

## How to Walk in God's Will (Part 1)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, friend. I have, I think, a very important message to share with you right now. I'll probably be on it for a couple of broadcasts. So, you're not going to want to miss the next one. We're going to be in Acts 16, and there's one of the most intriguing, truth-filled stories in all of the book of Acts we find here. I've entitled this The Summons and the Sending, and you'll find out why as we progress. First of all, the summons and that is just basically when God sends answers to hungry hearts. We read in Acts 16, beginning in verses 6–10 NKJV. It says,

<sup>6</sup> Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup> After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. <sup>8</sup> So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Interesting. In this vision, the man from Macedonia says, "Come help us." So, they believe that God has called them to go preach the gospel. That is the best way to help people. Friend, it is good to feed the poor. It is good to build hospitals. It is good to do all sorts of things, but the highest and best help we can give to any human being is to bring the gospel to them. This life is just a vapor that appears for a little time, and then it vanishes away. We are eternal beings who will spend eternity somewhere. If I help someone physically, that's wonderful. If I help them socially, that's wonderful. That's admirable. It's even noble, but it's most important that I help them eternally. So, when this guy called for help, they said, "Okay." God has called us to preach the gospel and to bring them the good news. That is the main help that the world needs.

Question though. Why there? Why Macedonia? Well, certainly, we're going to find out God is weaving a much bigger picture than any of them would understand at the time. God is doing much more. There's much more in play than they can see with their limited vision. As we look back, we get a glimpse into some of those things, but perhaps not all of it. If you really want to boil it down to its most immediate cause, it's because there was the cry of hungry hearts. They were embodied in the vision of this man who said, "Come help us." He represented the cry of many hungry hearts. If you would have looked at me as a teenager, as a young man in my 20s, you probably would have thought, "Man, there's no hope for a guy like that." But God saw the cry of my heart. I got involved in so many different things, and at the root of many of the things that I explored that I got involved in was a deep hunger to know God. I was looking for the truth.

I got deeply involved in Eastern religions. I got deeply involved in Native American religions. I did lots of psychedelic drugs. I, believe it or not, even got involved with people who were involved in witchcraft. I went to metaphysical churches. I was looking for the truth. And consequently, all the wrong pathways I went down, I got fairly messed up. But God saw that at the core of that was someone who was thirsting and hungering for the truth. That might be you right now. It might be the very reason that you've tuned in. God sent a 12-year-old boy to me who talked to me about Jesus in a park. I was in my 20s. I had never heard the gospel before.

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And through his influence and that of his family, I ended up in a street mission where I heard a simple message of the gospel, and I gave my life to Jesus. People prayed over me. They put their hands on me and prayed for me. I was delivered that night from drug addiction. From that day to this day, and we're approaching 50 years, 40-something years right now, 48 years, I've never had another illegal drug in my body from that day to this day. God did a marvelous thing for me. But I believe if I had sort of a laissez-faire, "I don't really care, yeah, I'll look into that." I think we get met to the level of our hunger.

I used to do a Bible study, a weekly Bible study in what we call here in California rest homes. They're basically hospitals for the aged. They get medical care in there. They have their own room. Many of them are just in a hospital bed. A large majority of them have pretty much been forgotten by family. They don't have anybody who visits them. I went in there one day with my guitar, and I asked the lady at the desk, I said, "Do you guys need someone to visit the old people in here? I can sing songs." I mean, she practically grabbed me by the collar and dragged me and said, "Absolutely. We are in desperate need." So, I began to go from room to room, and I learned all the old hymns, and we would sing In the Garden and Bringing in the Sheaves. I would read them Bible stories, hold those wrinkled hands, and pray with them. Many times, I sat in there were tears rolling down their cheeks, and I led quite a few of them to Christ. That developed into a weekly Bible study.

I would bring a friend of mine to come and help me with the study. We'd sort of round everyone up in their wheelchairs, bring them in, and I'd do a Bible study. One day, we're praying. We're actually at my buddy's house, and we're praying. We decided to pray in the Spirit, to pray in other tongues for about an hour. So, we prayed in the Spirit for about an hour, we got done, and we were just there quiet. The only way I can describe it is I had this sort of inward vision, just this quick vision. I saw a hospital room, and I saw the room number above it. Just as clear as anything. It was internal, but I saw it. I had this little vision. I intuitively knew that it was the hospital across the street from the rest home we were going to. I didn't say anything to my friend, and instead of turning right into the rest home parking lot, I turned left into the hospital. He goes, "What are you doing?" I said, "Just go with it." I didn't tell him what was going on.

