



## **Useful to the Lord – Part 8**

### **Whatever Comes Next**

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Well, I trust you would agree that as a real converted regenerate Christian, your desire is to please the Lord, you want to be useful to the Lord. We pointed it out in this series previously, and we just underscored the fact that's a core desire for real Christians. And I trust that you have in your Christian life increasingly sought to put more focus and attention and time into doing that well, doing it efficiently, wanting to represent Christ in this world by what you do, what you say, how you position yourself in ministry, how you sign up to be a part of things that you know will maximize your effectiveness where you are sharing the gospel, where you have relationships built, all the things that we as Christians are motivated to do and we do it in increasing measure. And I'm grateful to be a part of this church where I see a lot of that high level of commitment to serve and please the Lord. And it's a great thing

The problem is in life, in this fallen world, we see so many things that will get in the way of doing that. I'm not talking about just things that make it less appealing to us or I'm not just talking about the kind of diminishing returns or the boredom you might see in doing a particular ministry for a long period of time. I'm talking about the fact that there are circumstances that sometimes shut down opportunities that we really thought God would utilize me to do something good for him. I often think, well, this is where I think God will utilize my gifts or my talents, the things that he's invested in me and he'll maximize my fruitfulness here. And we start to tie my sense of usefulness to the Lord to my plans. And then sadly, what happens is things get in the way, circumstances shut those down and we are frustrated, obviously, because there are things that we didn't plan. We didn't want. We didn't forecast. We don't care for it. They might badly hurt and we're tempted to retreat.

A lot of Christians have sidelined themselves from being effective and useful servants of the Lord because they have been frustrated, hurt, disillusioned, discouraged, because circumstances have shut down what they thought in their life was Plan "A" for usefulness for the Lord. We always need theological tune-ups, but I would say the reason there are useful servants to the Lord who are unfazed by that kind of circumstantial shut down is because their theology is really crisp and it means something to them and it affects them in their thinking, their disposition and their decision making. They are people who have a real anchored concept of who God is, who they are and how he affects the circumstances of life. And we need that.

And so today I want to try to kind of fine-tune our theology by looking at a passage of Scripture that I think puts this on display and fleshes it out in real-time in someone's life, in Paul's life in particular. So if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Acts Chapter 13, and let's see if we can't learn what we see on display here in Paul's life as a template throughout this series of being useful to the Lord. This is the last of the 13th Chapter of Acts, as you'll see, obviously, as you look at it. It doesn't mean it's the end of our series. Our series, "Useful to the Lord," is going to continue on for a few more installments into the next chapter. We've



been several weeks into this, eight I think it is now. It's a 12-week series, so we'll continue to look at the rest of Paul's first missionary journey when we pick this up next time.

But for today, let's figure out what's going on here at the end of this chapter remembering the context. The context is Paul's first missionary journey. He leaves the headquarters of the church that had moved north, it didn't mean there weren't Christians left down south in Jerusalem, but up to Syria, the key city of Antioch, Syrian Antioch, we might call it. He gets on a boat and he sails across the Mediterranean Sea to the island of Cyprus. He works his way across with Barnabas and Mark to the edge of that, the western edge of that island. He has a successful evangelistic encounter with the proconsul of Rome, Sergius Paulus. Then they set sail and head up to the mainland north of Cyprus to what today is modern-day Turkey. In the New Testament times, the first century, it's called Asia Minor. They sadly lose John Mark and all that. He goes back to Jerusalem. But we have then Paul and Barnabas heading up to the highlands in what we know of in Scripture as southern Galatia, the key city again, another Antioch, this one we call Pisidian Antioch, in the region of Pisidia.

So Pisidian Antioch, they're there. And as we studied there in the synagogue and they're preaching, Paul is preaching because, of course, he is a seminary-trained doctor of theology in the Old Testament, if you will. And here comes someone who really is more educated and has more pharisaical experience than anybody in the synagogue. So they give him the microphone, so to speak, and he gets up and preaches. And we took several weeks to look at his sermon and what he has to say. We go from temporal realities regarding God sending delivers to the ultimate reality, eternal realities of God sending Christ as the ultimate deliverer to free us from the penalty of our sins, he preaches Christ, and there is a threefold response you remember last time.

We saw the inquisitive who needed more information and Paul's coming back the next Saturday to give them that information. We see some people that responded positively to Paul and Barnabas that began to follow them, which of course, was a reminder that they were now in the grace of God because they became followers of the Messiah. And then there were the leaders of the synagogue who said, "We don't like your being here. We certainly don't like it because you're gathering so many people. We were reluctant to give you the microphone in the first place, but now you got more people come into the synagogue than ever before. So we're going to close the doors to the synagogue. We're going to tell you to take a hike." They start to contradict what Paul had said in verse 45 and then they started to revile him. So as we saw last time, it degenerated into this ad hominem attack on Paul and Barnabas.

Then we saw them throughout that passage and then certainly in leading into this text in verse 46, we see them undeterred. That was the title of our sermon last week. They're undeterred. They continued to do what God had asked them to do. Today, we see how that filters its way into the next few weeks of their lives. But let's take a look at this in verse 46 as they continue to speak out boldly and let's learn what they have to say here and in so doing hopefully pick up some great theological lessons that'll keep you from benching yourself or being discouraged when some doors of circumstance close in your life and you think maybe God's not going to use me the way I thought he was going to.



Verse 46. I'm going to read from the English Standard Version verses 46 through 52, to the end of the chapter. It reads like this, "And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly," I love that, undeterred, "saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first.'" In the book of Acts, we saw that the gospel is going to be in Jerusalem, headquarters of Israel, Judea, the breadbasket of Israel, Samaria, we have the northern tribes there intermarried with the Assyrians some seven centuries before Christ, and still we got to reach them. They're reading the Old Testament law. "And then the ends of the earth." We're going to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth. And we know that that was the plan.

Certainly, the great commission was to make disciples of all nations, that was flowing out of the promise of the Davidic covenant that Christ was going to be a king, and he was going to have the extent of his oversight go all over the world. And it goes back to the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12, where God had promised through Israel, through his descendants, to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. So everybody from, you know, the people from every tongue, tribe, and nation, a select group from all those people, are going to be blessed through the promises God made to Abraham.

