

Acts 21:1-6 And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ² And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³ When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ And having **sought out the disciples**, we stayed there for seven days. And **through the Spirit they were telling** Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, **we prayed ⁶ and said farewell** to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

One of the most difficult things to do is to say goodbye. Paul has had to say goodbye to a thriving work in Ephesus. Backtracking on his way back to Jerusalem, he seeks to encourage them in their faith and they try to persuade him to not return to Jerusalem.

⁷ When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we **greeted the brothers** and stayed with them for one day. ⁸ On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of **Philip the evangelist**, who was **one of the seven**, and stayed with him. ⁹ **He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.** ¹⁰ While we were staying for many days, **a prophet named Agabus** came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹² **When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.** ¹³ Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, **we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."**

Now, two groups of Christians have urged him not to go to Jerusalem. In verses 1-6, the people urged him, "by the Spirit" not to go back.

Having arrived at Caesarea, they stayed with Philip and his family—his daughters were prophets.

Agabus, a recognized prophet in the Judean church came down to Caesarea and warned Paul, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

Luke and all the church urged him not to return to Jerusalem.

I. The Spirit leads Paul contrary to conventional wisdom.

Sometimes we feel so strongly about a course of action—we are so emotionally attached to it—that we feel the Holy Spirit is leading us to express his will. The believers in Tyre, Caesarea, Ephesus, Luke, Agabus—they expressed what they thought was legitimately God’s will. Agabus even gets the details of his prediction wrong. Paul will not be handed over to the Gentiles by the Jews. Paul, will be delivered from the Jews by the Gentiles. In fact, the riot among the Jews was so severe that the Romans had to rescue Paul from his countrymen. Think about that for a second.

Sometimes, people express their sincere desires in spiritual terms.

Transition: How do you know when God is leading you in a direction when all your friends, your family, those you trust are urging not to go in that direction?

1. What is the means by which we discern God’s direction? When we’re talking about means, we mean “resources” or “instrumentality.”

- **A redeemed mind.** If you are a believer in Jesus, then God has invaded your life with His transforming presence. And that changes how we think. This is precisely Paul’s argument to the Corinthian Christians.

(1 Corinthians 2:16) “For who has known the Lord’s mind, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” In context, Paul is telling the Corinthians that their poor choices are inexcusable. Why? Because they have the Spirit present and are able to discern the mind of Christ, the will of the Lord in these matters.

Illus. In our first home we were too poor for many years to afford Directv. After a couple of years we were doing better. I called the company to come out and install Directv. The guy comes back into my house about 15 minutes later and says “All done.” I was astonished that he had finished the job so quickly and said, “That was fast.” He said, “Yeah it was easier because you already had a dish back there.” I had never noticed it. **I had the hardware, but I could not receive the signals until the wires were connected.** Every person is an embodied mind. God is an unembodied mind. God, who is a mind, speaks to minds. When you become born again by the Holy Spirit God reconnects what is otherwise dead, useless hardware. You can begin to receive the signals again. How do you think? **How do reason and deliberate between choices?** You mentally project what you might and might not do? You entertain known facts and counterfactuals—potential facts. You consider your emotional state—your feelings impact your decisions. In the texts we just read, everyone is expressing their personal desire for Paul because of their love and affection for him. Paul told the Thessalonians, “We shared not only our Gospel, but our lives with you as well.” These converts are attached to their apostle. He means a great deal to them. And no one, rightly so, wants to see his untimely demise. **But Paul knows what the mind of the Spirit truly is.** And he is prepared to die for the cause of Christ.

- An active prayer life (Phil 4:6-7) Don't worry about anything, but in everything, **through prayer** and **petition** with **thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Listen, because we have the mind of Christ, the Spirit of God dwelling in our hearts, we need to engage our minds, think it through, listen to your emotions, trust that sanctified instinct. But in those moments and trials when we don't know what to think—the course of action is not clear—we need to actively, intentionally go to God in prayer praying, petitioning, with grateful and appreciative hearts. The peace “shalom” of God is the byproduct. The peace surpasses all understanding. It exceeds.

Prayer is access. And according to this passage it gives us two things: (1) access to the God who has the resources to meet our needs. (2) access to his comforting presence in face of agonizing delays. When I don't get what I want or what I think I need, I need *God!* I need his transforming, comforting presence.

- Morally praiseworthy subject matter (Phil 4:8) “Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.”
 - **Truth:** there has never been a time when untruth, falsehood, lies and deception are so readily available.
 - **Honor:** in the name of expressing “our truth” people have given themselves over to dishonorable, disgraceful behavior. Anything that diminishes God's image in you is beneath you.
 - **Justice:** biblical justice means to make impartial decisions based on objective facts. God knows all facts and hold no false beliefs. As such he can render perfect, impartial, just verdicts. Judging someone based on a falsehood is injustice. False justice is fighting injustice with the same. It's the attempt to right a wrong with another wrong.
 - **Pure:** We tend to think of purity as chastity—it certainly includes that—but is generally means “uncontaminated, unpolluted.” Free from toxicity, free from the noxious environment of criticism.
 - **Lovely:** Attractive. The world has an inbuilt aesthetic which is beautiful, lovely, attractive. There are subjective views of this too. The world also has an inbuilt aesthetic of gruesome and grotesque.
 - **Commendable:** The Bible is full of commands and in the absence of a command we follow what the Bible commends. Some things are expressly commanded or forbidden in Scripture, other issues are matters of wisdom—we follow a commendable pattern.
- God's Word (2 Tim 3:15–17) “and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” The Scriptures do not just tell us what to think on matters of doctrine and faith—they train us *how to think* in the

gray areas of life. When we meditate on Scripture in areas where it is clear, then that trains us how to think on matters where it is unclear.