We parked, and honestly, when I saw the vision of that room and the room number above it, I thought to myself, "That can't be." It was like room 429 or something like that. I thought, "This hospital is small. There's no way they have that many rooms. There must be something wrong with that." Anyway, we parked, and my friend, with a question mark written across his face, followed me in like, "What are we doing?" I just walk, and I start looking for rooms. Sure enough, I found that room with the room number above it. As we were standing there, a nurse walked out. She looked at me and said, "Can I help you?" I said, "Yeah, I need to go in that room." She said, "You can't." I said, "No, I have to go in that room." She said, "I'm sorry, you cannot go in that room." I said, "I must go in that room." She said, "All right, but be quick." Then she walked away.

We walk into the room. There's a woman sleeping in a bed there. No one else is in the room. I don't want to awaken her. I don't know what to do. So, I grabbed my friend's hand, and we just began to softly pray. Suddenly, she sat up in bed, looked at us, and said, "You scared me!" I said, "Ma'am, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. The truth is, I was praying a little while ago, and God gave me a vision of your room. He sent me here." She said, "Thank You, Jesus! Thank You, Jesus! I knew God had sent somebody! I've been praying. I knew God had sent somebody! He said that you would pray for me, and God's going to heal me. Thank You, Jesus!" She just had a little personal church service right there in the hospital room. It turns out that she'd had a heart surgery that had not gone well. There had been complications, and she

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wasn't getting better. She was getting worse. So, we just gathered around the bed there. We put our hands on her. We prayed for her and went our way after just encouraging her.

I went back just a few days later to see her, and they said that she had been discharged. Things just turned around for her, and she wasn't in the hospital anymore. But my point in sharing that story is her response, "Thank You, Jesus! I knew You'd send somebody. I've been praying." God saw the hunger of her heart, and if He had to send some 20-something-year-olds who kind of didn't hardly know what they were doing, that's what He was going to do. If God has to give a vision to Paul, in the night, of a man in Macedonia to come over and help them, that is what He is going to do. God sends answers to hungry hearts wherever they are. I don't think I'm being presumptuous, but the fact that you're listening to me right now and watching me right now, I suspect there's a deep hunger in your heart for God, for the things of God, and for truth. And just keep an open heart, lean forward, and listen to the things that I have to share. I just want to encourage anyone who's listening right now, let us take the posture of being available to be the one who receives the summons, to be the one who God sends to that person or to that group of people in need.

I suspect there are some people at your work who work with you who feel like they're going down the drain for the last time. Maybe their marriage is on the rocks, or you have a neighbor or somebody who plays football or soccer with your children, and they're just so desperate, and they've been praying, "Oh God, I don't know what to do." God is just looking for someone who will be sensitive enough that He can summon them and bring them to that person in need with help and with an answer. You might say, "Well, if I had a vision, it might make it a little bit easier. I could figure out who God wanted me to go to." Well, you may get a vision, or you may not get a vision, but the fact is, in this story that we read, though Paul had a vision, much of, in fact, most of the guidance was far more subtle, but it was just as supernatural. They wanted to go into Asia, that is, Asia Minor, but they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go. They sought to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.

Now, how the Spirit communicated to them, we're not told. Was it just the fact that maybe circumstances blocked their way, and somehow, they had an inward sense that God's hand was in these circumstances that barred their way? Or was it just an inner, inward lack of peace as they wanted to go into Bithynia or into Asia that just, "Man, I don't have peace about going this direction." The Bible says in Colossians 3:15 that the Holy Spirit works through peace. It said, "Let the peace of God act as an umpire in your heart continually, deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds." Now, I actually quoted that from the Amplified Classic. It just says to let the peace of God rule in your heart. The word rule, the Greek word, literally is the word for an umpire who would make a call out of bounds or in bounds. "That's out of bounds. This is fair territory. Keep going."