So all of that is right in line with what even Jesus taught, right? In John Chapter 4 when he is dealing with the northern tribes, what's left of them, they intermarried with the Assyrians. When he said to the woman at the well that salvation is of the Jews, the primacy of Israel, the primacy of the Jews, salvation was coming to them. And even Paul writes later, back to the Romans, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it's the power of God unto the salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." So we understand this necessity to preach the gospel there and not only made sense theologically, it made sense personally to Paul, didn't it? Think about it.

You are a Pharisee of Pharisees, born of the tribe of Benjamin. You're studying at the feet of Gamaliel. I mean, talk about being a perfect missionary to Jewish elites. I mean, that was Saul of Tarsus. And yet that door is slamming shut right here. They are "thrusting it aside" in the middle of verse 46. Since you thrust this word aside, it was necessary that we came to you first, but you're going to throw us to the side and then here's a kind of underhanded dig here. The word of God that is spoken to you is the thing that can save you, but you don't want it, and therefore you are "judging yourselves unworthy of eternal life." Right? You don't want Christ. If you don't want Christ, you don't want the life that he brings. So I know that's not what you think. You don't think that you're unworthy of eternal life, but you clearly are doing that by rejecting the Christ of the Old Testament and all the fulfillment of everything the Messiah was supposed to be.

And if you're going to shut us down, if you're going to close this door, then "behold," which is the word for "look," look. Figure it out. Take a look at what's going to happen next. "We are turning to the Gentiles." And then he quotes Isaiah 49. This makes biblical sense, "For the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" Now this is volume two of Luke's composition. Volume one was the gospel of Luke and in Luke Chapter 2, you might remember when Simeon took up



the child in his arms in the Temple Mount when he was being presented there on the Temple Mount, he quoted this very same passage in Isaiah 49, that the Messiah who was coming was going to be a "light for the world, for the Gentiles, that he can bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

So that was always the plan. And so the Gentiles were always a part of God's soteriological plan to see them save people from every tongue, tribe and nation. And that is just what Paul's saying. I guess that's what we're going to be doing now in your city, of the city in Antioch. But it wasn't going to last long as we'll see, at least not in this city, but when he said that, and you can imagine the doors of the synagogue are closed now. They don't want him to preach there the next Saturday. And now all the people hear Paul's response, which is, "Listen, if you're going to shut us out and you don't want the word of God, you're going to thrust aside the messianic promises of Christ and you don't want him, well, then we're going to turn to the Gentiles." And the Gentiles threw their hats in the air, verse 48.

"The Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord." We'll receive it. And they did receive it. "And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." So God had people there in the town. They needed to hear it. Paul's going to turn his attention with Barnabas to these Gentiles, and they're going to start being saved because God had been doing work. He had predestined them, obviously, before the foundation of the world to be saved, these select individuals. And they were being saved because Paul was bringing the message to them, which is the means by which God is appointed for them to be saved, "And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region," verse 49. So this is super successful, even though it wasn't Plan "A." And I think you need to feel that. That was not Plan "A." You are the completely perfectly prepared missionary to the Jewish people. I mean, that's who you are. You are trained in all the customs. Now you got to go and talk to people, some of them in the city in Antioch and in Galatia that they have no interest in the law. They don't know the law. They're not under the law of Moses, and he's going to have to go now and adapt to that and try and contextualize even who he is to speak to those that are not under the law. That's hard and it's not Plan "A," that it's his Plan "B," but it's working out. Plan "B" is looking pretty good.

Although, verse 50, he's got his opponents, "But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing." OK? It's always helpful if you're leading some kind of revolt against a group of people, get the women's ministry involved. They're not here. A lot of them, so I can talk about the dear gals of our church. Nevertheless, they go, "I know what we'll do. We'll get the key, you know, high women of high standing and high rank. And let's get the city council involved," right? You get those two against you that should be enough to put Paul and Barnabas out of business. "The leading men of the city," you have the women of high standing and they "stirred up," this is a hard word now, "persecution." Persecution. That's not a fun word. Talk about slamming a door close. It's slamming a door close while you have your hand in the door jam. This is hurting now.

And we're going to see how much the expression and the carrying out of that persecution is as he moves from Iconium to Lystra to Derbe. And we'll see more of these towns in Asia



Minor detailing some of the expression of that persecution. But here we just have the summary word. They "stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and they "Ekballo," they drove them out of the city. Ekballo is the word I often talk about because it's such an illustrative word in Luke Chapter 10, when we "pray to the Lord of the harvest that he might," I guess a literal translation is, "thrust forth workers into his harvest." "Ek" means "out." "Ballo" is like the word "ball to throw." And we often talk about the fact we should be praying for God to thrust forth missionaries, you know, not only in foreign countries, but even right here locally. We want to see people thrown into the mission field. Well, this is not used in a positive sense, obviously, they're throwing him out of the area.

Here's your mission field. I come here to do missions. Now we're going to throw you out of the mission field, right? So we're praying for God to send people IN and throw them into the mission field. And now these people are throwing him out of the mission field. That doesn't feel good. And that was not Paul's plan, right? Paul did not say, "I'm going to go there and hopefully I'll get thrown out." But he was thrown out, not just of the city in Antioch, but Pisidia, right? He drove them out of the district. Paul responds, verse 51, "They shook off the dust from their feet against them and went on to Iconium," which picks up Chapter 14, his travels there.

This is an old, by the way, custom of the Jews, often when they were traveling back to Jerusalem, entering into Israel, from the foreign countries where there were all kinds of idolatry and stuff went on that did not honor the Lord. They would either shake out the garments that they were wearing, knock off the dust from their feet and then come into Israel. If you've been to Israel before, even today, fly on El Al into Tel Aviv, sometimes you'd see the Jewish people just erupt in applause when the wheels touched the tarmac. And, you know, there's that ceremonial kind of like, "Yay, we're back in town," and even some devout get down on their knees and kiss the ground when they come back to Israel. And there's a sense here of I'm kind of shaking off this ungodly culture walking in now, that defilement, into the Holy Land.

And this is the picture you're hundreds of miles now from Israel. This is not about the land in which you're at. This is about the cultural response here, the individual response to the gospel. They're rejecting the gospel and so there's this sense of, "Fine then. You don't want it. You really are condemning yourself. You're judging yourselves unworthy of eternal life. And we're turning away and we are ceremonially showing that we're not responsible here. You are making your own bed. You're going to have to sleep in it." And I know that sounds pejorative, that sounds mean, but it's clearly a sense in which they realize the consequence of rejecting the message.

