



Sunday 1st July 2018

Acts 16: v 6-10 is fundamentally a story about four things:

hearing what God is telling us personally.

having Faith to be guided by God's wisdom in our decisions and actions.

recognising that God's idea of time and deadlines is different to and far superior to ours.

God won't give us something to do until He knows we are ready for it.

8 years ago I had a clear example of all three.

I'd been suffering from a slipped disc for the previous 9 years. I'd a great job that took me regularly to Hong Kong and was in the final stages of a PhD. I wasn't a Christian but my wife and daughter were. My daughter was studying at the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry led by Bill Johnson in Redding, Northern California. Just before a trip to Hong Kong I was hit by an overarching desire to go Bethel California on the way back from Hong Kong, basically travelling all the way around the world. I had no time to do that. I was running a large Masters course at Birmingham City University, completing a PhD and and having difficulty in walking because of the slipped disc. I didn't need to go to California to see my daughter as she was coming back to the UK a few weeks later for the summer break. It made no logical sense for me to go to Bethel in California, financially, professionally or medically. Despite all that it felt like I was being pushed from behind by a train. Forcing me to go. Like I had no part in the decision. All problems getting in the way of going just melted away.

I flew to Hong Kong, worked there for nearly three weeks, then flew from Hong Kong to San Francisco, then got a Greyhound Bus a few hundred miles to Bethel Church in Northern California. By then my slipped disc was making movement very difficult. At Bethel Church I was prayed for, the slipped disc of 8 years healed and an effect of the slipped disc making my legs of different lengths was put right through prayer. I was then invited to accept Jesus in my life.

I left Bethel totally committed to Jesus and was also given prophetic messages that have since come true.

I didn't need to go to Bethel for that. It could have happened in the UK. It happens at Locking Castle Church. But I was such a stubborn non Christian that God knew it would take something so spectacular for me to change my mind.

I'd looked for God for 64 years and God eventually chose the later stages of my life to show Himself in technicolour. Life since hasn't been without troubles, but its become far richer and more rewarding living with God. At 71 I'm loving life with God. God knew I was finally ready for all of the challenges and joys of following Him.

If you haven't found God yet. He is near you. Stay open to listening out for Him. His messages come in different forms. Sometimes in dreams as with the Apostle Paul.

The Apostle Paul planned to go to Asia, but God came to him in a dream in the form of a man from Macedonia telling him to go to Macedonia in Europe instead and Paul, Silas and the team obeyed.

Many Bible commentaries use the name Asia here, but that's confusing to our modern ears. The Asia in Acts 16 was actually the name of what we now know as the southwestern provinces of Turkey. The part some of you may have been to on holiday: Marmaris, Bodrum, Izmir. It was a fairly small geographical area. Nothing in common with China, India and the rest of Asia that we know now. Macedonia also had little in common with what we now call Europe.

Paul had also wanted to go into what is now northern Turkey, then called Bithynia, also called then as Asia Minor, but God also prevented that. So why did God tell Paul to go to Macedonia not South Western Turkey, or northern Turkey? Some think that as southwestern Turkey included the city of Ephesus, one of the most important cities in the world at that time, God wanted Paul to 'cut his teeth' in other areas a bit more before going into Asia. Eventually Paul did go to Asia and it would become one of the most challenging and important parts of Paul's ministry, one that later produced Paul's letters to the Ephesians. For whatever reason God had. God wanted Paul to go to Macedonia before south western or northern Turkey and Paul obeyed. And the team with him also obeyed God's message.

They had Faith in God's Wisdom rather than his own plans.

More recently at this Church, Brian and the team from here that went to Kenya, and others who went in previous years, put their Faith in God's Wisdom to overcome all fears and follow God's request.

Apostle Paul's trip to Macedonia though was hardly an easy ride and challenged Paul and his team. It was certainly a learning process. They were arrested, stripped and beaten with rods before being thrown in prison, then escaped after an earthquake and ended up baptising the jailer and his family! When God later sent Paul to south western Turkey, he knew Paul was ready. Paul stayed for over two years in Ephesus, for three months speaking in the synagogue and then every afternoon for two years he spoke in a public hall about the Gospel of Jesus to Gentiles and Jews. Acts 19: v 10 says, "This continued for two years so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. The story of Acts is very much the story of how the Spirit of God communicates to us and through us. Flooding the whole world with His Grace.

The known world at the time of Acts was small but travel was slow and dangerous and communication across the world then was very limited. What Paul achieved was extraordinary in eventually bringing the message of God's Grace from Jerusalem to Rome and all points in-between. Paul put his Faith in God and listened to His requests. It's been passed to us to continue his work in this much bigger world and with much faster communication methods.

Last Saturday in Bristol I gave a talk to a small group of Christian artists at Colston Hall. Within a few hours it had been picked up through social media by an ex-student of mine over in Taiwan.

God has given us that gift of communication technology.

What a wonderful challenge we have to communicate God's message across the world and what wonderful resources of technology we have to support us.

But ,as Paul, we must learn to hear what God is asking us to do and say

And practice putting our Faith in God's Wisdom.

I'm blessed to be part of a Life Group here at Locking Castle Church where all the members practice communicating God's message, listening to God and living in Faith, as one of the members, June, did on her trip to Kenya.

So how can we hear God?

Some ways that I'm aware of and use:

1. Pray to hear God.
2. In dreams (as with Paul)
3. An idea drops into our mind that we become determined to make happen (as with my trip to Bethel)
4. Reading a random Bible passage suddenly gives an answer to a problem or challenge.
5. A prophetic word is given to us from someone who lives in Faith.
6. A chance meeting with someone who can answer a problem or a challenge we have.
7. Practice seeing other people as God sees them. God loves us all and sees the best in us Looking at others through that lens opens up creative possibilities that God had seen but we previously hadn't seen.
8. Doodle, or draw, or write whilst praying. It can help your mind open up to different thinking, helping God's message ger through to us.
9. Be open to creative, imaginative change. God's imagination is way beyond ours.