was really a very modern populated area for that time. And many people living in that area. The city of Ephesus, they estimate the population to be some 200,000 people in Ephesus alone.

And so Paul was wanting to go down there and Silas and Timothy was with them now. And yet the Holy Spirit forbid them to go. Forbidden by the Holy Spirit sounds like rather strange words.

The question is, how did the Holy Spirit forbid them? Was it through the gift of prophecy? Now their first missionary journey was prompted by prophecy. Back in the 13th chapter, and the Spirit said, separate unto me Paul and Barnabas, for the ministry wherein I have called them. And so they fasted and prayed, laid hands on them, and the Spirit sent them forth.

And they went out on their first missionary journey. It was directed by the Holy Spirit through the gift of prophecy. Do you suppose that again it was through the gift of prophecy that they were forbidden to go into Asia? Or was it perhaps that Paul was so sick that he just couldn't travel at that particular time? Paul in his letter to the Galatians speaks of how sick he was while they were there.

And the love that the Galatians and the sympathy that they showed toward him in his sickness. He said that you would have, you know, plucked out your eyes for me. Now that's a proverb.

It's a proverb that expresses how deep is your love. I give my eyes for you. It's an ancient proverb that just expresses a very deep commitment, a very deep love.

And so Paul talks about how deep the love that the Galatians had for him while he was there. And through his many infirmities or sicknesses while he was there. If it were that he was physically incapacitated so that he could not travel, he looked at this illness as a messenger of God.

You know, God speaks to us in many different ways. Some ways are very unique by which God speaks to us. It's important that we learn to hear the voice of God in the different ways by which he does often speak to us.

God has many different ways of directing our lives. Sometimes it is by bringing some unexpected thing across our path. It slows us down.

Maybe it hinders us from taking a trip. If I go out in the morning to start the car and the battery is dead, what is my response? What is my reaction? Do I get all upset and say, oh, dead battery, you know, what shall I do? Or say a tire is flat. How do I respond to these kinds of things? Is it with disgust and, you know, this is a terrible disturbance.

I am late getting to the office and I need to be there and got a deal now with this problem. How can I be sure that God isn't speaking to me? Rather than getting all upset, perhaps it would be better that I just listen and say, Lord, are you keeping me from some danger? Is this a blessing in disguise? You see, we

don't look at these things as blessings. We look at them as great hindrances.

Several years ago, I was conducting a Bible study out in Corona. And when I, after the study, came out to the car, the fellows in the study came out with me. And we were living in Newport at the time.

I had to drive back. And when we got to my car, the back end of the car was sort of down. And looked in here was a flat tire.

My right rear tire was flat. So the fellows all rolled up their sleeves and we got out the spare. We put it on and I headed on down toward Newport in Santa Ana Canyon there on the freeway.

And about the Weir Canyon turnoff, just before I got there, I heard this pow, poof, poof, poof, poof, poof, poof. It's about 11 o'clock at night. Kay is waiting for me to get home.

She said, honey, try and get home early tonight. Yeah. Now, if you have that kind of problem on the freeway, forget trying to stop traffic to help you.

It doesn't happen. They won't. So, I started hoofing it to where I knew there was a public phone, about a mile or two down the road.

And I called a tow truck in Orange to come and to get me. And walked on back to the car. And of course, here you are.

It's, it's late. You know, and I didn't have a cellular phone then. I mean, goodness, nobody did.

I mean, it was, and, and you're just thinking, oh my, you know. I don't need this. And as I'm waiting for the tow truck, you just sit there, just sort of saying, Lord, why? Here I am out trying to serve you.

I'm teaching a Bible study. And, you know, I'm going a hundred miles an hour. And, and, no, not literally on the road.

I mean, I just, I'm sorry, I'm very, very busy. And why, Lord? And as the tow truck came around and turned on his lights so he could, you know, get my car up on the truck, the Lord spoke to my heart and said, this is the reason. I want you to talk to the driver.

So I had to get in the truck and he brought me into Orange. But I had a chance to witness to him. Found out he was a backslidden Christian.