And by the way, I should say it's not because he is like we would be, many of us, at least, and that is bitter about them as a group of people. "I can't get the Pharisees," well, we don't have any Pharisees here, probably, but the leaders of the synagogue, "to listen. Well, then I'm just mad at them. I'm not even going to go to the Jews anymore." Because that's what it sounds like, doesn't it in verse 46? Well, look at Chapter 14 verse 1, the very next verse in the next chapter, right? No, no. They go back to the synagogues. He's not giving up on the people,



he's not becoming prejudicial about a group of people. He's not prejudging them. Matter of fact, we learned later in Romans Chapter 9 and 10, Romans Chapter 9 verses 1 through 3, and Romans Chapter 10 verse 1, that he's breaking in his heart for their salvation. He rhetorically says, "If I could just be accursed," you know, in other words, "I could just give up my salvation for the sake of my kinsmen of the flesh," these Jewish people well then that's what I would do because I'm so desirous of seeing them saved.

So he's not giving up on the Jewish people. But in this particular circumstance, "I came to a city in Antioch to share the gospel. The door has closed. So what am I going to do? I'm going to go to Plan 'B,' which I think you can argue was not something that in the depths of my mind or heart I felt like I was prepared for, it wasn't my plan, it wasn't what I wanted to be persecuted and thrown out of town. But I'm going to do whatever comes next as long as it's biblical." And that's what takes place here. And it doesn't take place with a bad attitude because I've left one verse off that I want to now read in the bottom of the passage, verse 52. "And the disciples," of which Paul and Barnabas were part and they were leading a growing group of disciples, "they were filled with" angst and frustration and disappointment, and they lick their wounds. No, "they were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." I just want you to think about that.

Do you want to see a paradox here? Look at verse 50. "Persecution drove them out," "inciting." These are hard words against them, and even their response seems like, "Oh man, you're angry. You must have marched off angry, kicking the dust off your feet." No. "They're filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." So this is about a particular attitude when God closes the door that you perhaps have thought this is the way that God will utilize my life. And I know this can be broadly applied, but I want you to always tie it back, at least in this sermon, to your idea of what it would be for you to glorify God in your circumstances. And it may be that you thought, "Well, I will glorify God, you know, in my life. I'm going to get married and have kids." Maybe God's close the door on one or both of those, right? Maybe you're struggling with infertility. "Like, Well, that's how I thought I was going to glorify God. Raise up children like arrows, shoot them into the next generation," and now the door closed. Maybe it's marriage. God's close the door on that. Maybe that's a circumstance where you thought you...

Maybe you were going to, you know, use your house for ministry and you were hosting a small group there, but you got foreclosed on, or your owner, and you were renting it, has now sold it out from under you. There's no way you can afford that. So now you're in some small apartment, you can't... "I thought I was going to glorify God this way. I thought I was going to utilize my influence this way. I was trying to reach my neighbors for Christ, and then we got yanked out of that situation. Or I was really starting to make progress in being a light and salt in my workplace and then I got fired and I got a pink slip and now I'm out and I'm done with my job here."

I just want you to think about the closed doors that circumstantially take my plans that I think, "God, this is how I'll be useful to you. I was going to serve in this ministry. I was going to lead in this particular organization." You know, when I think of my profession, you're always going to be the pastor in this place and serve them for years. And then the door slammed shut. And



that's hard. Disappointing. Disappointing. Do you want to retreat? You want to retreat. Do you want to bench yourself? You want to bench yourself. Do you want to do what you can to sit around and heal? I get all of that.

But I'd like us to learn from this particular passage. Let's start in verses 46 and 47. Here they are saying since you did this and the door is closed we're turning to another like Plan "B" here. And I want to let you know it's within the purview, it's within the realm of what Scripture calls us to do. He didn't go to the synagogue because he goes, "I'm going to go win Gentiles to Christ." He went to the synagogue because these are the people who should be the first to hear the gospel. They just rejected him. But he goes, you know, it's not outside the bounds of God's will for me because I see it in Scripture to reach the Gentiles. So I'm going to turn to the Gentiles now. So Plan "B" is a biblical Plan "B."

Because the end of the passage colors the whole thing, I want you to see this as a positive disposition toward the change in plans. And I think it's going to require certain theology to do that. A clarity about theology. But number one, let's just put it down this way, it's a very positive word isn't the it, first word I've already printed for you, to "embrace." I want us, number one, to "Embrace Biblical Change in Plans." When I have plans and they're changed, and yet the change leads me now to see that there is a biblical Plan "B." It wasn't my choice. It wasn't how I thought God was going to use me. But I think I can see this is a biblical alternative to what my plan was, that I am saying, embrace it. Now, you got that? Was that clear?

OK, listen, here's the problem with preaching this to this church and not our grandparent's church. If I was preaching this two generations ago these are the kinds of people who found a girl at 17, 18-years-old. They got married and they stay married for 60 years. They went and got a job and they stayed in that job and retired there, you know, 40, 50 years later, they were the kinds of people who moved into a neighborhood, into a house, and they stayed there for generations. Their kids grew up and they left, and they were in that house for their entire life. They went to a particular church. They settled in. They got a ministry there teaching a Sunday school class, and they stayed with it for decades. That's how it used to be as at least a cultural norm. And particularly among Christians, it was even a higher rate of fidelity and tenacity and long-suffering to that because they saw themselves as Christians and they were committed. They were going to put their hand to the plow and they weren't going to look back. They were going to stay and be committed.

I'm talking about now closed doors, and you might be saying initially, I'm just saying for those of you who are tempted to think, "Well, that's what's happening to me right now. A door is closing. And that's what's justifying my move into this other arena. That's why I'm changing churches. That's why I'm moving in this area. That's why I'm changing jobs. That's why I'm, you know, doing this new thing." I just want to say I have to at least contextualize our cultural norm, which is people just switching everything in their lives when they get bored, when it gets difficult, because they're restless, because they're not content. These are underlying problems in people's lives that are driving them to change, and they always want to trade up to something else. But that's not how it used to be.



And all I'm telling you is before you blame a change in your life on a closed door, make sure the door is closed and it's going to be closed because it's really closed. Do you think there's any choice that Paul has to be here in the synagogue preaching the next Saturday? No way. The door is closed. It couldn't be more clearly close. So Paul does not just kind of move from one thing to the next because he's like a lot of the modern American Christians who just like, "Well, I did that for a while, I don't know, I think this might be better and the grass is greener over here."

