



## **Wisdom's Toolbox – Part 3**

### **Discerning God's Will**

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Well, I think you would have to admit that it would be reassuring to know that what you're doing with your life right now is precisely what God would want you to be doing with your life. Not generally, but precisely. That would be reassuring, would it not? To know I'm doing precisely what God wants me to be doing. Now, I know we all like to assume that we're right smack dab in the middle of God's will. But it behooves us to stop every now and then and ask, "Well, but are we?" I mean, are we really? I mean, are you right in the center of God's will, right where he wants you to be?

I know that can be an anxiety-filled question. Right? That can add some pressure. That can be a paralyzing question if you think about it long enough. And I'm not here to try and remind you that, you know, you should approach this with some worrisome anxiety-filled attitude. I don't think discerning the will of God should be like that, but I don't want you to default to what so many of us default to. And that is I'm just going to live my life, do whatever I feel is best, and then I'm going to look back and say that was God's will. I mean, a lot of people think that way. I mean, "I'm going to figure this out and just do what I think is right. And then just because I'm a Christian and God is sovereign, I just trust that was God's will."

We should want clarity. I mean, we should want clarity. I should want to know that the job that I'm in is the job that God wants me to be in, that I'm taking the opportunities that God would have me take advantage of. That I'm, you know, joining the right company or I'm being a part of the right teams, or I'm being involved in the right path and I'm going to the right school, that I'm dating the right person, that I'm going to marry the right person. Those are good decisions for us to say, I want to be making sure this is right and we want clarity in these things. And I understand that and we should want some clarity in those things.

And so we go to our Bibles and we open our Bibles. We say, okay, what kind of reassurance can I get about my pathway when I open the Bible? It gets really hard because all these narrative texts start telling us that, you know, when Moses was out there in the wilderness working for his father-in-law and God wanted to make it clear to him where he ought to be working, you know, here comes this burning bush that's not consumed and the voice comes out and he gets clarity about where exactly he should be. Or the children of Israel, the leaders of Israel, when should we take these people and move from this particular camp to that particular camp? We open our Bibles and all of a sudden now we see God's providing them with this big, giant pillar of cloud. And when it moves, they move. And if it's nighttime, if they're supposed to move at night, that is a pillar of fire. It moves and they move.

Or if I'm a king in Israel and I'm thinking is this the right time to go against this enemy? Is now the time to launch this attack? Well, I've got this high priest here who works at the center of Jerusalem, and he wears this breastplate. And on it there are these things called the urim and the thummin, whatever those are. There's not a lot of information but I know this. It helps me know what God's will is, whether it's time to attack or whether I should wait. I mean, if I'm



Joshua and I've got a bad actor here in the army and he's done some subversive things and we need to figure out who that is. Right? I try to identify with him, but it's hard, too, because all of a sudden now God tells him to cast these lots and figure out which tribe and which clan and which family. And there he is, Achan, that's it. My will is to tell you this is the specific guy. Go search his tent.

I mean, Peter trying to figure out what to do next in his missionary endeavor. And God brings down this vision and the sheet and all this stuff and it's like, now it's a Gentile, he's a Roman. Matter of fact, when I'm done with this multimedia presentation, they'll be guys downstairs who are going to be waiting for you to go travel up to his city and go see him there in Caesarea and share the gospel with him. Oh, to have that kind of clarity about God's will. Right? That would be nice. I mean, it always makes it more frustrating, more anxiety. Well, I don't have that kind of clarity about the decisions that I face.

Well, these are important people, right? Moses and Peter and, you know, Joshua. I'm just a normal person here in the 21st century. And maybe there are important people in this day. And maybe when some Supreme Court justice who names the name of Christ prays for wisdom about a decision, God is there working on that with him. But, you know, I'm trying to figure out whether I should sell my car now or not. It's like I won't bother him with me with that. You know, I can see God just fluffing that. That's not important. But is it? I mean, really, is there a sense in which we should say the decisions of our life even down to like where I should invest the next season of my life or what I should do with this particular thing that I've gotten, you know, in front of me. Does God care about that?

Well, I would say there are so many things in the Bible that remind us that he does. I mean, he gets very specific about the fact that his attention isn't elsewhere because he can only focus at one thing at a time. Right? God is a God that knows everything. Even a bird, Jesus says, falls from the tree, it doesn't fall from that tree apart from him knowing. That the hairs on your head are numbered. I mean, that's a lot of specificity. We don't even go to that detail. But God does. He's got the stars named. I mean, that's just an amazing thought that God is caring about the details. Yeah, well, maybe it isn't for us to be so concerned about, you know, every situation. We should think through, be smart, make wise decisions. And yet we read in the Bible all the time. Right? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and then he'll make your paths straight." Commit your work to the Lord. That was Proverbs 3:5-6, by the way, if you didn't go to Awana when you were a kid.

Proverbs 16. Here is a God who says, "take your work, commit it to the Lord. He'll establish those plans." But you've got to lay this before God. There has to be some sense of wanting to know what God wants. We should be trying to "figure out what is pleasing to the Lord," to quote Ephesians Chapter 5. I should want to know that. Now, I shouldn't be paralyzed by it. But I shouldn't be sitting around either when I read a passage like the one we've gotten to today in Acts Chapter 16 and say, well, you know, if God wants to close the door, he's going to do it in a very dramatic, clear and undeniable way. Sometimes it's not like it is in this passage. Matter of fact, I would argue it's not. The visions that we see they're not on every



page of the text. Matter of fact, from the time Moses writes the Old Testament in the 15th century B.C., all the way up till the New Testament times, it was 3,400 years of biblical history. We only have 18 examples of this, like here's the vision and here's what you ought to do next. This miraculous vision.

I don't think you should be sitting around waiting on Tuesday afternoon for a vision to figure out whether you should take that job offer or not. There needs to be, though, an acknowledgment of God in all of your ways, whatever that means. It's an interesting word, "Yada" in Hebrew, that passage in Proverbs 3. I need to know the Lord in all these situations, I need to have a sense, that's what yada means, "to know," I need to think about and know what God is about here in this. Now God is going to give us this thing, and the means by which to figure these things out. It will not be as dramatic as we see here in Acts 16. But Acts 16 is there and so is the burning bush in Exodus 3 to remind us that these life decisions are important and therefore we should not just plow through life without thinking about it. We should acknowledge the Lord at every crossroads, even if it's a small decision. We ought to think about what would the Lord have me do here. And the Bible gives us all of this information, including the narratives of Scripture, to be able to hone in on and hang on to this thing called wisdom, that we can apply it in situations to make sure that we're saying, I do think this is what God is saying.