Recap: We have been given the resources of a (1) redeemed mind; (2) access in prayer; (3) praiseworthy subject matter; (4) Word of God which is able to train us how to think.

2. What does the Spirit lead us to do and not do? Understand, there are parameters. There are guardrails and we need to be able to discern what the Spirit is saying and what he would never say to us?

- **The Holy Spirit will never lead you into unholiness or ungodliness.** He is the *Holy* Spirit, and so he will never tell you to do anything that violates the holiness and character of God and his Word.

Illus. Many years ago I had a guy come into my office who had cheated on his wife with her best friend multiple times.

His wife found out. He sat in my office and asked me, “What does the Lord want me to do? What’s the Spirit saying to me?”

Illus. Or irreconciled relationships. “I’m having relational struggles with someone, so I feel the Spirit leading me on...”

Nope. That’s not the Holy Spirit.

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,

Listen, the Holy Spirit is not going to lead you into an unholy choice. He isn’t going to lead you away from the Word he’s going to lead you back to the Word. The Scripture commands not to worship false, unworthy gods. The Scripture commands us not to lie, cheat, steal, or practice injustice. The Scripture, by way of the application of wise principles, commends us toward certain behaviors. **The Spirit will never violate what the Scripture commands or forbids.**

- **The Holy Spirit will generally lead you into a wise course of action.** The Holy Spirit won’t lead you in an unholy direction, and the Holy Spirit generally will lead you to a conventionally wise choice. **Prov 1:5** “let a **wise person listen and increase learning, and let a discerning person obtain guidance.**” Several times in Acts Paul has sought the guidance of his peers. At **times Paul’s life was so threatened that his fellow disciples/believers had to step in and hold him back from destruction.** In the Ephesus riot in the Amphitheater, Paul had intended to go in and reason with the rabble. But neither Luke, his ministry assistants, nor the magistrate of the city—would let him risk his life by going in. He heeded their wisdom. Most of the time the Spirit will lead you into a generally recognized wise course of action. **Rom 12:2** “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” **Even though we have been given a redeemed mind (the hardware has been rewired to receive the signals), we need to practice renewing our minds in the Word—so that we can discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.**

The Spirit will never lead us to unholy choices, and generally will lead us to conventionally wise choices.

- **The Holy Spirit may lead you to take a leap of faith.** Now, three times in this passage, Paul's fellow believers have urged him—even by way of well-meaning, well-wishing prophecy. Now Luke implicates himself here. Everyone knows what's going to happen. Everybody knows that the word on the street is that if you go back to Jerusalem—you're getting whacked. But in this instance, Paul knows in his knower, he has listened, taken wise counsel into consideration, weighed his options—and he knows the Spirit is leading him to Jerusalem. **Acts 21:13-14** “Then Paul answered, ‘What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, ‘Let the will of the Lord be done.’”

This is the way. And God will deliver him to Caesar. There are times when the people around are doing their job as good friends—everyone knows generally what will happen if you go in a particular direction. And you know, in your spirit, that the Holy Spirit is leading you forward. And the choice you're making, it's holy because the Holy Spirit doesn't lead you to unholy choices. It defies conventional wisdom.

- You may be facing a choice—a situation right now, where the Solid bet is on you not venturing out—taking the leap—taking the risk. But the safe way may not be God's way for you right now.
- **Illus. Christian Assembly Church in Eagle Rock, California**, said it raised enough money to pay off the medical debt of **5,555 struggling families in the greater Los Angeles area. They paid off 5.3 million in personal medical debt.** That act of generosity was unreasonable, counter-intuitive—certainly not contributing to any survival of the fittest instincts. An act of pure, Christian altruism that frankly had no personal survival benefit.

The Holy Spirit will always lead you into holiness—obeying the direct express commands of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit will generally lead you to act according to established wisdom.

The Holy Spirit may lead you to challenge conventional wisdom—to go against what everyone else knows is true. In this case God is calling you to put much on the line for the Gospel, for your family, for his name's sake.

That's what is happening to Paul here. Right now, he doesn't really know what the Spirit is leading him to. He just has a sense that God is directing him back to Jerusalem. Later, he will find out the details. But for now, he's leaping into the dark—into the unknown with faith, assurance that the one who has called him will sustain him. Can you have that same assurance this morning?

Father in heaven we thank you for: (1) a redeemed mind—renewed in Christ, baptized in the Spirit; (2) access to you in prayer, resources and comfort; (3) morally praiseworthy things; (4) your Truth in Scripture—which teaches us what to think and how to think.

We ask for your wisdom and guidance, we pray for a gift of faith to leap when those around us are urging us not to

We pray for strength of heart and the ability to trust you in times when you call us to leap into the unknown.