Think about my profession. Here's a spiritual task of taking a group of people in a particular locale, shepherding and pastoring them and teaching them. I mean, the average preacher comes to a church and stays from three to five years, and then he's gone. I mean, that may be helpful for all your dumb illustrations and jokes that you can reuse on a new group of people, but it's not the way it used to be. Right? You used to have to have 30, 40 years of sermons because, you know, these people know when you're repeating your sermons because you're there long term as their pastor. Now, do doors close? Yeah, they close, right? They close. And it may be that a pastor is going to have to go from church to church. But I just want you to think about the fact that of all people, we ought to be committed to settling into wherever we think God would have us be useful and to maximize that usefulness with a commitment that lasts.

And so I don't want you to see a sermon about closed doors and open doors, the will of God, going, "Yeah, great, fantastic. That justifies my restlessness, my discontent, my wanting to always look across the street to see if the grass is greener." So don't let that happen. It's just a caveat to make sure that you don't misunderstand this sermon. I don't want to justify that kind of lack of commitment and the kind of restless hearts that don't lead to being faithful and committed. The door was closed. Don't say the door is closed just because you find that there's another door open down the hallway. OK? You've got to say the door is closed. Now, are there times to walk out of an open door? We'll look at that in a second. But let's at least just start with the fact that what we're dealing with here is a real closed door. Right?

Now, the second thing that we think about embracing these biblical changes in plans, is that the open door that you're going to walk through next, the Plan "B," right? It needs to be a biblical open door, right? I don't want to be someone who has an opportunity that I say I'm going to take, but I take all the things that God has invested in me and I say none of that is going to be utilized. I'm going to turn my back on the giftedness or the investment that God has made, and I'm not going to walk through that door. I'm going to walk through this door because, frankly, sometimes when a door really is closed because this is going to be easier, this is going to be better. This is going to pay better. This will be better weather, whatever you might be thinking about.

Because here's the deal. If you look at Paul moving to the Gentiles, I just want to think as I tried to kind of give some color to this one when I read it, I don't think this is easier for Paul, right? He knows he's fulfilling the biblical plan in the sense that within God's plan we've got to have people reaching the Gentiles with the Jewish Messiah. But he was the Hebrew of





Hebrews. He was the Pharisee in training, the up-and-coming next great thing in Judaism. I just don't think he's thinking, "Well, I'm the ideal guy to be a Gentile missionary." So I don't think this is a door that he's looking to go through simply because it's something that fits his core desires. I think it's something he's going through that he says, this is truly a biblical alternative. This door is closed. "Here's a biblical alternative to what I was doing. And I guess God is going to use me in this new way, because look at what the Bible says this needs to be done as well. So I'm going to do it. It's not what I thought. But it's what I know needs to be done and what God said he would do. So I want to make sure I'm glorifying God here."

By the way, that's all about this positive word "embrace." Do you think Paul liked being in prison? I don't think so. Do you think he thought, "Well, this is really what I planned. If I can just get locked up in a Roman prison, that would be awesome." Right? Whether it was the prison in Philippi or the prison in Rome. When he writes from Rome, he writes the book of Philippians, for instance, he talks about being bound in chains. He talks about being a prisoner, but then he turns this and says, "Well, I know what my mission ultimately is. I want to glorify God. I want to be an ambassador and I want to be useful to the Lord. I want to use my gifts for him." That's his underlying passion.

He had a plan. It ended him in prison. That's not the plan that he had. But the Plan "B" could be embraced because he could sit back and say things like this. "Hey, you know what? I want you to know that my imprisonment has really led to people getting saved. The gospel is being heard and being proclaimed here among the whole imperial guard. People are coming to visit. And not only that being here, I'm providing an example under duress in prison to other Christians to be emboldened to share the gospel. Really, I just want to tell you this has ended up being a plan I can embrace because it is a biblical thing for me to continue to do evangelism. I just happen to be now not a foreign missionary endeavor, it's a prison ministry. So you know what? This is where God has me." He embraces it. He says, "To live is Christ." So I'm excited about him embracing Plan "B." Because why? Because it's still under the purview and instruction and principles of God's word, and I'm going to do it. It doesn't lock his gifts in some backroom, he continues to utilize them where he's found.

Let me turn you to two quick passages from the Corinthian letters. First Corinthians 16. A short passage, but I'd like you to get your eyes on it. There are all kinds of things circumstantially that do change our plans. He gives a head nod to that, I suppose, in verse 7 by using the phrase, "If the Lord permits." Look at verse 7 First Corinthians 16. "I do not want," he says, "to see you now just in passing." Corinthians 16:7. I don't just want to blow through, you know, Macedonia. No. "I want to spend some time with you," I'd like to go there and stay there, well "if the Lord permits." Do you think he knows about closed doors? He knows about closed doors. He's experienced them. He experienced them in Pisidian Antioch. "But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost," the feast of Pentecost. That's longer than he thought he was going to stay. Why? "For a wide door for effective work has opened to me."

That's where I want a period, right? I want the next open door, the Plan "B" for my life to be easier than the last plan. Right? Plan "A" that God slammed shut. But look at the next words here. "And there are many adversaries." God's not trying to make it easier for you. He's trying



to make you effective, and he may move you from this particular place to that particular place, to this job, to that job, from this ministry, to that ministry. Right? That may happen, and it may be harder in the new circumstance, right? But you've got to say I'm going to embrace it because it's a biblical change and I know the biblical change of plans is a biblical change that always is going to involve difficulty. I know that from Genesis Chapter 3, they're going to be thorns in the ground and there are going to be thorns in my ministry and there's always going to be difficulty when I try to serve God, evangelize in any way, help the body of Christ. This is just going to happen.

So I'm looking for biblical opened doors when door "A" closes, and it doesn't mean it's easier. It may mean that it's difficult, but I'm looking for the open opportunities. He has an opportunity because the Gentiles are going to receive him in Antioch and listen to him, and they do start listening to him and he sees that clearly.