And it's not just a subjective feeling. It's not just being led by my gut, but it's saying, I know that these decisions are important and even the small decisions are important enough for me to lay them before God and to be praying and utilizing the means by which I'm supposed to ascertain this wisdom that God says he's just generously ready to give. So let's read this passage without envy, because I don't want you to envy the fact that he gets such clarity, although it's hard not to. It'd be good for us to have such clear signs as Paul had. But we need to get our bearings. So take a look at this text. We're going to study verses 6 through 10 in Acts Chapter 16. If you've been with us, you know, we've been studying Paul's second missionary journey and sometimes we need maps. And some weeks I put them in. Some weeks I don't. But this week I needed a map because there are so many references to geographic areas that help us understand exactly what's going on in the passage, not just where he goes, but why these are really big changes in plans. Okay?

So let's think about where we started. In Chapter 15 Paul and Barnabas were like, we're going to go back and not only do the evangelism that God told us to do. Right? Matthew 28, the Great Commission, "go make disciples of all nations." But then he says, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded." So there's not only evangelism, as we saw last week, but there's a discipleship as well. And so they say, let's go back and strengthen these churches. Let's see how they are. Let's make sure they're firm and growing in their understanding of Christ and these New Testament truths that we orally gave them, let's just make sure they understand all that. We need to go and make sure they're strong. And so they're going back.

And then you remember Paul and Barnabas had a dispute over whether or not they should take John Mark and Barnabas and Paul decided we're going to go separate ways. We're going to divide and conquer. Now, we saw on the maps in the first missionary journey how



they kind of got into their boat at Antioch or not far from Antioch of Syria. They went across the Mediterranean Sea to Cyprus and they made this loop and then they came back. Okay? Paul and Barnabas say let's divide and conquer. Right? I'm going to take Silas. You take John Mark. You can go to Cyprus and take the route that we took, which for you is this way. And I'm going to go over land and start where we finished. And so he does. And he picks up Timothy as we studied last week. And now we've got some references to some geographic positions that will help us understand why this kind of change in plans and this affirmation of God's will is just so dramatic.

So if you opened up your worksheet or you downloaded the electronic one, you've got a picture there on the bottom right of that worksheet that's got a map. And as I read this, it's important that we understand what's going on in this particular section of Scripture. Let's start in verse 6, 6 through 10. Are you ready? So ready. It's 11:00. It's Sunday morning. We are ready. We have our Bibles open and we're ready. Verse 6. "And they," right? Now we've got Timothy, we've got Paul, we have got Silas. And we're soon to pick up Luke in this narrative before we're done with it. And there are others, clearly but they're not named. It says, "and they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia."

Now that makes sense because if you go to your map, you see the starting point was in Antioch, that's in Syria, north of Israel. And then they went up through modern-day Turkey, which is Asia Minor, and they went to the city that they ended with, which was Derbe and Lystra. That's as far as they got. And then they circle back to get back to Pisidian Antioch. And so we see the cities. Do you see the red line to Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and then they're going to go to Pisidian Antioch? Well, we got those first two cities last week in the beginning of Chapter 16. Right? And then we assume they're going to go and we do more than assume to Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia, because they said they're going to visit all the cities they went to. They did evangelism there. They won people to Christ there. So they're going to visit those places.

But you see that tilted word? It's grayed "out there. Phrygia. Do you see that there? And then you see Galatia, which the order is different because they started really in Southern Galatia in the cities of Lystra and Iconium and even Derbe right there on the edge. But to get to Phrygia is at the beginning there, this kind of transitional region into Asia. So if you're in Pisidian Antioch, Antioch of Pisidia or Antioch, as our map says, in Pisidia, you think, okay, we've really done all that we were going to do in this circle because we're assuming Barnabas and John Mark come across Cyprus and they're going to come back to the mainland. That's the way they went, Perga and up. And you think, okay, we've kind of done what we were going to do. We went to these big cities, we went to Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, and we know if the discipleship of strengthening these churches was the objective, there's the other objective that we're supposed to do, and that is to make disciples so there's more evangelism to do.

And we know in Acts 1:8, everyone in the early church is talking about making disciples and being his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, southern Israel, Samaria, middle and northern Israel and the ends of the earth. So he's there in Pisidian Antioch. They've done whatever they're



going to do there. And I think the logical thing is for Paul, and we see his penchant for this later, to get to big cities like Ephesus and make his way west. And so you see there, although it doesn't mark the Roman road, there was a major Roman road from Antioch in Pisidia that would go right across Asia to Ephesus.

Now, Paul would end up there later. But I think, as most scholars would think, that Paul and the team, they think that's the logical place to go. Let's continue to expand the borders of the Church. Let's go west. So let's go to Ephesus. Right? And that's where the second half of verse 6 comes in. Well you're there, you're kind of hanging out in Phrygia and Galatia, why? Because we've "been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia," which includes that whole yellow area there, including Ephesus, which I think and most people think that's probably where he would logically want to go.

And now I got this little sentence here, this phrase "having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia." Don't you want like a paragraph or two on explaining what that's all about? I'd like to know what does that mean. Well, what happened? Is it signs, is this angels, is this circumstance where they're, you know, Border Patrol, they're at Asia? What happened? He doesn't tell us, but he's pointing to the fact that this is the Holy Spirit. Luke is describing this and Paul was the one relaying this, this is God saying, "no, you're not going to go." That's a big word. Forbidden. Forbidden by the good God. Now, what does the good God want us to do? Make disciples to the end of the earth. Yeah, but not here. Not now. So that seems odd.

Keep reading, verse 7, "When they had come up to Mysia." Now find that on the map. On our map you can see the letters in gray just above the word Asia. Did you find that? Smile at me if you found them. Okay, you got that part there, that's the northern part of Asia. And you can see just up and above to the right, tilted there in bold letters is Bithynia. We came up to Mysia, verse 7 says, "they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them." Again, give me another paragraph or two on what that was about. What does that look like? Right? So yet he's called the Holy Spirit. Right? Third person of the Godhead in verse 6. And then the Spirit of Jesus is also a reference to the third person of the Godhead, not allowing them to go. God did not want this. The Spirit of God who interacts and dwells within, does not want us to go.

Now, it'd be cool to sit down and find out, well, what did that look like? Was that a feeling? Was that circumstance? I mean, what was that? Did you all take a vote here? How did you figure that out? Well, whatever it is, they're strong words and it's a strong no. Forbidden and would not allow. Right? Did not allow. "So, passing by," which is an interesting verb. Passing by, Mysia. It's like they didn't even stop there to do that ministry in northern Asia. Right? "They went down to Troas." Now it is a little bit south, but down it's going down in the hill country, down to the coastal port city of Troas. And in Troas you think, okay, Paul's like, "I don't know. I'm supposed to make disciples of all the nations. I'm supposed to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel. I've done some good discipleship on this trip. I'd like to do some good evangelism," and it's no, no. And now I'm just kind of boxed into this place. I've just kept going. I can't go to Bithynia. I can't go through Mysia and do anything there. I can't go to



Ephesus. I can't be in Asia. So let's just try and find a hotel room here, you know, in Troas and see if we can just sleep this off.