And I said, oh, I, I don't like this. I said, you know, the Lord has to give me a flat tire way out here in the middle of nowhere just to talk to you, you know. I have to suffer because you need witnessing too, you know.

But how many times I think we miss what God is seeking to say. Because we don't stop at those moments to listen. And where we might be looking at something as a curse, unbeknownst to us, it might be a blessing.

God might be keeping us from a severe accident. And so I've learned to not really be disturbed by disturbances. Because I sort of expect to be disturbed.

And if you're expecting to be disturbed, you're never disturbed. The only person who is disturbed is the person who never expects to be disturbed and disturbances disturb him. But I've learned when something

comes along that isn't, you know, a part of the plan, to sort of tune in.

Lord, do you have something to say to me? Do you want me to go in another direction? Are you stopping me, Lord, for a reason, for a purpose? Is this the way the Lord kept Paul from going to Asia? If it is the way that God used to keep him from going to Asia, the sickness that he experienced there in Galatia, then Paul learned to see the hand of God in every situation in his life. And he took it, the illness, as a messenger of God to him. So however the Lord directed Paul, he wasn't able to go to Asia.

Later on in his letter to the Romans, he said to the Romans, but as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Paul was being led by the Spirit of God. We wanted to go down to Asia, but the Spirit forbid us from going to Asia.

As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. As you look at your life, can you say of your life that you are being led by the Spirit of God? That's one of the proofs that I am a son of God. Do you seek to be led by the Spirit of God? You know, I don't like it, as an employer, to have employees come to me and tell me what they're going to do.

I like them to come and ask me if it would be alright if they did this or that. There's a big difference between presumption, coming and saying, well I'm going to go over here and I'm going to do this and that and the other, when you're an employer, better that you say, I've been thinking, you know, would it be alright if I, and to get permission, rather than telling what you're going to do, seek permission for what you're going to do. I think that a lot of times with the Lord, we just tell the Lord what we're going to do.

Lord, I'm going to do this, that, and the other, and I want you to bless it. Rather than seeking and saying, Lord, you know, this is what I, you know, I'm going to do this, that, and the other, and I want you to bless it. Rather than seeking and saying, Lord, you know, this is what I, you know, I'm going to do this, that, and the other, and I want you to bless it.

Rather than seeking and saying, Lord, you know, this is what I, you know, I'm going to do this, that, and the other, and I want you to bless it. Rather than seeking and saying, Lord, you know, this is what I've been thinking about, and I wonder, is this your leading, and is this what you want me to do, Lord? And if so, I'm willing to do it, I'm ready to do it, and thus seeking the guidance of the Lord. As the scripture said, if in all of our ways we acknowledge Him, then He will direct our path.

But, you see, the directing of our path is dependent upon our acknowledging Him. After they were come to Mysia, then they assayed to go to Bithynia. Now, Bithynia was north from them.

It was the area around the Black Sea. Now, this was another very populated area at that time. And so, not being able to go south, down to Asia Minor, they figured, well, we'll go north, up to Bithynia.

Lot of people up there, good opportunity to share the gospel. And ultimately, the gospel was shared in Bithynia, and there were many converts, many Christians in that area of Bithynia. But, Paul tells us, the Spirit would not allow them to.

So, once again, they were stopped by the Holy Spirit from going now to Bithynia. Our plans are not always His plans. Many times, God chooses to close the doors on our plans.

When God closes a door, it's important that we not try to break it down. That I'm gonna go, you know, no matter what, I'm going to Bithynia. No, if the Spirit doesn't allow us to go, if God, by some means, closes

the door, then it's best to just look for the door that the Lord is opening.

Jesus said to the church of Philadelphia, I have set before you an open door which no man can shut. And so, I look, someone said, well, how do you know the will of the Lord? Well, I look for the open doors. I look to see what door the Lord may be opening, the opportunities that God might be giving to me through open doors.

Again, we don't know by what means the Spirit would not let them go to Bithynia, but I find that there are those people who are so determined to do something that they ignore all of the stop signs, all of the red lights, and they usually find themselves ending up in the ditch. And then they say, why would God allow this to happen to me? We usually end in big trouble when we insist on our own way rather than seeking His way. So, passing through Mysia, or passing by or through, they came finally to Troas, which of course is the ancient city of Troy.