Second Corinthians Chapter 2, you're not far from it. There are doors that are open that you should not walk through. When a door closes, you look and say, "OK, God, that didn't work out. I'm here now," or "I'm looking at what are my options now." Look at verse 12 of Second Corinthians Chapter 2, 12 and 13. "When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was open to me in the Lord," Troas is in Asia, "my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and I went on to Macedonia," into northern Greece. So he's in Troas, I got a lot of opportunities here. I got an open door. It's a "door that was opened in the Lord." So I mean, it's like, these are godly things that can be done, but I'm not going to walk through the open door because I don't have Titus here.

I know that sometimes we quote that without any context or any understanding of what's going on in the passage. We say, well, not every, you know, open door is a call, and I get that and I'm 100% behind that. I just want you to know why here. The reason he wasn't going to sit here and go planting more churches at this particular time, he's writing to the Corinthians and he wants to know in the church that he calls himself the father of, he's the church planter. He says, "You got many guides in Christ, but only one father." "I am ultimately the biggest authority you have, not only as an apostle, but as the church planter. I led you guys to Christ. I baptized some of you. I was preaching the gospel to all of you. And look what God did through me. I need to know how this church is doing because this is a priority, a logical, wise biblical priority. I need to know about you guys." And the guy who was the liaison between Corinth and Paul was Titus.

So he's waiting to hear. He doesn't have information on Titus. He doesn't want to open another can over here of ministry and another box over here of ministry without dealing with the ministry priority that's over here. I need to hear from Titus and because I didn't have the information about you guys through Titus, I left this open door to go over here. So sometimes we have to lean into a door. In this case, he's got to do more work to figure out if there's a way that he can fulfill his obligation to a primary priority. And so the open door that God has for you that's another thing you can fall back into in ministry, or evangelism or whatever it might be to glorify God. I'm just saying because it's open doesn't mean it's God's will for you.



You've got to prioritize where God would have you be useful, even though sometimes the doors are closed, the doors are closed.

So you move on to whatever is next. You do whatever is next, the most biblical, useful employment of your gifts and your skills and what God has invested in you to do. Then you embrace it. And I just can't help but show in our passage here and though it's an argument from silence, right? There's no moaning and groaning, and I can say just the opposite because it ends with joy. I just know that Paul's just very matter of fact about this. I can't do this. So we're going to do this instead because it's a biblical this. So Plan "A" didn't work out. That's a biblical Plan "A." This is a biblical Plan "B." I'm going to go with Plan "B" and I'm going to do it without fretting. I'm going to do it without the fear of missing out. I'm going to do it without looking at what could have been and grieving over lost opportunities.

Now I know, and I don't want to get in my own life, but I know what it's like to have a door closed and you sit there and you're tempted to say, "I want to look back at what could have been." But you've got to say there's no time for that. I'm sorry. There really is no time for that. Jesus says, you know, "we can only work while it's day. Night is coming, when no one can work," right? You got to get to work, work, do the work. And we don't have time to fret in our therapeutic culture. We don't have time to sit around and heal for long periods of time. Right? Get over it. Get going. Door one closed. It's jammed your knuckles. Put some Band-Aids on, wrap your fingers and move into Plan "B." Do it like Paul did, decisively.

He embraced the second plan and then look at our passage, Chapter 13 verse 49. Man, they loved it. They embraced him. There was a welcoming party. "They rejoiced," and then people started getting saved. "As many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And they look back months later and said, "The word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region." Southern Galatia was filled with people responding to Christ. So they look back and see the confirmation that Plan "B" was really God's Plan "A" because they saw the fruit of it all.

Now, when the door closes and your fingers are hurting because the door just shut and you're going, "This is not what I planned. I wanted to serve the Lord with these plans, and now I'm stuck with Plan "B." I'm just saying at that moment, before you can assess it from a future perspective, you've got to have the faith and confidence and trust to say, I know that God, if he closed the door and has another door open that's a biblical open door, I will trust him for the fruit that's going to come out of it. I put it this way, number two, "Trust God for Godly Results." And I got to say trust God for godly results because the results aren't my life is easier now, it's better, I'm richer, I'm healthier, I have more fun, it's more pleasurable. That's not the goal. The goal is God's good. God's results, godly results.

And what does God want to do? A lot of stuff that may not result in my pleasure, convenience or comfort. So. I want that, and I want to be able to look back on it and see it and rejoice in it. But then I also want to, when it's happening, be able to look forward with faith and go if God shut the door and it's not what I wanted, that wasn't my plan, I guess Plan "B," Plan "C," Plan "D," whatever it is that I'm thinking I'm on, was nowhere on my radar, I want to be able to say,



"I going to trust God," because that's how God works. I can look back in redemptive history and see how God works.

Let me throw three passages at you. How about this one? Genesis Chapter 50 verse 20, Genesis 50:20. For 13 chapters we've seen the drama of Joseph and Joseph was rejected, do you want to talk about being run out of town, he was run out of his family, thrown in a pit, then dug out of the pit and sold as a slave. That was Joseph. And then after all the machinations and all the drama and all the chapters and everything he goes through at the end, you know what happens. He ends up taking this small clan in a drought, brings them down to Goshen to Egypt. They grow into over two million people in the end result of Joseph's leadership, bringing him there. He's risen to the second place of leadership. And these brothers, when dad dies, they're afraid. Now you're going to take revenge on us. And he says, listen, stop it. I know you meant it for evil. This is the verse now, Genesis 50:20, "But God meant it for good."

There he could see it because he could look back on a number of years and see in a decade or so, "Look what God did. I know that God did this even though it hurt. This was not my Plan 'A.' Plan 'A' was hanging out with my brothers and growing old in Canaan. But instead, I ended up having to learn another language. I had to grow up in Potiphar's house with a crazy wife who he was married to. And I end up here now having to meet my brothers who sold me into slavery. But I realize it's all because God is working out his plan."

So here's the deal. I got to be able to have the belief that when I'm early on in the process of being thrown into a pit and the door is closed and I got driven out of something I thought was God's plan for me to glorify him, I got to know this: God has a plan. He's going to work that plan, and it's going to be for his good. All these three passages, by the way, all hang on this last passage, which I guess I didn't quote upfront. And that's Romans 8:28. Romans 8:28. Right? "Where we know that God works all things together for good to those that love him and are called according to his purpose." HIS purpose. God has a purpose. He's the chess master. He's moving pawns around. Has he moved you to some spaces you didn't think you were going to be in? You thought you were going to have this and you didn't have that. You thought God would use me in the church this way. And he didn't. You thought you were going to be involved in this particular thing and he shut the door. I get it, and it's frustrating.