Verse 9, "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there." So he's got like a Macedonian, you know, Spartans shirt on or whatever, you know, he's clearly dressed as a guy from Macedonia. And he was standing there "urging him" in this nighttime vision and he was "saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'" Now look at the map. You can see we already are anticipating this trip which is coming next. He gets on a boat there. This upper little peninsula of water off of the Mediterranean. He's going to get in a boat at Troas, this port city, and he's going to go over into Macedonia, which is modern-day Greece. And he going to go there and he's going to make his tour around. You can see some familiar cities there. Philippi, it doesn't go well there, more on that later, Berea, Thessalonica and find his way down to Athens. So all of this is going to take place. But right now, he didn't know it was going to take place. He thought there was lots of work to do in Asia, but God shuts all that down and now he's sleeping there in Troas and in the nighttime he gets the vision, and the vision is a dude sitting there with Macedonian garb on and saying, "Come over and help us." Help us. That's the verb. Help. Help us.

Verse 10, "When Paul had seen the vision, immediately..." I mean, I don't know how immediate that was, it was nighttime, maybe they packed in the middle of the night, figured out when did the boats leave. How can we charter a boat to get over there? "We sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." Duh. Right? Well, yeah. Everything else was shut down, right? You couldn't go here. Couldn't go there. Couldn't go over here. Couldn't go up there. You got here. And all of a sudden, now come over here. You're in a port city. We're going over to Macedonia.

Now again, you can envy that. How great it would be to have the Macedonian call to go, know that I got to take this job or it's time for me to retire. Or, you know, I got to go and work in this place. Or I should sign up for that ministry not just because they announced it but because it's the Macedonian call? We've got to figure out how to get some clarity, because I do think clarity is important because God says every part of the body is important, not just the parts that seem really visible and luminary, and they stand on stages or they're missionaries. Every part of the body is important. Even parts that we don't think are important. They're important and the role that they play is important. And the decisions that they make are important. There are a lot of passages about making decisions in the Bible, and we've got to make good ones.

Why is this here? Because those decisions are important. And all we can do is speculate. If we want to ask God one day that'll be good, too. But to figure out why in the world Paul, who had a heart for Ephesus, who would end up spending three years there, was not allowed to go there. And a lot of scholars would say, well, the reality was there was so much that he was going to do on this trip through Macedonia. I mean, there was really in that Hellenistic culture all the way to the Areopagus or Mars Hill, as they called it, when he debates with the philosophers, that was critical for his preparation to do what he was going to do at Ephesus. I



mean, maybe that's the case. I don't know. But the point is clear. No, no, no, no. And then go. That's what we see in this passage.

Now, we should learn something about making good decisions, trying to find out what's pleasing to the Lord. That would be a good thing. But it needs to start with at least just what I think is implied clearly, it's not implied, it's spelled out throughout the book of Acts and it just spills over into our first verse here in verse 6 that they were going about the things that they know they were supposed to do. They know they were supposed to go and make disciples of all the nations. They know that they're supposed to reach the ends of the earth. So Paul's all about that, and he's ready to do it. He's reached some people. He's disciplined those people. Time to go and get some new people. He's a missionary. He's going to do it. Okay? He is being obedient to what he knows is clear. Even though God is going to say, I don't want this right now in that place.

If you want to be ready to know what God would have you do in the next season of your life, the next decision you face, whatever you're grappling with right now, it's going to start with you making sure that what you're doing right now you can point to and say, I know this is within the boundaries of what the Bible has said I should be doing. Right? Like your job. Well, I know one thing. Paul writes to the Thessalonians and says, "You're just a busybody trying to live off of other people and you're not working. Well, you shouldn't even have lunch today." Right? You should be gainfully employed, working somewhere, making a living and making a living on your own. Just like Paul made an example of himself in doing the missionary trips.

So I'm a dentist in Fullerton. Well, that's great. Then you know you're doing the right thing. You're not cheating your patients, right? You're not overbilling anyone. You're not messing with the insurance. You're doing a good godly job. Well, that's good. And you ought to do what you know God has said. But I'm going to say you need to make sure you're not doing anything that you know God says you shouldn't do. I don't want to think about, "God what do I do next," if I know there are things right here that I know God says and I'm not doing those things.

Let's put it this way. If you're taking notes, and I wish that you would, jot this down. Number one, do now. Number one, "Do Now What You Know God Says." Do now what you know God says. Right? You need to know what God says. And there's a lot of latitude in what God says. And I need to think, am I doing what God says and I need to be doing it. There's some motion in that word. Doing it. Do you ever come south on the 605 freeway there at the edge of Long Beach and Los Alamitos and you turn south, which is wise to do when you're in that area. And so you're going to take the 405 because it ends the 605, dumps off at the 405. I'm going to take the 405 and now I'm going to start heading down to South Orange County. Good decision. But you're heading down to South Orange County.

Well, that's before it branches off and you've got an option to go on the 22 and the Garden Grove Freeway. Right? You know, this area? I always think of that area when I get dumped into that area. Right? I grew up not far from there and so I drove that a lot. That's got the most lanes of any freeway I drive at that point. Like, I got a lot of choices, man. Sometimes just for



fun, especially when I was a young driver, I might get dumped off from the 605, I'm going to just do lane one for a while, lane two, and I'll go lane three and lane four, lane five and six, lanes 7, 8, 9. And you're driving along that part, a very interesting part of Orange County, the Los Alamitos Weapons Station. I'd like to see what's there? A bunker? If you can get me in and give me a tour of that let me know, but...

I know one thing that I'm not supposed to do, and I know it because there are signs and there's barbed wire and there's a chain link fence and there's a guardrail. I'm not supposed to be driving in there. So I can do all the lanes and I got like 12 to choose from when I'm on that part of the 405. But there's a lane me plowing off the road down the embankment through the chain link fence where all the barbed wire is and into saying, "Hey, I want to go look around in the bunkers here." I know that's off-limits for me. That lane is not allowed. Now I can be in lane one. I can be in lane eight. It doesn't matter. I'm not going to get arrested or pulled over for being in those lanes, use your turning signal, but I'm not going to be ticketed or arrested. I can choose any of those lanes I want. I can't go in to check out the missiles. That's not allowed. So if you do that you will get arrested. You might get shot at that part of the county.

So I'm thinking I just want to make sure that I'm not riding through the embankment and careening through the chain link fence when I'm saying, "I wonder what lane God wants me in." Right? Does he want me in lane four? Does he want me in lane ten? Maybe he wants me in lane one. No, no, no. He wants you on the road, see, between the guardrails. And what you need to do before you start seeking God's will on the details of your life is saying are you off the road as a Christian knowing there are guardrails that God says this is wrong. I cannot set up to know what God's will is unless I'm now driving down through the pathway that God has given us.