It is there on the Aegean Sea. And here, while they were at Troy, Paul had a vision one night, a vision of a man from Macedonia, a Greek, and he was calling him to come over and help him. Now, this leaves no question as to how Paul was being directed, at least in this point.

The Lord was directing him through a vision, a man of Macedonia, calling him to come over and help. And so, it was leading him supernaturally. Now, the question is, in these days in which we live, can God still direct people supernaturally? Or was that something that was just reserved for that particular historic time of the church? There was a banker in San Jose, Mr. Edwards.

I didn't know him personally, but I did know his son Leland Edwards quite well. And he accepted the Lord, really committed his life, spent a lot of time in prayer. And one evening, while in prayer, he had a vision of an old gray-haired man standing in a field holding a plow.

And the old man in his vision called and said, come and help me to harvest the field. And somehow he knew that the man was in Panama. So he resigned his position as vice president of the bank.

And he went to Bible school, and then applied to the mission board to go to Panama. And God blessed his ministry there in Panama. He developed one of the largest Protestant churches in the city of Panama.

One day while he was there, he received a phone call from the hospital. And they said, Dr. Edwards, we have an old man here in the hospital. He's dying.

He's sort of in a semi-coma state. He keeps talking in a language we can't understand. But he doesn't seem to have any friends.

He has been a missionary down here, and would you mind coming and visiting him? Dr. Edwards said that when he walked into the man's room, it was the man that he had seen in his vision. The man that was calling for him to come and help. He was a Cumberland Presbyterian missionary.

They really couldn't find much concerning his work there in Panama. But yet, Dr. Edwards said it was a very moving experience to see this man, that he had seen in a vision, there in the hospital, and to realize that he was the one that was praying, God send someone down to help harvest this great field down here. And in responding to the call of God, as I said, Dr. Edwards did develop one of the largest Protestant works in Panama.

Yes, God can in these days still direct and guide a person supernaturally. I don't think the problem is on God's side. I think the problem is on our side.

It isn't that God isn't speaking. I'm afraid it's we're not listening. And that our lives are so full, that God just doesn't have the opportunity to speak to us.

Well, as I say, I think He is speaking, I just don't think we're hearing. So, Paul now is being led by the vision, a clear direction now of where they're to go. No, can't go south, Paul.

No, can't go north, Paul. Go west, young man. And so, Paul, having had the vision, they immediately made passage on a ship that they might go over to Macedonia, to Greece.

Who was the Macedonian man that was calling Paul for help? Of course, we really don't know. But some of the commentators have suggested that it was Luke. The interesting thing in this narrative, is that at this point, Luke did join Paul's missionary team.

It is here that Luke begins to employ the plural personal pronoun. Notice in verse 10. And after he had seen the vision, immediately, we, so now Luke is speaking in a personal pronoun, we endeavored to go to Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel, called us to preach the gospel unto them.

Now, up until this point, Luke has been telling the narrative in a third person way, but now he begins to speak personally of his being a party with Paul in the taking of the gospel on over to Macedonia. And so, determined or sure now that the Lord was calling them to go on over to Macedonia. It's great when we get a clear direction from God.

That we know, this is what God wants. It's always a great feeling. Now, Luke tells us the route they took.

Therefore, loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course, or the wind was behind us, to Semothracia. Semothracia is an island up there in the northern Aegean. It's about 20 miles long.

And the next day to Neapolis. Now, Neapolis was the port city for Philippi. Philippi is about 10 miles from the port of Neapolis.

And so, they made this in just two days. Now, there is always a strong current in that area that runs from west to east. They were going against the current.

So, they evidently had a good wind behind them. Because they were able to make this journey in just two days. Later on in the book of Acts, the 20th chapter, they made this same journey again, only reversed.

Where they were going with the current. They came from Neapolis to Troas, but it took them five days to make the journey later on. But when God's in a thing, He expedites it.

