"GOD'S SOVEREIGN LEADING"

Acts 13:1-4 & Acts 16:6-10
3/16/2014

*** All of us must allow God to lead us to do His will!**
How does God Lead?

I. God Leads Those Who Are <u>Busy Serving</u> Him (v. 2)

II. God Leads Those Who Are <u>Eagerly Seeking Him</u> (v. 2)

III. God Leads You by <u>His Holy Spirit</u> (v. 2, 4)

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VI. God Leads by <u>Closing some Doors</u> of Opportunity (Acts 16:6-7)

VII. God Leads by <u>Opening other Doors</u> of Opportunity (Acts 16:8-10)

A. God indicates an open door by speaking to us about a need of ministry (v.9a)

B. God indicates an open door by creating a burden for a particular need (v.9b)

C. God indicates an open door by presenting ministry opportunity (which may even involve opposition (v.10 –f)

1. Philippi (Acts 16:11-40)
2. Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)
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"Come over into Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9)

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I. **God Leads Those Who Are** _____ (v. 2)

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III. **God Leads You by** _____ (v. 2, 4)

IV. **God Leads You** _____**, Not Out Of The Ministry** (v. 5)

V. **God Leads You Through The Authority of** _____ (v. 2)

VI. **God Leads by** _____ **of Opportunity** (Acts 16:6-7)

VII. **God Leads by** _____ **of Opportunity** (Acts 16:8-10)

A. **God indicates an open door by speaking to us about** _____ _____ (v.9a)

B. **God indicates an open door by** _____ **for a particular need** (v.9b)

C. **God indicates an open door by presenting ministry opportunity (which may even involve opposition** (v.10 –f)

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INTRODUCTION:

How do you know when God is leading you?

How do we differentiate between our doing our own selfish, independent will, and our doing God's will?

Sometimes what God wants and does not want is obvious. For example, God never leads a person contrary to His Word. God never leads us to do anything sinful.

Some have tried saying:

"God has led me to date this unsaved man . . ."
"God has led me to divorce my mate . . ."
"God has led me to quit coming to church . . ."
"God has led me to work at this night club . . ."

God's will never contradicts God's Word!

Some things are obvious about God's will. It's obvious that God wants us to love Him, give to Him, tell others about Him, serve Him.

What is not so obvious is - Where do I serve Him; How do I serve Him, etc.

In Acts 13:1-5, we will see some principles that will help us to determine whether or not it is indeed God who is leading us.

We make decisions everyday. Decisions to seek a good job; seek a place to settle down and live; seek a life's partner (mate).
In all the major decisions we make, how can we be assured that God is in it?

Acts 13 is a pivotal point in the book of Acts.

The emphasis moves from Peter's ministry to Paul's. From the church at Jerusalem to the church at Antioch. From the Gospel remaining in Palestine to the Gospel going to the uttermost parts of the earth in fulfillment of Acts 1:8.

V. 1
"Prophets & Teachers" - were men gifted by the Holy Spirit to provide leadership and direction for the early church (Eph. 4:11, 12).

A prophet - received direct revelation from God during this transitional time period when the N.T. was not yet complete (I Cor. 14:3).

A teacher - taught the O.T. Scriptures and showed Christ's fulfillment of them, and then taught how to live the Christian life from the teachers of Christ which were handed down from the Apostles.

NOTE: the variety of nationalities and backgrounds God uses in a local church: Barnabas, a Jewish Levite from Cyprus; Simeon, a black man (nick-named "Niger") from Africa; Lucius from Cyrene in North Africa; Manaen, a man who had aristocratic (upper class, royal) connections with the Roman government (Herod Antipas); and Saul (Paul), a trained Jewish rabbi from Tarsus in Cilicia.

*** All of us must allow God to lead us to do His will!**

How does God Lead?

I. God Leads Those Who Are <u>Busy Serving</u> Him (v. 2)

("As they <u>ministered</u> to the Lord")

V. 2
The word "ministered" refers to service of a spiritual nature.

NOTE: Ministering to the saints (cp. 11:26) is ministering to the Lord!

Never forget that whatever you do for a fellow child of God in this local church you are doing for Christ. (SEE Mt. 26:34-46).

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me" (Mt. 26:40)

Mark 9:41 - "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lost his reward."

(SEE V. 5)
We all are to be involved in one form of service or another.

The ministers had a minister (John Mark). We are all ministers. I serve you, many of you serve me (in various ways), and together we are serving Christ!

1. **Barnabas & Paul faithfully served** (12:25)
(They were dependable; they finished the job)

12:25

Barnabas and Paul had faithfully carried out the menial task of bringing relief money to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30).

