

LITTLE THOUGHTS ABOUT OUR BIG MISSION
A Devotional Theology of Mission part 6
Acts 15:36-41; 16:6-11

Mark 16:15 And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

I’m really excited about our 6th installment in our devotional theology of missions that we’ve titled “Little Thoughts About Our Big Mission.” But before we dive into that I want to share something that came my way on Friday. Brian Brodersen and I were driving to a CCBC board meeting in Murrieta Hot Springs. On the way we had a phone conversation with Sarah Yardley about the upcoming outreach in Dundee Scotland. After we finished the call Sarah sent this to Brian while I was driving.

THIS IS WILL



Sarah said I ran into Will tonight at the Little Bird EP launch. He came to Creation Fest this summer, invited by Simon Cotter, who he knew through the Unit Skate Park. Simon got him a tent and took care of his sleeping bag. Will was in a dark place when he arrived, with no hope.

On Tuesday morning, he heard Brian speak about being a prisoner of Christ. He remembers hearing it, praying with two people, but not being ready to “give his life to God.”

He went back to his tent, and later, on his own, prayed to commit his life to God. When he woke up the next morning, for the first time in 14 years he didn't want to kill himself. The week before he had started self-harming, cutting gouges out of his leg. He felt like someone or something else was carrying darkness into his life, and for the first time in years, he felt free. He woke up the second morning after deciding to follow Jesus, and for the first time in years, he felt hope.

He wanted to be baptized at Creation Fest but couldn't miss his housing appt. Simon took him, and due to a scheduling issue, he was able to come back in time and be baptized. And then, miraculously, a spot opened up at the Turnaround House in Newquay with Matt and Sally Timms.

He says walking with Jesus has been like going from strength to strength. He's never experienced anything like it....

He's telling all his friends. He's already led one other into faith in Christ. He said, “anything else this good, a new car, anything, you wouldn't want to share but this...I want to tell everyone.” They(Turnaround House) said it's been a long time since they walked into the recovery house and found one of the guys leading a spontaneous Bible study — but Will does.

He is glowing with joy. He couldn't stop thanking me and marveling at the people he met at Creation Fest and the way they showed him the love of God.

(It is worth it for one.)

Such PERFECT WORD at a PERFECT TIME as we're learning about mission and ramping up for the Influence Her Conference.

So here we go!

LET'S TURN IN OUR BIBLES TO ACTS 15

Our first little thought about our big mission is

1. Mission Is Vine and Branch Stuff

Acts 15:36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."

Paul's had a very clear sense of vision and mission. He was very clear on **where** he believed God wanted them to go and **what** God wanted them to do.

Where he believed God wanted them to go: *every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord*

What he believed God wanted them to do: *see how they are. Let's see how the new believers and the newly planted churches were doing — see if there's anything we can do to encourage and strengthen them — if there's any gaps in their understanding of the Gospel.*

REMEMBER how we learned in our first study in this series that *our mission is actually Jesus' mission*. Jesus is the good shepherd! Jesus not only died for His flock — He wants to feed and lead His sheep. He wants to make them lie down in green pastures; lead them beside still waters, lead them in the paths of righteousness, comfort them with His rod and His staff. Paul's vision and mission had its beginning in the heart of Jesus. Paul thought about all those men and women who belonged to Jesus in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe because Jesus thought about them!

Mission is Vine and Branch Stuff

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

As truly as a branch is so intimately connected to the vine that you can't see where one leaves off and the other begins, so the Christian is INTIMATELY connected to Jesus. And as truly the life of the vine is in the branch — the life of Jesus is truly in the Christian.

You CAN'T be truly connected with the heart of Jesus and NOT want for His sheep what HE wants for them.

FILE THIS AWAY for a few minutes: The original vision and mission got them out of the walls of the church and moving out into mission. Paul and his team did revisit those cities and did strengthen those churches —

Acts 16:5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Based on what Paul knew about the heart of Jesus Paul's had a very clear sense of **where** he believed God wanted them to go: *every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord*; and **what** he believed God wanted them to do: *see how they are*. God had something in mind that was larger in scope and objective!

We'll leave this thought by saying that Paul had NO IDEA about the big changes God was going to make to in the direction of **that** mission and **his** ministry!

2. Mission Is Going to Be Messy

These good men, these godly men, these great men who loved and respected each other, these men who had agreed on so many things and now agreed on the importance of the trip, could not agree on the make-up of the team.

Check this out.

Acts 15:37-41 Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in

Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other.

NIV — They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.

Who was “right” or who was “wrong” is another study all together. Here’s what I want us to take away as we think about our big mission:

FIRST — We learn that even the best of God’s men and women are still at best merely human. This is what God has to **work** with.

SECOND — Kingdom work is **work**. Work involves **workers**. We don’t want to miss that this blow up proves the truth of **Proverbs 14:4** — *Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.*

The big idea in the proverb is that if you were going to have **abundant crops** you had to invest in oxen. The very nature of the beast **guarantees** the **certainty** of filthy, messy, stinky stalls. There is no such thing as a breed of oxen that doesn’t poop. It’s what they do by nature. Feed them and they poop.