And so, here they are. Two-day journey. They're making good time from Troas to Neapolis.

It's exciting how well things go when finally we get in tune and in line with God. You know, the Bible tells us that the eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the entire earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are perfect toward Him. Now, Paul is in tune with the Spirit.

No, you can't go to Ephesus. You can't go to Asia Minor. No, you can't go to Bithynia.

Paul, Macedonia. And now, in harmony, in tune with God, we see how God is with them and how things really begin to go. Verse 12, And from there they went to Philippi, which was the chief city in that part of Macedonia.

It was a Roman colony in which, or by which, those that were born in Philippi were automatically Roman citizens and had all of the privileges of a Roman citizen. The city of Philippi was named after King Philip II, who was the father of Alexander the Great. Historically, the city was known because of two great battles that were fought there.

The first battle pitted Augustus and Mark Antony against the Republican Army of Rome under the leadership of Brutus and Cassius. In that battle, Brutus and Cassius were the victors. There was a second battle.

Again, Cassius and, let's see, in the second battle, Brutus and Cassius, no, in the second battle, Cassius and Mark Antony defeated Brutus with his Republican Army, and as a result, Brutus committed suicide. But it is here that the Gospel was first preached on European soil. Today, the ruins of Philippi are still quite impressive.

We'll be visiting Philippi this coming spring when we take the cruise in the Aegean and we follow the footsteps of Paul. The last time I stood in Philippi, I was deeply touched. With standing there and looking at the ruins and realizing that Paul the Apostle stood here.

Paul the Apostle brought the Gospel to Philippi. It was here that Paul was imprisoned. But it was here that the Lord, through an earthquake, opened the prison doors to Paul and the jailer was converted.

You know, when you stand in these places and then in your mind, you go back and you think about the things that happened right here in this area and the Gospel first coming to Europe and this is where Paul stayed for a certain period of time, preaching and all. It just is a wonderful experience, hard to describe. When you allow your mind to just rehearse the wonderful things from a spiritual standpoint that were done in this area.

And today the present city of Philippi is a non-descript kind of just a little village, but the ruins of the old city of Philippi are really quite impressive indeed. But here they begin sharing the Gospel as we'll get in our next lesson down at the riverside where a group had gathered for Sabbath worship and we'll see the beginning of the work in Philippi and of course later on Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian Church a letter from the prison in Rome that dealt with rejoicing and all in the Lord. Father we are grateful for the Gospel that was brought to the European continent for the tremendous effect that the Gospel ultimately had on our Western civilization.

Lord even today we are still beneficiaries of the ministry of Paul so many years ago. But how we benefit today from the things that you taught him from his letter to the Philippians and his other letters Lord and the influence that the Gospel had in bringing to us Lord this appreciation for freedom and liberty that we have wherever Christianity is taken. And now Lord we just pray that we might be open to the Spirit that you will be able to lead us Lord.

And when things don't go exactly as we have planned when disturbances come help us Lord to just be sensitive to start listening in case Lord you're wanting to send us in another direction. Help us Lord to just sort of be free to move however you might direct us Lord. And we ask that you'll give us an ear to hear

when the Spirit would speak to us in Jesus name.

Amen. Shall we stand. The pastors are down here at the front.

We encourage you tonight. Don't rush off. Come and spend some time in prayer.

Maybe the Lord wants to direct and lead your life tonight. Give him an opportunity listen for him to speak to you. It may be that you're in need of direction.

It may be that things have happened that sort of have you at this point sort of in a state of wondering where do I go from here. Maybe the Lord has closed the door on you and you're needing now to find out just what God is saying and what God is wanting to say. I would encourage you just spend some time in prayer.

Fellows are down here to pray with you if you desire just want to come and just pray. That's fine too. But just wait upon the Lord and trust in the Lord with all of your heart.

Lean not to your own understanding but in all of your ways just acknowledge him and he will direct your path. I will serve you because I love you. You have given life to me.

I was nothing until you found me. You have given life to me. Heartaches broken people ruined lives are why you died Calvary your touch is what I long for.

You have given life to me. You have given life to me. God bless you.

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