Now I know it's called narrow and my illustration is about a big fat freeway. Right? But compared to how much real estate there is in Southern California those 12 lanes or whatever it is there at the 405 and 605 and the 22. I'm thinking that's a narrow road. You can be in a lot of different places on the narrow road. I can be a dentist, I can be an architect. I can be a plumber, I can be a missionary, I could be a pastor. You could say, well, all of those I'd like to know what God wants me to do, but I know he doesn't want me to be a bank robber, right? I know he doesn't want me to do something illegal with my life. He doesn't want me do something unethical with my life.

And I'd say get even more specific. Before you start praying for what is next on your docket to make a decision about maybe you need to look at all the things you've heard from God's word, everything you've read in God's word and say, "Is there anything that stands out to me where I'm running over the cones and careening over the curb and I'm outside of the will of God on? Because God is not interested really in telling you what's next for you if you're not willing to get on the road. And by the way, don't park by the side of the road and say, "Well, I'll start driving when I know what lane I'm supposed to be in." Right? It's hard to steer a parked car. It's a good illustration in this analogy. I need to get going. Get in the boundaries of the narrow road, going toward the small gate called the Kingdom of God. Get on that road and do not let up.





So if there's something going on, something simple... If you want to make the sermon uncomfortable, Pastor Mike? Here it is. I want to know God's will about this, that or the other. Oh, I know I'm supposed to, I don't know, be doing more in my church than just sitting here on the weekend and hearing sermons. I should be serving and I have no ministry post. Well, don't be talking. Do not be talking about knowing God's will for your work if you're not involved in serving in the body of Christ.

Or how about giving? Do you want to make it really uncomfortable? Here it comes. Don't talk about knowing God's will if you're not doing what is clear in God's will, and that is that everyone should be giving to their local church. Just that's what the Bible says. Galatians 6:6. You're supposed to do that. Everyone's supposed to decide what that amount is, but you're supposed to decide and be doing it. That's the job. That's what First Corinthians is all about. The idea of supporting financially those who invest in you. I'm just saying those are simple things. "You've made this really uncomfortable, Pastor Mike." I understand. But you want to know God's perfect will. You want to know what's best for you. You got to start by knowing what the guardrails are and make sure that everything in your life is within those guardrails. Right?

I'm not living with my boyfriend. Right? I'm not stealing stuff at work. Right? I'm not doing something that is unethical or wrong or unbiblical. I'm not rebelling against God anywhere. I'm within the boundaries of what the Bible says. Speaking of the passage, and I referenced it quickly, but let's go to Ephesians 5 real quick. You need to see this is a great text that reminds me that first we need to make sure we're on the road and that as a Christian, we're obediently not going with our four-wheel drive off into the, you know, the chain link fences of the Naval Weapons Station. Stay on the freeway.

Ephesians Chapter 5. So much great material here that relates to our topic. But look at verse 7, for instance. "Don't become partners with them." That pronoun. Look back at the people we're talking about. The sons of disobedience. Right? Christians are living differently. We're on a different path. They're on a broad road. We're on a narrow road. But we have this road we need to be on. "You were once," verse 8, "darkness," this is Ephesians 5:8, "but now you're light in the Lord." I'm on this pathway. I'm a child of God. "Walk as children of light." By the way, that analogy of pathway and road is all over the Bible, that's the idea. I'm supposed to stay on this road, this pathway. I'm supposed to walk in the pathway. Psalm 119, I need to be directed within the pathway of God's commands. Right? I need to have a light as a "lamp unto my feet" so I can see where the steps are. But it's on the pathway of righteousness.

And what is that? Well, parenthetical statement. Let's talk about the curbs. Let's talk about the guardrails on this freeway, "For the fruit of light," things that I ought to be doing, "is found in all that is good and all that is right and all that is true." Now, those are big issues, right? That's like you should be going southbound here. That's going to the right direction. Go there, stay in this domain of good, right and true. "Well, I think my job is good. I think I'm doing this right. I think this decision about schooling or the spouse" or whatever you're making a decision about, okay, those are all good. Christian. Right? "So I'm not going to be unequally yoked. I'm



not breaking God's rules here." Good. And then after that's taken care of and I love that it's put in parentheses because it reminds me of the guardrails. Next time you read this on your own, say there are the parentheses. Those are the guardrails. Right? I'm a child of light, I'm going to walk within the commands of God.

Now, verse 10. Now I can get to this "and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." Make those decisions. And then when you start talking about, "should you be in lane three or lane eight?" Now we can start talking about lane changes. What is the best thing? Should I be in Bithynia or should I be on a ship going to Macedonia? Those are good questions to ask. It's good to lay those things before God. It's good to seek the wisdom of God on those things. But first, make sure you're on the right highway.

One more thing and this is critical. Go to Romans Chapter 12, please. Romans Chapter 12 verses 1 and 2, another memory verse from your childhood, I hope. If not then it would be good to memorize it now. This is a great text. Remember where it comes at the end of a book that was Paul's magnum opus about salvation. And we get three chapters on sin. We get justification starting in Chapter 4 by faith. We have this great layout of all the things about salvation and the Spirit invading our life and children of God in my spirit and his Spirit, confirming that I'm a child of God. All these practicals talked about God's salvation in his plan in Chapters 9, 10 and 11.

Then in Chapter 12 after all of this, including the mercy of God grafting us into his plan and being a part of his family, being part of this tree that he's made. Okay? "I appeal to you, therefore," based on all of that, "by the mercies of God." How great it is to be a Christian. I can't believe that I'm saved. God is merciful to me, a sinner. "To present your bodies as a living sacrifice," two things, "holy and acceptable to God." Now I'm acceptable because I stand in faith with Christ before God. God accepts me in Christ. But now I'm supposed to now be set apart as a living sacrifice. Old Testament worship service, right? You bring an animal and he might be lunch in some fellowship offering that you're having. He might be food for the Levitical families. Right? But basically your sacrifice is gone. But now you come on to the Temple Mount as a living sacrifice.

And I think that imagery is going to go all the way to the end of this verse. Right? Acceptable to God, "which is your," now the English Standard Version read "spiritual worship." Do you have a little footnote if you're reading in the English Standard Version? What does that say? Not "your spiritual worship," but "your rational service." And the reason being is because the word worship here is not the standard word for worship in the Greek New Testament. It's the word that you can translate and is translated in many translations "service." And it's the picture used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, of the Levites who would come and serve on the Temple Mount. They would serve there. It was called worship because they were Levites doing it for God. But if they needed to clean the ashes out of the incense altar, great. If you needed someone to stack the shewbread. Well, then you're doing the sacred work of God, you serve and you do that, right?



If it's the slit the throat of the animals to have the sacrifice, then you do that. If it's to put oil in the lamps and trim the lamp, then you're to do that. You're serving. And that word there and if I preached on this before, if you go back and hear it, I try to make the case, I think that marginal reading is the right understanding of this text. It is your reasonable or your rational, not just your spiritual, it is your reasonable, rational service to God because you are a living sacrifice. You had a dead sacrifice that you brought in worship, right? There's the animal. I can't use it as livestock. I can't use it as a monetary thing. Now, it's just given over to God.