But before you take a seat and get out of the game, look around. God has moved you to a place because he's going to bear fruit through that because he knows the game better than you do. He has a strategy and a perspective that you don't. And he's making moves that you couldn't make and you wouldn't make. But he knows, just like Joseph never would've gone to Egypt, he would have stayed with his brothers, but instead God used him. And by the way, I always quote Romans 8:28 and you do too. Do you know what Romans 8:27 says by the way, Romans 8:27? It says that "the Spirit of God intercedes for us," here's the phrase, "according to the will of God." So the Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God.

Do you know what Joseph was probably praying, "I want to be reconciled to my brothers. I don't want to be sold as a slave. I don't want to be in Egypt." He was praying according to



what he thought the plan should be. He was praying for Plan "A," a restoration of Plan "A." God had Plan "B" and guess who was praying in line with Plan "B," which is really God's Plan "A?" The Spirit because he knows how to pray. We don't know how to pray. We pray things as best we can. But the Spirit of God is going before the Father saying, "here's what really we need in this particular person's life." Because the triune God knows how to play chess and you're not very good at it. You're not even that good at checkers, right? But God is really good at chess.

I can't talk about the sovereignty of God, which is what this is all about. There's no way I can rejoice in God's good godly results in the future in the midst of my pain and the closing of Plan "A" unless I believe in the sovereignty of God. And I look at Joseph, you know I'm going to quote Joseph. This one's harder, though, Job Chapter 1. So I got Genesis 50, Job Chapter 1. Job Chapter 1 is a man that if I were to ask you, why did Job have all of these problems? What would you say? That's a hard question. Why did Job have all these problems? And when I say problems, capital "P" here, big problems, right? Think about it. I mean, you can think about some of the interesting conversations he had with his wife and think, "Well, bad marriage." Right? You can think about his property being stolen by the Serbians, who come in and steal all of his economy. His bank accounts are drained, right?

But you got to start where we think about his children that he deeply loved and was interceding for in his life and praying for. They were all killed. This is big, he's buried his children. His body now for the rest of his life is going to be potted with marks from the boils that sprung up on his body. He was terribly ill with a terribly painful skin disease. All of that happened, I just want to ask you, within the sovereignty of God or outside of the sovereignty of God? Of course, within the sovereignty of God. We know that.

But then I ask, "Well, why?" Because if I ask why was Joseph sold as a slave into Egypt, you'd say, "Well, I get that because within a matter of years, Joseph's able to say, "I know God meant it for good." What kind of answer did Job get? You get to Job 38 through 42 and you think, at the end of the book, I don't know. God says, "Shut up Job." I mean, that really is what happens in the book. "Sit down. Shut up. You don't know." All God does in that book is say this: "I'm the chess master and you're not." That's really what you're left with. So why did all that happen? Well, I guess we could go back to that, you know, kind of boardroom meeting God was having when Satan goes, "look at Job, it's only because he honors you because of what you've given him." And God says, "Fine, take it all away."

And he does win a little argument, I suppose, with Satan. But really, what's the purpose? So you've got to say, I guess ultimately, it's some kind of writing of the book that ends up being some hope for us that we can believe in the sovereignty of God, that he's in control, even if Satan's attacks upon us for some greater good, although I don't know exactly what those are. So God closed, you know, door "A" for you. I get that. Does that hurt? That hurts. If I say why did God close that door? If you still don't know, 10, 20 years later, I'm just saying, don't sweat it. Really don't, because God always knows. And maybe on the other side, and I trust it'll be true when I'm glorified and I have the mind of Christ, First John 3, "I'll see him and I will be like



him." I'm going to look back and be able to see the other side of the tapestry. Sometimes I'm left with the raggedy side of the tapestry and I don't really know what the picture is.

If you're doubting where you are on the board, I'm a pawn, I'm a pawn, a pawn, a pawn. Well, maybe you're at the top of the ranking. How about if your Christ? I'll give you one more passage. I gave you Genesis 50. I gave you Job 1. Let's give you Acts 2. Acts Chapter 2, Peter is preaching about Christ. Christ could not be more loved, right? He's the second person of the Godhead. And it says in that passage that Christ was now beaten and he was tortured and he was executed. And then Peter adds this line, "according to the," I love the way it's put, "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."

So I'm thinking, OK, does that look like Plan "A?" No, it doesn't look like Plan "A." Matter of fact, I look through all the prophetic promises about the Messiah. About 95% of them, I mean, 90 plus are about the Messiah ruling and reigning on the throne of his Father, David. It's about him having all the accolades and the glory and the wisdom and the riches of the world. They're all coming and bowing at his feet. That's Plan "A." Ask Simeon, ask Zechariah, ask John the Baptist, ask everyone from the Old Testament, "What about the coming of Christ?" It's Plan "A." Here's Plan "B." I mean, even in the garden, Christ himself, "let this cup pass from me." You're thinking this is not the plan. Oh, it is the plan. It's God's plan. It doesn't feel like the plan. It doesn't feel like the plan in the emotional trauma of Jesus in Gethsemane. And it certainly doesn't look like the plan of the disciples. They're all running away when he's crucified.

And yet the Bible says this is the definite plan, and because of that, keep reading the sermon of Peter, it's all parlayed into the fact that you don't have to die for your sins and be cast out into outer darkness. His death is Plan "A," right? His rejection is Plan "A." His crucifixion and beating is Plan "A." So I'm not thinking about the fact that God does not parlay my difficulties, my disappointment, my dejection, my rejection, my firing my expulsion, my foreclosure, whatever it might be, my divorce, whatever it is that might have been happening to me, that I did not plan and I did not choose and here comes the door slamming on my fingers.

All I'm saying, if you don't think that's going to be parlayed into what God is going to work out for good, then we don't understand the examples of Scripture. We can see forward into eternity with hope and a God who promises to work all things together for good. We can look back and redemptive history and look at the pictures of individuals like Joseph and Job and most importantly, Jesus, and say, "We know how God works and I can trust him for good and godly results, even if it wasn't my Plan "A." We got to get there in our hearts. And that may help us with the bottom of this passage, verse 50. I mean, the bottom of the passages is joy. "But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went on to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." Contrast paradox, do you see it? Incited, persecution, drove them out. They go fine and we're done. Breaking off of relationship here. And then they go, "Yay! We're joyful."



