

Sermon: From “They” to “We”

Text: Acts 16:6-10

Introduction:

Many books have been written through the years, trying to answer the question: How do I know what the will of God is for my life?

Our experience tells us that there is certainly no easy answer to this question. God RARELY “speaks” to us with undeniable and obvious clarity. Discerning the will of God is typically a process that requires great sensitivity and openness to the small, still voice of God in our hearts. God has a unique way of working through the various circumstances in our lives, coupled with truth from the Word of God and advice from wise counselors.

I’ve mentioned through the years that my father was a pastor for over 60 years. He passed away eight years ago following a severe fall and complications from diabetes. His life was mightily used by the Lord—and he possessed a tremendous spirit of wisdom and insight.

One of the things my dad would say with respect to making big decisions (such as a job change) was that we need to sense both “the push and the pull.” The “push” has to do with the prompting of the Spirit in our hearts—that it might be the time for some sort of change. This might come from an unsettled feeling, or a lack of contentment. Perhaps things have gotten to the point where you “just know it’s time to try something new.” All of these sorts of thoughts and feelings can represent a “push” in your heart.

A “pull,” on the other hand, is an obvious open door. It’s a job offer, or an opportunity that can come to us from out of the blue. It’s someone saying “we want you.” It’s a series of circumstances that work out in such a way that it’s just too hard to ignore. It’s a clear sense.

The key to this “formula,” though, is that we have to experience both the “push” and the “pull” operating at basically the same time. We might be feeling a “push,” but if there’s no “pull”—then we need to hang in there and stay put. And there are times when a “pull” can come our way—perhaps an unexpected job offer or a favorable recommendation. But if we’re not experiencing a clear sense of “push,” then it’s probably not the time to act.

Our passage of Scripture this weekend illustrates this principle perfectly. (Acts 16:6-10)

Last week, we saw how the Lord was assembling the right team around Paul to launch out on the trip that would change the world (getting the right people in the right seats on the bus). Silas was a perfect co-pilot—and young Timothy signed up as the apprentice. This morning we see how God has one more key person to add to the team. But more than that, God the Father gives Paul the clearest and most obvious “pull” that any of us could experience (more on that in a minute).

- I’m curious if you have seen this principle of “push” and “pull” at work in your own life?
- Have there been times in your life when you’ve experienced a “push” but not a “pull”?
- Is this principle of “push” and “pull” at play in your life right now?

Examination:

- Read **Acts 16:6-10**

- We see in verse 6 that “Paul and his companions” traveled through the region of Phrygia and Galatia. Who are his companions at this point in the trip?
- Why does the region of “Galatia” sound familiar to a student of the Bible? Where else have we heard of Galatia?
- When we think of Asia, we now think of the far East—specifically China and the various nations that surround China. But in the first century world, Asia was the name applied to the area we now think of as western Turkey. (*The word Asia originated from the Ancient Greek word Ἀσία, first attributed to Herodotus [about 440 BCE] in reference to the Persian [Iranian] Empire, in contrast to Greece and Egypt. It originally was just a name for the east bank of the Aegean Sea—now in western Turkey.*) Paul had it in his mind to visit Asia...but he didn't. Why not?
- Verse 7 describes two other locations—Mysia and Bithynia—regions that are both in what is now northern Turkey, along the border of the Black Sea. Verses 6 and 7 tell us that Paul's first intention was to head due west (into Asia). His next thought was to head due north (into Mysia & Bithynia). It might seem like a small thing—but the reality is that Paul was thwarted by God from going to two places that he INTENDED and wanted to go. Has this ever happened to you? Has God ever kept you from heading in a direction that you thought was the right way to go? How do we feel when God shuts us down like this? Can we tend to get angry with God when things don't go as we plan?
- Proverbs 16:9 states: “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.” What do you think this means?
- Who specifically kept Paul from going west? Who kept Paul from going north?
- How do you think the Holy Spirit/Spirit of Jesus communicated with Paul?
- Having been prevented from heading west or north, Paul could have either turned around—or headed on a diagonal path to the northwest (which is what he did). This northwest pathway led Paul directly to the coastal city of Troas. Does it appear from verse 8 that Paul knew WHY God wanted him in Troas?
- Verse 9 is a VERY IMPORTANT verse in the overall course of this trip that changed the world. What happened? Where is Macedonia? Do you think Paul had it in his mind to go to Macedonia? How significant is it that Macedonia is in a completely different continent (Europe)? Who was it that was actually GUIDING this journey—Paul or God? Who is it that actually guides our lives?
- If the urge (vision) to go on this missionary journey could be viewed as the “push”—can this cry for help from the Macedonian man be viewed as a “pull”?
- Up to this point in the narrative, the language that is used is: “Paul and his companions.” How does that change in verse 10? What pronouns are used by Luke—the author of the Book of Acts? What does this indicate?

Application:

How is the “push” and “pull” of God at work in your life right now? What is God calling you to do that you're not doing already? WHO is God calling you to “go to”? Are you listening?