Well, now you're coming and saying I'm the sacrifice and I'm a living sacrifice, much like the Levites who were running around serving the Lord in the Temple Mount. Now that's me and I got to see myself that way. Now I can't be conformed to the world because the world's always saying, "whatever feels good, do it." And by the way, the Christian version of that is "just do whatever I think is right, and I'm going to call it God's will." And there are people in a church our size, you know, they come to us and they say things like, "Well, I am living with my boyfriend, but I think it's God's will." It is not God's will. "And I'm going to marry this non-Christian, but I think it's God's will. I feel that." Well, it's not God's will. Because God's got guardrails and I'm supposed to live within those guardrails and the mindset is I don't just do whatever I want. I look to see what God has said. I look at those principles there in the word, next phrase, "be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

Like Psalm 1 says, "I take the precepts and principles and the commands and the narratives of God's word, and I'm always mulling those over." It's a great word in Hebrew. It's the word to "chew," like a chewing on the cud, like an animal would do. You're chewing mentally on the truth of God's word all the time. So I'm doing what he says. I'm staying within the guardrails of his truth. I'm applying it to my life. Now I'm here "by testing you may," here's the word of our sermon today, "discern what the will of God is. Now you get two words that are helpful, right? It's "good." That's what we saw in Ephesians 5. And it is "acceptable" to God, right? And then he uses this word, which is where most of us stop reading, I don't want to hear that word, "perfect." But even that word, the word "Teleos," the idea of it is just appropriate. That decision that you make is the right decision. It's the teleos decision. It's the appropriate decision.

It's the word that Jesus uses when he talks about as loving an enemy instead of taking vengeance on the enemy. We're like God in that case, bringing his sun out on the evil and the good, bringing his rains on the justice and the unjust, the righteous and the unrighteous. God is being that way, magnanimous, patient, being good to people who don't deserve it. He says, when you do that, you're being teleos. Be perfect like your Father is perfect. Do the right thing. And so I'm going to live within the boundaries of God's word. But I see myself as a living sacrifice. And our little adage around here is, that means that I am willing to do anything God would ask us to do within the lanes of God's truth, anywhere God would ask us to do it, and at any time God would want us to do it. And so I am like a living sacrifice. I'm like, they're signing in as Levites saying, "I'm here to serve. What do you want me to do? I'm going to sweep. I'm going to clean. Do you want to put something up? Do you want to deal with this thing that's the bloody mess over here? I don't want to do it. But I'm going to do it because I'm



a living sacrifice. That's my reasonable, rational service because of God's great mercy toward me. He owns me. I'll do whatever he wants."

Put it this way. I know if you say I know I'm living within the boundaries and the guardrails of God's commands, I just want to know what lane I'm supposed to be in. Should I be the dentist in Fullerton or the architect in Irvine? Or should I be the pastor in Aliso Viejo? Which am I supposed to do? Okay? Well, in decisions like that, big career decisions, I'm just thinking before you say, God, what lane do you want me in? You ought to be saying I will be in any lane you want me in. That's where we have to start, right? We're saying I'm going to live within the guardrails of God's commands, and I'm willing to do anything you want me to do. We start with that. You're setting yourself up to find out what God would want. That's doing now what God says. It's not only obedience to the clear revealed will of God. That's the guardrails, but it's you saying, I'm willing to do whatever role you want me to do.

If you want me in Macedonia, I'll go to Macedonia. Do you want me to go to Bithynia, I'll go to Bithynia. You want me in Asia, Ephesus whatever you want. I will go where you want. I'm a servant. I'm a living sacrifice. Check, check, check, check, check. I'm there Pastor Mike, but I still don't know. Great.

Back to our passage. Let's try and see if we can learn any principles from Scripture based on the fact that God seems to think it's pretty important where Paul is, when Paul is. Right? He wants him in this lane at this time going this speed. Well, I want to learn kind of what that is. Well, let's start with the things that were forbidden. Middle of verse 6. Why were they just kind of going through these areas and making their way to Troas? Because the Spirit had forbidden them to go speak the word in Asia. When they'd come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but no, "the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them." So passing by Mysia, they didn't set up shop and do evangelism there, they went down to Troas. No, no, no, no, no. We need to... Now, within the lanes, we know the no's. Right? I have to repeat it. But let me just say, I've got to now understand or discern when God in my life is saying, no, you're not going to be a dentist in Fullerton.

Number two on your outline. "Discern When God is Saying No." Jot that down and once you jot it down, you're not done because that point doesn't say anything. Right? The point is just basically saying I got to do something. How do I do it? That's why there has to be more written under this point than just you writing it down. Because when I find your worksheet here after church, you just leave it on the thing and all you have is the main points written. Sometimes that works and I say, okay. At least they got the basics. You're not going to get the basics if you don't write something underneath this. Right? And then take your stinkin' worksheet with you. (audience laughs) Okay? And make me think that maybe all this work, I mean, preaching to you is worth something and you want to keep it. I'm just playing around with you, kind of. Kind of.

Okay. Number two, "Discern When God is Saying No." Well, how do I do that Pastor Mike? I'm so glad you asked. Okay? I don't mean to be Dr. Seuss. Right? But let me tell you what no is not, okay? No from God is not, I got to figure some things out here. Number one. Right?



And just let's start with this. No is not when whatever lane I'm in is difficult. Okay? Let's just start with that. Some of you have been trained in you're thinking about God that God's will, if you're in it, it's going to be smooth. There'll be no potholes in lane three, man, if I'm supposed to be in lane three. Okay?

Now, that's not a biblical thought in any way at all. Matter of fact, when it speaks of the narrow road that I'm supposed to be on. Right? It's hard. That's the word that's used in Matthew 7:14. "The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life." Now, that's just the big will of God. That's the will of God of the guardrails. But the will of God to send you to Macedonia doesn't mean it's going to be easier than it was in Bithynia. I'm just sparing you the trouble you would have had in Bithynia. That's not the case at all. And Paul recalls, by the way, speaking to a city in Macedonia, Corinth, he says, "I've had all kinds of trouble." It didn't mean I was outside the will of God. So some of you were saying, well, I was going to be a dentist in Fullerton. I'm overusing this example. But you know what? It's really hard. So, you know, dental school is not for me. It's too hard.

Listen, God's will and the lane you're supposed to be in and the decision you're supposed to make does not mean it'll be easier than the other lanes. It doesn't mean there are less potholes. That's you presuming upon God that God's will is always easier than not his will. And that's not the truth. You need to be ready for the difficulties of the right road. So no is not, "Hey, this is difficult, then it's a no." Let me give you this one. No, from God is not I've got people in my life who oppose it. I've got people in my life who oppose it. People opposing it does not mean it's a no from God.