Which, by the way, do not define joy, as I tried to share in our Summer Fruit series. Remember when we were baking out on the courtyard, Summer Fruit? We talked about love, joy, love, joy, peace, patience. We looked at the fruit of the Spirit, joy. We said, do not try to define joy, and I gave you like eight different biblical examples we ran through. This is not just some little feeling in my heart somewhere, some little slice and slip, but I guess I'm OK with it. That's not joy. Joy is happiness. Joy is a positive disposition. Joy is this is good that this has happened. Joy is joy, right? And if you want to call it a word that we don't like to use in biblical context, it is true, it's called happiness, that I'm happy.

I'm not happy that Christ died on a cross, but I'm happy that Christ died on the cross. I'm not happy that Joseph was the guy that I'm cheering for in Genesis Chapter 47 and 48, but I'm glad, I'm happy that he was. I'm happy that doors have closed on my life, that I didn't want to close because I see that God is a God who's planned everything out and is going to produce good in it. And I know that Plan "B" is really God's Plan "A" so I can choose to be joyful.

Matter of fact, let's put it that way. Number three, I need to "Choose Joy Amid the Disruptions." Number three, choose joy amid the disruptions because you can put disruptions in quotation marks if you like, because they're not disruptions from God's perspective. It's not a straight line in my mind on the chessboard. I get moved way over here. But you know what? God is doing exactly what he's doing, and I can say God is going to work this out for good. Therefore, I can choose to be joyful in this. By the way, notice where the word joy comes from. If you were writing this, you might, if you are the super spirituals among us, certainly you would say, "they were filled with the Holy Spirit and with joy." You're going to go, "That's the way it ought to be," because you're going to see the connection.

Matter of fact, you're going to see the subservience of the virtue to the person. You're going to say if they're filled with the Spirit, then, just like you taught in the summer Pastor Mike, it'll be the fruit or the evidence of the Spirit. But that's not the way this passage is arranged. "They're filled with joy and the Holy Spirit." I'm not saying there's a dependency on the Holy Spirit filling them because they chose to be filled with joy. But I am saying just to think logically throughout the Scripture, how often is joy commanded? A lot. And I know you think you can't command this, right? You can't command me to feel something. But I can tell you you can make a decision to be joyful. That's what the Bible says. And I'm not saying because it's lesser than happiness. It envelops happiness. You can choose to be happy that in the midst of your life, even though there are things that have disappointed you and discouraged you and you're tempted to back out, you got to say I can be happy about the Plan "B," the Plan "C," the Plan "B" because it's God's Plan "A."

Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice." That is an imperative command. Rejoice. And Paul says that while he's sitting in prison and he chooses joy. He sits there, by the way, in Philippi singing with Silas in prison, choosing to be joyful and express his joy to God. How about this, James Chapter 1? "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials." Think about this. "Count it joy." This is a mental perspective that you say, I am going to consider this a joyful thing. I'm going to rejoice in this. So I know there's an active component to this, even though the way you see a coupling with the words Holy Spirit,



you think it must be a passive thing. Is there a passive element to this? There is. There is a passive element to this, but the major element to this is the fact that you were deciding up front.

That's why I chose the word "joy." Matter of fact, had the words been turned around in the text, I might have chosen a different word to start this point with. I might have focused more on you ought to deepen your relationship with the Spirit so you're going to have joy as a product. Joy is a byproduct, but it is also something you have to choose and aim to do. And I've already proved that by a few quotations from the text. I mean, it should be without any question in James Chapter 1 verses 2 through 4. Is there a passive element? Yes. I don't want to in any way diminish that.

As a matter of fact, let me quote for you First Peter Chapter 1 verse 8. First Peter Chapter 1 verse 8 talks about and ends with this. I'll just give you the final line and then I'll go backwards. "Rejoicing with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. That's a lot of Bible words." But listen again, "rejoicing with joy that is inexpressible and full of glory." If you just start to unpack some of those words. Really? Wow, that's big. I'd like that. That's a good disposition. And I'd like to have that disposition. But it starts with this, "though you've not seen him," Christ, "you love him. And though you do not see him now, but believe in him, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."

So I do know this: that my connection to the Godhead, in my love for the Godhead, in my harmonious relationship with the Godhead as a Christian, I know one of the byproducts, as we taught last summer, is the fruit or the expression or the outworking or the byproduct of joy. And I want you to think about that. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, you know the list. But that second one, joy, I know that that is an outworking of the promise of God's Spirit active in me.

Matter of fact, I've talked about that in quotations, which I'm not big on quotations, but I talked about a sermon, I think it was from Romans 2 that Jonathan Edwards was preaching about the fact that the principle of joy resides in us because the Spirit resides in us. Even Lewis' quotes about the fact that "if you want to be warm, you better draw near to the fire." There's something about the source of joy, which ultimately is a God that I'm in harmonious relationship with that does something in my perspective. It's the ability to be joyful when things are not the way I planned them because I'm good with God and God's good with me.

By the way, you can be a Christian and still have issues in that regard. Two passages real quick. First Thessalonians Chapter 5, Ephesians Chapter 4. First Thessalonians Chapter 5 talks about the fact that I should not quench the Spirit, talking to Christians now. And here's the context. You could say that as a general statement, but he goes on to talk about despising prophetic utterances. In other words, when someone gets up and tells you what the Spirit says, in this case, we have it codified in Scripture, the principles of Scripture. We read the Bible, we read a good, legitimate, rightly divided Christian book, you hear a good biblically expounded sermon, when you hear those things if you don't embrace those things, if you're not accepting those things, he uses this word earlier in the book of First Thessalonians, he says,





"You have to "Dechomai," you have to embrace it. And he says that about them, they welcomed the word, it's translated, I think in First Thessalonians 2, to embrace the truth of God. The author of this truth is the Spirit.

Well, you're going to be copacetic harmonious with the Spirit. And guess what you get? You get the outgrowth of that in this thing called joy, love joy, patience. So I don't want to quench the Spirit, and the other passage was Ephesians 4:30, which is I don't want to grieve the Spirit, to grieve the Spirit. If the Spirit of God is manufacturing this, I'm choosing to do it, that's the active part, and I'm passively receiving the product of the Spirit, being in sync with the Spirit, is the fact that the Spirit of God... Give me a second here. I took a vacation. I'm coming back. The beaches were warm. It was awesome. Got a suntan. This is the part we edit out. Ephesians 4:30, that's what I have.

