

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

I am always intrigued by situations where I hear someone tell me: God told me to... and then they list something they were told. Some of it may be my conservative upbringing, or perhaps growing up in an age where, despite postmodernity's increasing grip, rationalism is still held in high esteem, but my initial response is usually: Really? God *told* you this? Did he call, or just text?

Let's be honest. Most of us are in the same boat—at least, I assume we are. If someone began talking about hearing God talk to them, we would start looking for men in white jackets, right?

Why is that? Is it because we believe we live in a “different age” where God no longer speaks? And if that is the case, how do we know what to do? When we talk about being “Spirit led,” just what exactly do we mean?

Today I want to look at a passage in the book of Acts that very clearly shows the acting of God in directing the lives of his followers. I want to do so simply to get us to ask the question: How do I know what to do when it comes to following God? I am not trying to advocate that God is or should be more “vocal,” nor am I trying to say Paul's experience is normative, as much as I am just trying to get us to spend a little time thinking.

Summary of the Text:

This week, the section in the Book of Acts from *The Story* is filled with tension. Paul and his traveling companions have faced persecutions and have been beaten, but have also returned to the very locations where they had been persecuted. As they continue on their journey, we get to a moment where Luke writes about very specific ways the Spirit guides these men.

First, we are told in verse 6 that they are prevented from preaching in the province of Asia. We get a similar statement in verse 7 where the men try to “enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.” What we are not told, in either instance, is exactly how that transpired. I do not mean to be crass, but was the Spirit standing at the border with a large “Do Not Enter!” sign? I think it would take something like that for me to recognize it, but Luke gives us no clue as to what happened, except for a pretty confident statement that it was the Spirit who prevented their entry.

In verse 9, we are told that Paul has a vision (Was this a dream?) of a man asking them to come to Macedonia. Again, there is very little detail beyond the obvious statement of this happening in a vision.

Notice their response in verse 10. The men get ready “at once” to go to Macedonia. This could be either Paul waking everyone up at that exact moment, or it could be first thing the next morning, plans were changed and they headed that direction. Either way, the point is the same: because of this vision, there was a great need for them to change their plans and head to Macedonia.

Notice also their reasoning for this. They had concluded that God was behind this vision prompting them and it was him who wanted the gospel preached in that area. Why God? How do we know? Someone once said that you could see the fingerprints of God when you looked back on your life. Moments that you did certain things—accepted jobs, did not take other jobs, etc.—in hindsight exhibit the presence of God that you may not have seen at the time. This may be what is happening in this story. As Luke goes back to write down the events, he is certain that God was behind this.

LESSON #31

Date: 04/21/2013

Text: Acts 16.6-10

The Story: Chapter 29

The Big Picture: I wonder how our lives would be different if we had a direct phone line to God, where we could ask questions and he could give us instructions.

Materials Needed: none

It may also be that Paul and his companions were so in tune with God's promptings that they had no doubt from the moment they decide to go to Macedonia that God was the one prompting this. Whatever the case, the end result was that the word of God was preached in Macedonia as a result, according to Paul and his companions, of God's acting them to move.

Preparing for the Group Time:

Reflect on your life and the ways you have seen God at work in your own life. How did you know that it was God at work? In what ways do you distinguish the promptings of God from your own desires or wants? Think also about what advice you would give someone seeking to be able to know God and determine the ways to best follow his leading.

Living the Story

Lesson #31

Text: Acts 16.6-10

Lesson Outline:

To start group, ask the group to share the last movie they went to go see. Why did they choose to go see *that* movie at *that* time? Now ask if there has ever been a time when they made a decision to do something or go somewhere with full confidence that God was prompting you to make that decision. How did you know it was God? How does your reason for this decision compare to your reason for seeing a movie?

Read Acts 16.6-10.

Ask the discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer.

Discussion Questions:

We are told in Acts 16.6 that Paul and the people with him were prevented from preaching the word in Asia or entering into Bithynia. Why do you think they were prevented from doing this? Does this seem contrary to the command we have to preach the gospel to all nations?

If we assume Paul wanted to go into this area, what sort of internal wrestling do you think went on as he was prevented from doing so?

In what ways have you sensed God preventing you from doing things that may have been your desire? In what ways do you think it was God at work, versus something like poor timing?

Paul has a vision for him to come to Macedonia. What do you think you would say to Paul if he walked in the door today and told us to pack up, we are going to Macedonia and here is why? Why do we tend to have such reservation about people who say: God told me...?

How can we be better at seeing God's promptings in our lives? In what ways can we do a better job of giving him credit for being at work in the things we do?

Living the Story:

Your challenge this week is not to do as much as it is to think about the ways you decide to follow God's direction. How do you determine it is God prompting you to move? How do you decide between God's prompting and your own desires or wants? How can you do a better job of listening to God?

Next Week:

Next week we begin looking at Acts 17-19, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans from *The Story* chapter 29. (In other words, read the entire New Testament and you should be good.)