And I mean that not only on the outside. Let me give you a verse for that. First Corinthians 16:9. You remember this. "A wide door for effective work has opened for me, and there are many adversaries." So there are many people who don't like me on this road. And you can say, "Yeah, yeah, that's basically like the first point." No, no, no, no. It's different. And here's why it's different. Because it's not just people on the outside like non-Christians that if I'm supposed to be a pastor, well then everyone will love me as a pastor. It's not just that the world isn't going to like that. I mean, and I know what that's like to be able to announce, for instance, you know, to my fiancée's family that I'm going to be in ministry. I know what it's like to have the negativity of people who don't get it. But I'm saying sometimes it's from people on the inside. Right?

Think about Paul. Paul was going in God's will to Jerusalem. Speaking of Ephesus, when he ended up getting there, as he was saying goodbye, they're going, "don't go, don't go, don't go." Why? "Because it's going to be bad. You are going to be arrested and you're going to be bound. Remember that there was even this prophecy. You're going to be bound. You're going to be bound as a prisoner. You're going to be persecuted. Don't go." Who is saying that to him? His enemies? No. His friends. Non-Christians? No. Christians. If you're looking for unanimity among all of your Christian counselors to say yes to the thing that you think, well, it's a no if I don't have unanimity from all my wise counselors, I'm saying that's not the case. I don't see that in Scripture.



Now, should you seek wise counsel? Yes. It'd be good for you to listen to wise counsel from more than one person. You don't just ask for advice on whether or not this is God's will for you until you find the person who is saying what you want to hear. But you should take the people that you consider wise and godly people and hear from them what they think you should do. Will they all agree? Not necessarily. You may have some people saying, "don't go to Jerusalem. It will be hard. You shouldn't go." They're basing their decision on something that's not right.

And sometimes they'll even start by saying you should go. Think about Nathan. David said, "I'm going to build the temple." Remember that? And Nathan goes, "Yeah, do whatever you want." That's totally within the guardrails of God's will. And he had to come back the next day because God knocked him upside the head, said, "Nathan, go back there and tell him no. It's not for him to build the temple." And he had reasons and explained those reasons. And it's going to be your son, Solomon, who builds the temple. All I'm saying is that sometimes you get people who are advising you who don't know quite the right thing. They're not tuned into it. So sometimes you'll have people who oppose it. Sometimes you'll have people who say yes and it's not good. So a no from God is not, you know, I got people who oppose it, inside or outside.

Number three, it doesn't follow the exact grammatical paradigm, but a no from God is not "well then I'll pull over until God makes it clear." In other words, a no from God does not mean I'll just quit then. And I find people that do that, right? If I can't go careening into the Navel Depot and I don't know if I'm supposed to be in lane eight or lane two, well, I'm going to pull over, eat a sandwich and wait until God makes it clear. Right? That's not what he did. Really look at the map, Paul, really, if you think about it in terms of his intentions, he's like a pinball in a pinball machine. He's a geographical pinball. Why? Because he's looking for God's will. I'll go here. Nope. Go here. Nope. Go here. Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, nope.

What's happening? He's not stopping, see. You need to do what God wants you to do by trying to go after what God wants you to do, even if you don't know exactly what it is, but you keep moving. It's hard to steer a parked car. You need to keep moving. If God's will is for you to be gainfully employed and provide for your family, then, "Well, I tried for two months I tried. I filled out, you know, 15 applications. I had eight interviews and I can't find a job. So I'm going to wait until God magically provides one." Right? No, keep going. You keep going. Whatever it is, you keep going. You don't stop whether it's a ministry post, whether it's a decision in your life, whether it's finding a spouse or finding a degree or finding a job or whatever it might be. No doesn't mean I guess I'll quit. The worst thing you do is pull over, but keep going. Some people have even written about the will of God that way. Just do something. Right? Do something. Keep going.

What a no is, as though I need to tell you this, but let me just say it again. A no from God. If you're going to discern God's no, I know this for sure. A no from God is a clear biblical prohibition. That's a no from God. That's a no from God. Some say, "Well... I want to marry this guy. He's really nice. We've already had sex, and, I don't know, I just think I should. And he'd make a good dad," right? Not a Christian. You're supposed to be a Christian, right? Stop.



That is not God's will. Right? A no from God is always going to be whatever the clear prohibition is. And you just need to just swallow that now and say, as a Christian, that's it. I love God. I keep his commandments. Those are the guardrails. I do not plow off the road because all these other lanes look, they don't look very attractive to me. You've just got to know a no from God is always a clear biblical prohibition.

And when you say no to that, you're saying no to God, to quote First Thessalonians 4, who gives you his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants you to stay on the road. A no from God, I'll give you another one here, can be a clear provincial circumstance, but a clear provincial circumstance. Now, I don't know if I can schedule a time to talk with Paul and Luke and all the rest, I'd like to know, "What do you mean the Spirit prevented this." Could it have been circumstantial? It seems like it might be, because I don't know, elsewhere, you're talking about open and closed doors, and those seem circumstantial. Is this just internal or is this just subjective? Is this objective? I mean, was Bithynia on fire or something? Right? And it's like, oh, clearly the Lord's preventing us from going. I don't know. Maybe.

He wouldn't say no if it was hard, but he might say no if there's clearly a circumstantial situation and then he goes, "Well, I guess that's not God's will." There are some things that are beyond your control, right? Think about Paul praying for things like he prays for this thorn in the flesh to go away. Remember this? He tells the Corinthians that. "I wanted it to go away. He pleaded with the Lord," 300 times. Is that what it says? "Three times." Why? Because he can take a no from God. He can see that a no is a no. So I'm not... So he could say to God, I got a million reasons I got to go to Bithynia. There were a lot of Jewish settlements up in that part toward the Black Sea, a lot of them. As a matter of fact, a lot of Jews were scattered in Bithynia and they needed to be reached. And he thought, I'm here, I'm trained in a Jewish seminary. I should be the one preaching in Bithynia. Maybe he should. Maybe he could argue that way. He could say to God, "God, I'd be much more effective as a missionary if I wasn't sick, if I didn't have this thorn in the flesh."

You can reason all you want with God, but if the circumstance is shut down and he says no, well then at some point you have to conclude what he concluded when he said, Second Corinthians 12, "Hey, his grace is sufficient for me. I'm going to boast of my weakness," because God shut the door. And guess what? Do you think those Jews were reached in Bithynia? Have you read First Peter Chapter 1? He's writing to the Jews in Bithynia, the Christians who have become converted Messianic Jews. My point is, God is going to get his job done. And Ephesus, you can be saying, "God, I should be in Ephesus." He takes the no and it could be a circumstantial no. Who knows? Maybe the Romans road was closed for construction. I don't know. And he goes, "I guess we're not going there. It must be the Holy Spirit preventing it." It could be. And you could have circumstances in your life. You got to accept the no if it's a no.