The relationship with the Spirit that I'm harmonious with is in that particular passage, the context is that in that passage, think about this now, he goes on to say, you've got to be in sync with your fellow believers, that you're forgiving one another, you're patient with one another, you're forbearing, you're forgiving each other as Christ has forgiven you. The problem there is, I know, at least in context, I know it's broader than that, you can grieve the Spirit and quench the Spirit in a lot of ways. But if I don't have a forgiving heart toward my brothers and sisters in Christ, I can't think I'm going to have joy coming from the product of the Spirit and not going to be in sync with the Spirit. Just like I can't think I'm going to be in sync with the Spirit from rejecting the things that the Spirit has taught and that he wrote in the word.

So if I think about the fact that they were filled with joy, that was a decision they made. But it was also a byproduct of the relationship with the Spirit because they were filled with the Spirit. And to say you being filled with the Spirit means your harmonious with the Spirit, which I know this, they're receiving the truth of God, and they're in sync with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They're forgiving each other. They're patient with each other. They're kind toward one another, they're compassionate with each other. So those could be a check on this. Well, I'm trying to choose joy in the midst of Plan "B." Well, you're not going to have that joy if you're still bearing a grudge against the people who shut the door in your face. Was Paul? No. In the next chapter, he goes right back to the synagogues again. In Chapter 9 of Romans, he continues to say, my heart is breaking over their loss. Choose joy amid the disruptions.

It's about theology, I said, right? We want in our theology to understand and believe in the sovereignty of God. That means you've got a propped up understanding of reality because God has revealed truth about himself. The last day of the year you'll hear Auld Lang Syne sung, right? Remember that old song? You hear it every year. Nostalgic about the end of the year, it's about old times. And it was written by a Scottish lyricist in the 18th century, Robert Burns, and in the writing of this song he reminds us about how to look at the past, letting things go, you know that. It doesn't matter. What matters is apparently Steinbeck, John Steinbeck, was a fan of Robert Burns because Steinbeck 150 years later, he writes a book called "Of Mice and Men." Some of you have read that, many of you have read that.



He lifts that title, Steinbeck does, from another song, a verse, a poem that Burns wrote about mice of all people. Matter of fact, he called the poem "To A Mouse." And it's clever and insightful, and that's why it became popular hundreds of years later in Scotland because he was clever and insightful. He writes about a mouse and a mouse that is busy in activity and its observational poetry. And he speaks about the fact that he sees the mouse and he's so industrious. He's working so hard. He's gathering food to get through the winter and talk about him grabbing pieces of corn. And all of that is interesting and fun. It kind of gets your mind in the mind of the mouse.

And then it goes into talking about how the mice have these plans that are so easily foiled and disrupted by all kinds of things. How easily his home is destroyed by the plow. How easily his stuff that he has stored up is taken and stolen. And it's like all of his plans can so easily fall apart. And the second to last verse in that poem, that's where we get the famous line that Steinbeck liked. And it speaks of the "best-laid plans of mice and men." Now this is a modernized version because the Scottish version for the 18th century has got old Scottish English, but the updated words, "the best-laid plans of mice and men so often go awry and leave us with nothing but grief and sorrow." And so it's a sad poem about the fact that this little mouse, he's just scurrying around doing his thing and he's got plans and the best-laid plans of mice and men, right? He starts to identify how human beings are the same way. It's just amazing how circumstances can just destroy our plans.

The last verse of Burn's poem says it'd be better to be a mouse, though, because at least the mouse instinctively and his little mouse brain has had his mouse plans destroyed, but all he can think about instinctively because he's a mouse and not a man is all he can really think about is the present. So he just goes back to trying to rebuild, scurrying about his activity. He didn't fret about it. He says but look at us as human beings, right? We look at all the hopes we had based on our plans that have been crushed and look at the woe and look at the pain, the sorrow is compounded. And then we look forward to the things that we had planned and now they're gone, right? The pain of looking forward. And that's how Burn's poem ends, it's a sad little poem.

Let me add some correction to Burn's perspective on his poem to the mouse. That may work for non-Christians, but it does not work for us, right? Because I'd rather be a man than a mouse, because my view as a Christian man is not just looking to the past of when my hopes were built on a plan that did not come to fruition and I'm going to live with the disappointment of the plans that never came to be. But I have the ability as a Christian to look based on redemptive history back at how God uses Plan "B" in his sovereignty to be Plan "A." And I can look to the future of the promise based on a God who says one day you'll be able to look from eternity's perspective at the other side of the tapestry.

So to Burn, I would say this: you're not looking far enough backwards and you're not looking far enough forwards. And I guess you couldn't if you're not saved because real Christians, they want to please the Lord and they realize this, that God is sovereign and the best laid plans of mice and men, I know they often go awry, but that's not the plan that directs my life. That's not the plan that will ultimately bring glory to God. It's the plan that I'm willing to trust



God for the good to come out of. That I know the change that he's going to bring circumstantially, I'm going to embrace. Closed doors? No problem. Let's go to the next thing. Whatever comes next, as long as it's biblical, and I will choose to be joyful in the midst of it and not lick my wounds or regret things that could have been or look back with nostalgia what I wished and hoped would have been. I look beyond that, both backwards and forwards. I'd much rather be a Christian man than a mouse, that's for sure.

Let's pray. God, give us more faith and trust and confidence in your sovereignty that you're a God in charge of all things. That you work as Ephesians 1:11 says, "Everything after the counsel of your will." That in your sovereignty, it extends to the fact that we've had the door slammed in our face, we've had jobs that we thought we would be in for the rest of our lives go away. We've had relationships that we thought would work out for decades that didn't. We've had health expectations that I'll serve you with a healthy body for all my life and it's not there.

God, there are so many things we bank on, our money, our position in a church, our focus on a ministry, our ability to think straight, even in circumstances of life and seasons of life that then get taken away by injury or difficulty, and God its Plan "B" for us, but let us trust you that you're a God that's in those changes and that you are going to "work good for those who know you and are called according to your purpose." And that we're your servants, we're your pawns, we're willing to be useful to you wherever you plant us and we'll choose to be joyful and filled with your Spirit as we seek to gain perspective, the perspective that we need to have, particularly as plans change, and it seems like in our day, they're changing much more rapidly than they ever have before. So let us anchor our hope on you. I pray.

In Jesus name. Amen.