"So, let the peace of God act as an umpire in your heart continually, deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your mind." So, the idea is as I pray about going somewhere or doing something, and as I pray and lean inwardly toward that, I have peace. The umpire's making a call. That is supernatural guidance. Or if I'm praying about doing a certain thing, entering into a business negotiation or relationship, and I'm troubled inwardly, I just don't have peace, friend, don't try and override that. Listen to it. It is one of the ways that the Holy Spirit can speak to us. In the book of Proverbs, it says all of wisdom's pathways are peace. If you're walking on wisdom's pathway, there's going to be an inward peace. It doesn't mean there won't be an outward storm, but an inward peace of the heart will be there if you're on the right pathway. So, you don't need a vision to be summoned by God and to be used by Him to help somebody. Sometimes, His direction, again, is far more subtle. It's interesting, as you read the

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next couple of verses 11 and 12, it says, "So we set a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis." Then, they end up in the city of Philippi. It's interesting language. It said that we set a straight course. It's actually a nautical term in the Greek language. And this is just sort of a side thought. It might help you. It's a nautical term in the Greek language, and it literally means "before the wind." In other words, when they landed on what God wanted them to do, it seemed like even nature was cooperating with them and speeding them along their way. And if we read the account, the journey, as they sailed across, it took two days because they were sailing before the wind.

But in Acts 20:6, the same passage took five days. What's the point? Two days, five days, same passage. Sometimes, when you're on the King's business, the wind is at your back. And sometimes, when you're doing the King's business, the wind is in your face. The thing is, you will arrive if you just don't give up. I have done some things, and it just seemed like every door opened, and just everything was cooperating to make it happen. I knew God was in it. There were other times I knew God was in it, even though every door seemed to slam shut, even though the wind was in my face, and it was a difficult way to go. Now, I need to determine those things on the inside that I'm not going to be thwarted, that I'm not going to be turned aside because of difficult hours or difficult circumstances. So, hey, that's free for you, my friend. But just a thought. So, they arrive and lay low for a few days. They just sort of observe things and rest. Then, we read in the next few verses 13–15 NKJV,

<sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. <sup>14</sup> Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

This is a very, very persuasive woman. Now, according to Jewish custom and Jewish law, a synagogue could not be formed unless there was a minimum of 10 Jewish men. So, here in this Roman colony, this city of Philippi, apparently, there were not even 10 Jewish men. So, what they would do if they didn't have that is they would customarily meet on the riverside, and say prayers and read Scripture or whatever. But here, there are just women. Apparently, there are not even any men involved. So, Paul and Silas come there to the riverside, and they share the gospel. The Lord opens Lydia's heart. Then, she immediately opens her house. God opens her heart. She opens her house, and she opens her pocketbook. It's interesting because it says that she is from the city of Thyatira, known for its purple dye. There was actually a dyeing guild there, a very lucrative business. This particular purple that they dyed garments with from Thyatira was used for the Roman togas. It was actually called a royal purple. We still use that phrase today.

This woman was apparently very rich. She had household servants. She had a home large enough for her servants and for her new guests. So, she has this business bringing purple-dyed garments into Philippi. She's a well-traveled woman. She's a wealthy woman, but interesting; if you look on a map, Thyatira is right in the area of what they called Asia, where Paul tried to go and the Holy Spirit had forbidden him. You see, God has other plans. No one can do it all. No one can be it all. No one can be everywhere. So, now the gospel is obviously going to be carried there through Lydia's business connections. God has another way to get the gospel there. Beyond that, this city of Philippi was named after Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. This is a very strategic city. Many, many strategic battles were fought

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there because Philippi commanded the road between Europe and Asia. Lydia is the very first European convert. The very first European convert. Some historians refer to Lydia, and as I understand it, some secular historians even refer to her conversion as the turning point of Western civilization. That's no little thing. Friend, we should not be enslaved by statistics and measure our success by the number of people who have come to Christ. Certainly, numbers are important because they represent people. But did you know the Gospels are just filled with stories of individuals who Jesus ministered to? Individuals are important to God, and they can lead to great things. I mean, think about Philipp. He's in the city of Samaria. He's preaching Christ to them. There is revival in the city. People are coming to Christ. There are miracles. Then, God basically taps him on the shoulder and says, "You need to go out to the desert. You need to leave the revival. I don't want you to start a newsletter. I don't want you to buy a building. I want you to go out to the desert."