Now this is the most nuanced one, so be careful with this one. A no from God can be a clear godly resolution. Now follow me on this and no from God could be something that prevents an option for you because of a clear godly resolution. Think with me on this. In Romans Chapter 15, for instance, Paul's talking about his travel plans. And he says, "Listen, I have purposed



not to preach Christ where he's already been preached. I'm not going to lay something down on another man's foundation." Now, is that like a guardrail in Scripture, like in no missionary can go where other missionaries have gone? Of course not. Of course not. So this is something he had resolved to do and it helped him make decisions. And I'm going to argue, I think that was a godly thing based on his own experience and his own background and his own strength going into places that Christ had not been proclaimed. And he says, I'm just resolved for this and I'm going to do this. And therefore, it wasn't an unbiblical thing that he said. It helped him say, that's why I'm not coming here and that's why I'm not going there.

So he was able to see God's no in a preexisting commitment that he made. And he said, that commitment is going to hold me to this thing and this path and this commitment to lane three. It's not that I couldn't get punched off of lane three. I could, but, you know, unless God shows me otherwise, this is the lane. And I think this is the lane. It's a godly resolution and helps me say no to lane two. I can see that.

I can see that when Paul says, here's one and it gets subjective, I get that. In Second Corinthians 2 when Paul is thinking, by the way, he's in Troas later in the same city that he ends up in and gets the Macedonian call in. And he's already written First Corinthians. In First Corinthians, if you've read First Corinthians, it shows that the church in Corinth was a mess. Right? Agreed. A mess. And that mess in Corinth, he's so concerned, he says you got a lot of, you know, guardians and all that and teachers. But I'm your father. I'm like the key guy here. I know I can do some things in that church that other people can't. I'm committed to your welfare. I'm committed to you getting this fixed. He wrote a super long letter, 16 chapters, we call it, First Corinthians to fix a lot of this. Well, he's waiting to hear how it went. He can't wait. He's anxious. He wants to hear.

Well, he says he's got an open door for ministry now in Troas. But he says, I didn't do it. I didn't walk through it. "I didn't find Titus there." And Titus is my tie to you guys in Corinth, in Macedonia. And I know that if I could hear from Titus how you were doing, I'd know whether I should stay here or go. "But since I couldn't find Titus there, I said no to this open door." See that preexisting commitment to say this church in Corinth is critically important to me. I play a special role in it. I can't say yes to this because of the commitment and the resolution I made here to that. And therefore I say no to a great opportunity, "an open door for effective service" in Troas this time. But I'm not going to do it because I'm committed here. And that is a commitment, a godly commitment and is a commitment, a preexisting commitment and resolve that lets him hear God's no in that.

Now, can that be nuanced in a way that unfortunately leads us into error? Yes, but perhaps that helps because I find that and in that particular passage, he says, "I found no rest in my spirit." I just didn't think this is the will of God for me to take this opportunity because of my preexisting concern for you and my commitment to your welfare. It's like Psalm 37:4, right? "If we delight ourselves in the Lord, he'll give us the desires of our heart." I think it's not only the desires that we have preexisting as a desire, but he gives us those desires. And sometimes those desires come and get solidified in some commitments. And those commitments keep me from saying yes to something God would have me say no to, because that desire is going





to be fulfilled. His role in Corinth was going to be fulfilled, so he wasn't going to take the open door in the port city of Troas at that time.

And some commentators will say, well, that was a wrong decision, by the way. And even me just revisiting that passage in light of this sermon and it was wrong, he should have gone through the open door in Troas. But I think by Chapter 7 in Second Corinthians, I think it's confirmed that the decision he made was the right decision. That's for the Bible scholars that want to go deeper on digging that one out. But I do think it was the right decision. Not that every commentator agrees on that.

All right. Back to our passage, because I'm running out of time. Verse 9, Chapter 16. "A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man from Macedonia standing there urging him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'" Oh, man, that's great. "When he had seen the vision, he immediately sought to go into Macedonia." We get the "we" here because Luke's joining him now, going to Macedonia, "concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." We got a yes from God, we got to go, go here. You need to not only discern God's saying no. Number three, you need to discern when God is saying go. Now, that's not telling us anything. That's a title for some things you need to write down.

Number one, how do I know if it's a go from God? I'll give you some principles and wisdom from Scripture. Number one. And this is old hat, don't yawn, but here it comes. It'll be in line with God's written word. It will be within the guardrails of God's word. It's not the dirt road next to the chain link fence at the Naval Depot. It's going to be on the paved highway. So you're going to be able to say my business card or my address or whatever, it's in keeping with what God says is right. No doubt. I mean, to go to the ends of the earth, Asia is that, Bithynia is that, Mysia is that and Macedonia is that. It fits. It's within line with God's word.

Number two. A go from God will be in line with needs. That's important. Look at the word that was used. "Come over and help us. Come over and help us. We need your help." In other words, if you come here, you're meeting a need. And I'm going to say, when God is moving chess pieces around, he's moving chess pieces around to meet needs and that you need to think about is this meeting a need. All the way down to the conversations you have on the patio. You do understand, to quote the book of Ephesians again, Chapter 4 says that I ought to, even in my words, look for the will of God and what to say to someone, am I meeting a need that I can meet the need of the moment?

Well, if that should be the way my words and sentences are directed, certainly it should be what ministries I'm involved in and what career I have, where I live, what I do with my spare time, how I invest my money. All that should be helpful. And I got to look at what are the things that God says this is helpful. Evangelism is clearly helpful. Discipleship is clearly helpful. There are plenty of things in the helpful list, these good and true things that end up being now I found the perfect thing. It's always going to be something where a need is being met.



I just love passages like Isaiah 46. Here's the thing that reminds me that the need is the objective of the whole game. Right? The chess game has an objective and God says, "my counsel will stand," this as Isaiah 46:10 and 11. You've heard this many times. "I will accomplish my purpose." I've got a purpose, "calling a bird of prey from the east," which is representing a king here, "the man of my counsel from a far country." I'm bringing someone that is part of my plan. "I have spoken, and will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it." I just love the fact that God has a plan. He's got a plan for South Orange County. He's got a plan for your neighborhood. He's got a plan for your workplace. He's got a plan for your family. He's got a plan for this nation. He's got a plan for this generation. He's working out a plan.

In Ephesians 1 when he starts talking about the coming of Christ and the redemption of Christ being the fulfillment of God's plan, two verses later he ends up saying in verse 11, "Hey, he worked everything after the counsel of his plan of his will." So I know this: God's got a big will, a big objective. And each move of the piece on the board is all working toward his purpose, his plan. That's why you can quote Romans 8:28. Right? Those of us "who are called according to his purpose, he works all things together for good." Unfortunately, some think, "Well, that's just my excuse to do whatever I want. Look back and call it God's will." No, no, no, no. You ought to do what all of the Bible says, which is acknowledging him in every step that you take. If you're going to go to this square on the chessboard, does it meet a need? Not just going because I think it's cool or I think it's fun or I think it'll be good. Is it meeting needs? Everything in God's economy is designed that way.