Those who are faithful in little things will be given greater responsibility.

Mt. 25:21 - "His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

SEE Luke 16:10, 11 (NOTE: Paul and Barnabas were faithful, so God knew He could trust them with true riches).

Paul looking back at this point of God's calling him, said: And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." (I Tim. 1:12)

2. **Barnabas & Paul continually served** (v. 2)
(They were consistent; they didn't quit the job)

If you are not already at work in the ministry God has given us to do here, what makes you think you will work when you move to another location? What would lead you to believe that when you become trained, then you will serve . . . or when you go to the foreign mission field then you will serve?

The work of missions must begin at home!

You can't suppose that you can live any way you want, and that someday God will knock you over the head and call you into some great work for Him.

God never moves parked cars! (He moves those who are in motion)

God's will (desired purpose) unfolds as we are busy serving Him right where we are!

II. God Leads Those Who Are <u>Eagerly Seeking Him</u> (v. 2)

("As they . . . fasted")

"Fasting" does not merely refer to going without food for self-denial's sake. It refers to going without food so that you can spend the time normally spent eating - praying! In the Bible, prayer is linked to fasting (cp. v. 3; Ezra 8:23; Neh. 1:4; Mk. 9:29; Acts 14:23; I Cor. 7:5).

NOTE: Nowhere is fasting commanded in the Bible for Christians; it was totally voluntary.

Fasting points to their dedication and intensity in spiritual matters.

The Spirit leads when He sees sincere devotion.

Prov. 3:5-6 - Trust in the Lord
Don't trust your own understanding
Keep acknowledging God
(in all your ways)

III. God Leads You In The Person Of <u>The Holy Spirit</u> (v. 2, 4)

1. The Spirit's Leading is personal

The Spirit is personal; and He leads us personally.

The Holy Spirit is personal (not a mere force)

--He speaks
--He refers to Himself with personal pronouns ("Me; I")
--He is God!

The Holy Spirit leads us personally.

Whenever you make a move for God, it is important to know that it is indeed the Holy Spirit leading you and not some other spirit, or your own independent decision.

The Holy Spirit evidently called out Barnabas and Paul with an objective, verbal, spoken voice. Not like the way He calls preachers today!

How does the Holy Spirit call today?

1) By the Sword of the Spirit (His written commands are His call) - Mt. 28:19-20. The call of the Great Commission is a matter of obedience, not some "experience." If you want a call, go home tonight and I will call you on the phone and quote Mt. 28:19-20 to you!

2) By the Conviction of the Spirit (the Holy Spirit's conviction is His call)

3) By the Internal Promptings of the Spirit (your sincere willingness and desire to serve is God's call put into you by His spirit) - Phil. 2:12-13; I Tim. 3:1.

4) By the objective opening and closing of doors of the Spirit (Acts 16:6-7)

What is a call?

God calls you when He puts into you:

1) an interest,

2) that becomes a concern,

3) that becomes a conviction,

4) that becomes a compulsion

(Bill Commons, ABWE)

2. The Spirit's leading is specific

The Holy Spirit "calls" and "sends" specific leaders for a specific labor to a specific location.

IV. God Leads You <u>Into A New Ministry</u>, Not Out Of The Ministry

(v. 5) (He leads us into service, not out of service!)

V. 2

Paul and Barnabas were called unto ( ) a new work.

1. God never leads us to quit

God never calls anyone out of a ministry in a local church to move them on to a time of rest, relaxation, and vacation from the work of God!

God may call you from work to work; but never from work to retirement.

There is no retirement in Christian service until death! (Rev. 14:13)

Many times Christians are like broken vending machines: They are "out of service!"

If God truly was the one who led you into a ministry to begin with, He won't turn around and lead you out of it unless He is moving you on to more effective service.

He may lead us to change our ministry, but not quit it!

2. God never leads us to worldly pursuits.

God never leads a Christian to change His status (to leave the "state" he is in) for merely secular reasons.

If we are to do all "to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31), we had better not move, marry, or change our vocation unless we know it would be for His glory.

Why do most people move? Worldly reasons. Make more money; live more comfortably. Without considering whether or not you can serve God more effectively by making the change.

3. God never leads us for selfish personal advantage.

NOTE: When God leads you away from a particular local church, it is because He has a new ministry already lined up for you.

He does not lead you out of a church so that you can go hunting for another church. (unless, of course, the church was unbiblical or preaching false doctrine.)

Why do some Christians hop from church to church?