He goes out to the desert. There's one man, an Ethiopian eunuch, who's hungry for God. He's reading from the scroll of Isaiah. The Holy Spirit says, "Join yourself to that chariot." He is invited up in the chariot and sees he's reading Isaiah. He said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" "How can I unless somebody helps me?", the eunuch said. So, from the same Scriptures, he preached Christ to him. The man is baptized. He was a man of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. So yeah, it's one person, but this guy is going to carry the gospel back into the royal house. Ethiopia was impacted and is impacted to this day because of that single person's conversion. So yeah, they went into the city of Philippi. I mean, they had a vision, but people didn't get saved by the truckloads. They didn't get saved by the hundreds. First, there's just one lady. She gives her life to Christ. But oh, how significant that one salvation was. She was God's foothold to win the city and literally His foothold to change history. God knew what He was doing. I think the devil sensed something was up, which brings us to something else. When we've been summoned and commanded by God, led by God to do something generally, there's going to be opposition. There's going to be setback. So, there's the sending, but there's also the setback. That's opposition from the enemy. We read in verses 16–18 NKJV.

<sup>16</sup> Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

I want you to know that everything she said was true. They were servants of the most high God, and they were proclaiming the way of salvation. True, true, true. Verse 18,

<sup>18</sup> And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

Now, Satan's first and most dangerous attempt to derail the work of God is to try and get God's people to form an alliance with him. That's the most dangerous thing the devil does. He wants to form an alliance. Up to this point, only women have been reached with the gospel message. But many men were listening to this fortune teller, to this woman who was possessed with the spirit of divination. In fact, in that culture, in that time, a general would not even go to war unless he had a good positive omen from a fortune teller or someone like this. So, the devil would have been saying, "Hey, maybe she has a wrong spirit. Right, Paul, you recognize that?" Maybe she was saying what she said with a condescending tone or sort of a mocking tone. We don't know. We're not told that. "But hey, at least what she's saying is right. Why don't you let her speak and



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represent you? It can be a win-win." That's what the devil always does. "Let's form an alliance." He wants you to lay down in your hammock, and he'll rock you, hand you a lemonade, and start singing, "Why can't we be friends? Why can't we be friends?" But, friend, you never want to form an alliance with the devil. Never ever do you want to do that. Listen to me, Paul would have, before he was saved, prayed this very common prayer. "Lord, I thank You that You didn't make me a Gentile. Thank You that You didn't make me a slave. Thank You that You did not make me a woman." The devil, certainly, would have been reminding him of that. It was the Jewish culture that he was very steeped in. Women had a very lesser role, and the men were dominant in virtually all things. That was Paul's upbringing. He would have, like I said, just been steeped in that from the time that he was a boy.

If you think about it, the devil probably would have been saying, "Look, if you let me represent you, we can get the men too. Don't you want to reach the men? I mean, after all, that was a Macedonian man in your vision, wasn't it? It wasn't a Macedonian woman." But the truth is we don't need men or women who simply affirm the truth, yet they do not submit their lives to us to represent us. No matter what kind of influence or notoriety they have, that never turns out well. Anytime the church has made alliances with men or women who did not obey Jesus, love Jesus, and serve Him, but they made alliances just because of their notoriety, it has always backfired on the church, and it always has hurt the work of Christ. Whatever is sought to be gained through that person's notoriety or through their influence is ultimately lost. Because, friend, there are always ulterior motives involved. And frankly, the devil never does the church any favors. Now, when the devil can't get us to align with him, and the apostle Paul recognized and refused to go for it. He cast the demon out of that girl. The devil results to his only other tactic. When we won't form an alliance, he will always seek to antagonize, which will always backfire for him. We continue reading in verses 19–23 NKJV,

<sup>19</sup> But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. <sup>20</sup> And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; <sup>21</sup> and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." <sup>22</sup> Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.

Now, they certainly had a setback, but you know what? They were going to have a comeback because when they had a setback, they didn't lose their song. We're going to talk about that next time. Now, friend, you may have experienced a number of setbacks yourself. Perhaps you were on pathway, and you felt like God was really in it, but it seemed like everything that could go wrong had gone wrong. That doesn't mean you are out of the will of God. In fact, it may be a sign that you're in the will of God. As we talked about in the message, I think you need to pray and just lean into things in that place of prayer and listen for the umpire of peace to make a call. All of wisdom's pathways are peace. As I said earlier, it doesn't mean we're going to be free from storms. We all have storms. We all face opposition. Sometimes, it just seems like the opposition is coming from all directions and all angles. But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but He will, with the temptation, with the trial, with the setback, also make you able to bear it. Friend, I pray that God would speed you along and that His plans would come to pass in your life in Jesus' name.