Speaking of the design of God, here's another one. God's go will always be in line with your gifting. It'll always be in line with what God has invested in you. Right? What God has done in your life to make you useful. That's different than need, right? So we move the bishop over here. Move the rook over here. Right? Move the castle over here. That is the rook is, I don't know. It's been a long time since I played chess. The pawn. I know the pawn. Move the pawn over here. What does it do? Right? Well, then I move it here for this purpose. And that's the point. There's a meshing together. Paul was called to Macedonia at this time, in this order, before he got to Ephesus, because God says this is good not only for meeting the needs in Macedonia, but because you're perfectly suited for this and you'll be better suited for Ephesus once I'm done with you over here in Greece. That's how God works.

And all I'm saying is I got to think about that. Speaking of God's design in First Corinthians 12, the body of Christ is each placed in the body where God wants it to be, wants it, wills it to be, because they all are designed to do different things, right? Your pinky is designed to do something different than your nose and your ear is designed to do something different than your kneecap. And those things are there because they meet particular needs and that's why they're there. And you need to think about your life that way that I need to know that God's placing me, what's God's will for my life? Well, it's going to utilize my gifting.

And I always say this: it ought to be, whenever I teach in First Corinthians 12, you got to be able to ask the question with an affirmative answer. Is my help helpful? Is my help helpful? And you've got to be able to say yes. And more than just you and your mother, you need to



have other people say your help is helpful, right? "Oh, yeah, he's great at whatever it is." No, you're not great at everything and you're not helpful at everything. Sometimes you think you're helpful. You're not helpful, right? And you need some people in your life who you actually ask, am I being helpful in this spot? Would I be helpful if I were a part of that? And you've got to say that's it.

I mean, trust me, I've been called to places I never thought I would be in roles, in jobs I never thought I'd have, standing here talking to you on a Sunday morning, I never... But whatever. God said, I'm going to gift you to do it and I'm going to have a need there you're going to meet. And then until the need goes away or your gifting goes away or you die, that's what you're going to do. Great. Whatever, right? I want to be a living sacrifice to do God's will. I got to discern when God is saying go. Always going to be aligned with the word. Always going to be in line with needs. Always going to be in line with my gifting and be able to step back and most people are going to say, reasonable, objective people, your help was helpful. Yeah.

"It's still, you know like, it's not satisfying Pastor Mike. It's like still reading the tea leaves and it's not, you know, it's not clear, like the burning bush or like, you know, God's voice from an angel." I get that. Here's what I know about wisdom in decision-making, and you just read it in Proverbs. If you're reading through the Bible with us, Proverbs 2, we cry out for wisdom. You're going to get it if you seek it, like it's hidden treasure. Now he's going to give it, but it's not going to be easy to get. And all I'm saying, if it were easy to get, you'd say, "Well, that would be better." I'm saying I would stop envying the people who got clear direction regarding God's will.

This is a good passage with a good result. And he said, "Immediately, we purpose to go to Macedonia." Fantastic. I love Paul. Paul, great. Good job. But a lot of times God gives clear directives regarding his will and it doesn't go... I talk about the burning bush. The burning bush, in Hebrew, in his dialect, "Hey, you're a shepherd, Jethro is no longer your boss. I need you to go to Egypt and we need to talk to that pharaoh down there. I need you to tell him to let the people of Israel go. That's your new job. You're going to be a spokesperson for me." How clear could that be? I mean, you want to know what God's next job is for you? That would be great. Burning bush, voice in your language, no longer this, do this.

Here's the problem with God's will. It's not in the knowing, it's in the doing, right? It's really not about the knowing for most people, because Moses knew it in Chapter 3 and by Chapter 4 what is he saying? You know the Bible? "Send someone else." Gideon. How clear could the angel coming telling him, "Hey, the Midianites are attacking. You're going to be the captain. You're going to deliver them. Go." How clear is that? It's miraculously clear. It's one of the 18 times we have this kind of clear vision where this is, BAM, here, do this. And I just want to think in the clarity of that. What was his response? Doubt. "Hey, I got a fleece here. Could you perform a magic trick just to make sure I heard you right?" What? Right?

And God, God is so gracious and so patient. Way more patient than you and me. Right? We would knock him upside the head. We would pull a Zachariah. You're not going to talk until you believe what I'm saying. You would come up with something if you got all power, but



instead, God says, "Whatever. What do you want? The wet or dry? What do you want tonight?" He does it for him. But it isn't a lesson for me to try and figure out how to test God in his will. It's not about the knowing. Most of us know. You could hear a sermon like this. You could look at the things in your life and you could probably say, I get a sense of what's wise for me.

Or after a couple of hours in prayer and Bible study and processing this sermon, you probably will have enough clarity. It won't be about the clarity that you need. It'll be about your willingness to do it. And that's what we all need to grapple with. We need to get back to that ATAPAT, as we call it, AnyThing, AnyPlace, AnyTime. I am willing to do anything God wants to do, any place he wants it, anytime he wants it. And if I am, see, then I just think that the knowing of God's will gets a lot clearer really fast. Don't envy the clarity. You've got a good shepherd. He's good at leading. And he will lead you beside still water sometimes, sometimes into green pastures and sometimes through the valley, the dark and scary valley of the shadow of death.

And that's the thing. He's going to lead you. He will get you there. He'll get you not only there, he'll get you through it. Sometimes he'll set up a meal for you at a restaurant where everyone around you hates you. "He'll prepare a table before you in the presence of you enemy." I'm just saying, it won't always be fun. It won't always be pleasant. But in the end, the goodness and mercy of God will overtake you and we'll get through this life if you're willing to do his will and walk wherever the shepherd leads you. And in the end "we will dwell in the house of Lord forever." That's good news. But between here and there, let's be willing servants who say whatever your will is, we're willing to do it before we even know it. Jesus said, as people said, "I don't even know if you're really the Messiah." He said, "If you were willing to do my Father's will, then you'd know whether my teaching is from him or not." The problem is the willingness. It's not the knowing. It's the willingness to do it. And I pray you and I both will be willing to do this will.

Let's pray. God help us in a day when the needs are great. The chessboard on this little part of the world, there's plenty to do. There are plenty of people here who are equipped. They've been given the resources, the wherewithal, the gifts, the talents, the aptitude to do things and they just need to be willing. And I know you'll make it clear. And God, if anyone is careening through the chain link, barbed wire fence and they just need to get back on the road, God, get them back on the road today. Repenting of those things that they know are not right. Starting to do the things they know they should do. And if some people would park by the side of the road because they've had their feelings hurt, they don't get the lane they want or someone cut them off and they're just going to sit by the side of the road, get them going again, get them back into traffic, and get them moving down the highway. When we get to the split we'll know whether to go this way or that way once we get there. But right now, we've got to start moving. God, I just pray we'd all be willing no matter what. So, God, may you help us to know what your will is in every situation, not stressing about it, not freaking out, not worrying, not laden with the paralysis in our decision-making, but acknowledging you in all of our ways and trusting you to make our paths straight.



In Jesus name. Amen