ANSWER: They are only interested in being served, not serving! They carnally think, "This church does not offering enough for me," rather than thinking, "I have something to offer to this church."

When God leads us it is: always for us to serve, not merely for us to be served.

People generally leave churches over a Satanically-instigated personality conflict, not over Biblical convictions. ("I don't think the pastor is flashy enough; the music isn't fast enough or loud enough, etc.)

NOTE: Paul & Barnabas were not seeking a new ministry.

They were faithfully and continually doing the ministry God gave them until the Holy Spirit called them to be foreign missionaries.

If God were to ever lead me out of FBC, three conditions would have to be met according to the pattern in Acts 13:1-3:

1) God would have to fill the leadership position before I left (NOTE v. 1 - three other leaders were left to oversee the work)

2) I would want the approval and blessing of the church in regard to the new ministry God would lead me to (v. 3)

3) God would have to have a new ministry waiting for me to immediately enter.

V. God Leads You Through The Authority Of <u>A Local Church</u> (v. 2)

The Holy Spirit (in v. 2) told the church to dismiss Barnabas and Paul, which shows how they were under the local church's authority.

NOTE: The church dismissed Paul and Barnabas; they didn't merely walk out and leave (as is the practice so often today).

(cp. V. 1 - "in the church")

The Holy Spirit works through the local church to equip and enlist believers to go forth and serve.

The local church is God's only divinely established program today. Para-church organizations are only good to the degree that they help local churches.

Mission boards do not send out missionaries -- churches do!

These boards are servants to the churches as they help expedite the work (they aid the missionaries with custom procedures, dealing with various governments, sending their support money, etc.).

(NOTE: Paul & Barnabas later reported back to the church at Antioch (Acts 14:26,27)

V. 3
The laying on of hands is symbolic of identification. It expresses fellowship between the church and the two men. It shows a oneness of purpose and a unity.

It shows that the church recognized God's call on their lives and by putting their hands on them and praying, the church is, in a sense, saying: "We are standing behind you, brothers...We are backing you up...Our support goes with you...We are in this together."

A church must be sensitive to the Spirit's call in the lives of its members.

The words "sent them away" reveal how close Paul & Barnabas were to the church.

The words describe how the church "released" them. The church "let them go." Lit. - they "loosed them"; this implies that they hated to see them go.

Paul & Barnabas were, in a sense, in the hands of the church. They were held on to by the church until the church released its loving grasp of them and entrusted them to the Lord and His new work for them.

You can be assured that God is leading you when you fellow church members agree as to the decision you are making, and add their blessing to it (cp. Mt. 18).

VI. God Leads by <u>Closing some Doors</u> of Opportunity (Acts 16:6-7)

"They" = Paul, Silas, and Timothy (15:40-16:3)

V. 6 - "Forbidden" - to hinder, prevent, or keep from

"Holy Ghost" - The One preventing Paul, Silas, and Timothy from working in Asia Minor (Turkey) at this time was, surprisingly, the Spirit of God!

How did the Spirit forbid them? The Bible does not say.

--Perhaps verbally (an audible voice, vision, or dream)

--Perhaps circumstantially (He could have allowed great difficulty, intense pressure, lack of peace, etc.)

Why did the Spirit forbid them? The Bible does not say.

--Perhaps God would use others at this time to work in Asia Minor

--Perhaps the urgency of the need at Macedonia outweighed the need in Asia

Imagine the Spirit preventing them fro preaching in a particular locale! He does want preaching in Asia, just not by this particular team at this time.

V. 7 - "The Spirit suffered them not" - the Spirit did not permit or allow them to minister in Bithynia either. He now closes a second door.

When God closes a door (on a job, relationship, ministry, etc.), we need to learn not to become angry or bitter. But to meekly roll with God's flow and allow Him to redirect us. We must trust His sovereign wisdom to guide and His strength to provide for the new journey ahead.

VII. God Leads by <u>Opening other Doors</u> of Opportunity (Acts 16:8-10)

It's Jesus Christ who opens doors!
Rev. 3:8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it:

"The name Macedonia derives from the Greek Μακεδονία (Makedonía), a kingdom (later, region) named after the ancient Macedonians. Their name, Μακεδόνες (Makedónes), is cognate to the Ancient Greek adjective μακεδνός (makednós), meaning "tall, slim". It was traditionally derived from the Indo-European root *mak-, meaning 'long' or 'slender'" (Wikipedia)

Hence according to Thayer "Macedonia" means "extended land" Macedonia was a large region located north of Athens Greece, which included cities like Philippi (Acts 16:11-40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), and Berea (Acts 17:10-12).