This translates perfectly into Mission. These men were like oxen, paired by God. They invested 3 years of labor in the field, traveling great distances, facing radical opposition, risking their own lives. By the grace of God there was a great harvest of souls among the gentiles.

But — Just as there is no such thing as a breed of oxen that doesn’t poop, there’s no such thing as a sinless Christian. Where there are *oxen* — where there are Christian workers — there’s gonna be stinky messes! If you want to see an abundant harvest, but you’re not up for the poop that comes with it, you’re in the wrong business.

METRO — Mission Involves stinky messes! We need to know that God involves working with men and women men who might be blind to their pride; who have even their best passions tainted by sin; who have strong feelings and strong convictions — many of which are wrong.

3. Grace Is Greater Than Our Mission Messes

Acts 15:39-41 Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Our limitations and imperfections do not stop His work! Jesus and His grace is greater than our flaws and failures. He is able to **salvage** our messes **and** actually **multiply** His work.

Before mess, you have two men (Paul, Barnabas) on one team going to one place. After the argument is over, you have five men (Paul, Silas, Timothy, Barnabas, John Mark) in two teams going to two different places. From two in one place to five in two places. The Gospel is now being spread by more people in more places than ever before.

4. Mission Demands More Than Good Intentions!

Acts 16:6-8 NLT Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from **preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. ⁷ Then coming to the borders of Mysia, **they headed north for the province of Bithynia**, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. ⁸ So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas.**

WOW! Up to this point God greenlighted every plan they made concerning **where** they wanted to go. When we come to this passage in Acts 16 Paul is still working from the very same motives when he planned their travel itinerary in Acts 15:36.

the province of Asia = Asia Minor. Paul had great vision for Asia Minor. It was heavily populated (lots of souls to reach), the center of culture (that could become a powerful vehicle for the Gospel), and a hub of commerce (perfect delivery system for the Gospel as people came from around the world on business and if saved would carry the Gospel around the world).

The same was true of Bithynia. Bithynia had a large population center — and there also happened to be a very heavy concentration of Jews there.

Jesus wanted the Gospel preached!

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

THOSE are GREAT reasons — GREAT motives — for Paul wanting to go into Asia Minor and Bythinia.

Now let's read the same passage with a different emphasis

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WOW!

Up to this point — moved into mission by great motives — **God greenlighted** every plan they made concerning **where** they wanted to go. But NOW they are hitting worse than red light after red light — they're running into "ROAD CLOSED" signs — "DETOUR" after detour

the Holy Spirit **prevented them from preaching**

ESV = They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit

So — having been **denied** in his attempt to bring the Gospel to the south of Asia Minor Paul **naturally** thought that if he couldn't go **south**, he would go **north**.

⁷ Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia,

but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there.

The Holy Spirit **declined!** He didn't allow the transaction to go through!

I think that if we could go back in time, and had met Paul during this time and asked him, “*Paul, where are you going?*” I'm sure his reply would have been, “*I don't know.*”

⁸So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas.

Troas was a beach town — a sea port — four miles from ancient Troy.

The big take away for me here is this — When all else fails, go **rent a condo** at the **beach** and **pray!**

Seriously, the big idea is that Paul was now waiting. The mission that began so smoothly had come to a shocking, grinding halt! Paul knew he wasn't going in the right direction! He didn't blow off the denial and the decline! The best thing he could do was STOP!

That's a great example for us because often times we are so invested in a decision and a direction that in the face of the Holy Spirit saying “STOP” — we don't change direction and head towards the proverbial cliff (marriage, business, ministry choices).

HERE'S THE DEAL — and it is lost on the 21st century Christian who is living in a world shaped by the powerful culture of technology, information and marketing: The Holy Spirit is *Lord of the harvest*. He is the one who sending laborers into the harvest. He is the one intimately involved in directing the actions and decisions of the laborers when it comes to the where, when and how of the mission of God. The Book of Acts is what it is because the 1st Century believers were governed by the Holy Spirit.

Here we see in the lives of Paul and his team that the Holy Spirit's denials are as much a part of His direction in our lives as His approvals!

By way of these DENIALS the Gospel broke into Europe changing the course of western civilization, and ultimately reaching me in Anaheim nearly 2 millennia later (and you here in Northern California nearly 2,000 years later).

PLEASE LORD — Let me see your denials in this amazing light!

If He doesn't approve of all we aspire to in His Kingdom, we **must surrender** our designs **to His direction** and **believe** it for the best.

QUOTE: Bobby Richardson — *God, Your will! Nothing more! Nothing less! Nothing else!*

We must allow the Holy Spirit to be intimately involved in our decisions. That requires humility — humility that acknowledges our finite ability and capacity and His infinite power and wisdom! It also requires humility that will admit that our best laid and well-intended human plans are sometimes wrong and need to be changed by the Holy Spirit.