A. God indicates an open door by speaking to us about a need of ministry (v.9a)

"A vision appeared to Paul" - not the normal way God gets directives to people; but Paul was an apostle and received direct revelation from God.

God speaks to us via His Word. He can also use situations and circumstances to get our attention.

B. God indicates an open door by creating a burden for a particular need (v.9b)

"A man of Macedonia" - God could have just told Paul to go into Macedonia. Instead God uses the invitation of a man . . . a man in need. . . a man looking for aid or help.

As the eunuch said to Philip, "How can I [understand] except some man should guide me?"

C. God indicates an open door by presenting ministry opportunity (which may even involve opposition (v.10 –f)

"We endeavoured to go" - We zealously sought to go.

"Assuredly gathering" - to put all of the pieces together; to unite all of the information and come to a conclusion.

Paul and his team--when adding up the closed doors in Asia and the Vision of the Macedonian Call--concluded with what they knew to be God's call.

"A burden without action is just a wish"
(Pastor Kenny Fryman)

So they launched out to Macedonia, in Greece.

1. Philippi (Acts 16:11-40)

2. Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)

3. Berea (Acts 17:10-12)

Great fruit in each city (with opposition in each).

"Open Doors" do not happen necessarily without opposition:

1Cor. 16:9 For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

Conclusion:

Do you sense God's leading in your life? Is God at work leading you to people to whom you can minister? Are you in the center of God's will for your life? All of us need to be right where the Lord wants us. We will never be content anywhere else.

“Come over into Macedonia and help us”

Many of you are aware how that God has opened opportunities for me in the past to minister in India (4 times), Russia, Ukraine, South America (Quito, Ecuador, 2 times), the Eastern Caribbean, and most recently Haiti. My particular privilege was to teach pastors.

Just last month I received two unsolicited invitations to minister to pastors in Kenya and China.

The reason, I preached this message today, was to set the stage for what I am about to announce.

I believe that God has led me to launch out into a full-time ministry of International Evangelism. Terri and I have peace about taking a step of faith and beginning a new ministry of helping pastors primarily in 3rd world countries.

It is not an easy decision for us to leave. We love it here. I don't like change; I'm comfortable here (too comfortable perhaps). To my shame, I feel like my ministry has been to a degree on "cruise control."

After Twenty-Six years of ministry in this local church, we believe our mission here is complete, and that God is moving us to begin a new ministry.

We are making this move with much thought, prayer, advise from people I respect and conviction that this is the Lord’s leading in our lives.

I praise God for giving me the training that I have received. I am also thankful for the Lord’s enablement to communicate His Word. I have a burden to teach others what God has given to me. Particularly teaching those in the ministry on the foreign mission field. About 18 years ago on one of my trips to India, a missionary we support said, "Why don't you do this full-time?" Well, I have given that question thought over the years and believe that now is the time. Traveling overseas and ministering in some challenging environments is not easy, and I believe I need to do this while I still have some youth in me - before I get too old and worn out.

Faith Baptist has taken great care of us over these 26 years. The church has adequately met our financial needs, and it will be a step of faith for us to leave the comforts and support God has graciously given us through you. We will have to raise support for our future ministry. I am assured God will provide.

Now, don't worry, I will not leave this church without a pastor. As a general rule, I do not believe a shepherd should leave the sheep shepherdless.

I believe God has placed someone on my heart to be the next pastor at FBC. Someone who I believe will surpass my work as a pastor. Someone I greatly admire and recognize God's gifts in him. Someone who is a godly man with a godly wife and a Christ-honoring home.

I am recommending that Thomas Overmiller (of Falls Baptist Church and Professor of New Testament at Baptist College of Ministry) be the next pastor of Faith Baptist Church. He has agreed (with the blessing of his pastor, Wayne VanGelderen) to candidate for this ministry.

It may appear to some that this is an all-of-a-sudden decision, but in fact, I have been contemplating this for many months, and have been in communication with Thomas since late November/early December. Before the Swansons knew they would be needed in Nebraska for Colleen's mom, Pastor Swanson knew that I was seeking God's will about leaving, and he was in full support of Thomas as my choice for the next pastor.

I have scheduled Thomas to be with us next Saturday and Sunday because he is on spring break from his college teaching at that time.

I would like to form a committee of men who are active members of FBC, who will join me and our deacons to meet with Thomas and Sarah next Saturday late afternoon to interview them. Thomas will then preach next Sunday morning and in the afternoon service will present his ministry burden for FBC and NYC and answer questions.

This afternoon, we have scheduled a church business meeting to discuss the details and hope that all members can join us.