

## Introduction

Karen and I lived in Orlando for thirteen years, and we never really liked it. We both loved going on camping trips to the mountains in Tennessee and North Carolina. We have always liked mountains, and we liked the change of seasons. Both of us had a desire to move to Atlanta. We did not have a prophetic word about moving to Atlanta; we simply had a desire. I could list a whole lot of reasons why moving to Atlanta made sense. My allergies were very bad in Orlando. Neither one of us liked the hot and humid climate. We both like the mountains, and we like the different seasons. I was also playing professional golf and as a big family, we drove most places. From Orlando, it was a two-day drive almost anywhere. From Atlanta, most places were within a one-day drive. When I flew to a tournament, nearly all the flights went through Atlanta, where I had to make a connection. So, in the natural, there were some reasons for our desires to move to Atlanta.

But, we did not have a prophetic word from God telling us to move to Atlanta. We were not like Joseph who had angelic encounter to tell us to him to go to Egypt or later to return. We did not have an angel appear and tell us to move to Atlanta. We simply had a strong desire to move to Atlanta. When I presented all of this to our pastor at that time, he looked at all the reasons and circumstantial evidence and said, that if I did not move to Atlanta we would be going against God's will. He saw it very clearly, but it was not as clear to me. I did not have any Scriptures. I did not have a prophetic word. The only thing that we had was a desire and some potential logistical benefits. We did move to Atlanta and I do believe it was indeed God's will. It was confirmed through our spiritual authority at the time.

This morning we are continuing to look at discovering God's Specific Will for our lives. This is Part 2 and we will take the things that we learned last week and look at how God used many of those same methods to communicate His Specific Will to the Apostle Paul. It is a case study of God's Specific Will for the Apostle Paul. We will see how God had a Specific Will or plan for him. We will see how God prepared him for the work he was called to do. Third, we will look at the various ways that God communicated His Specific Will to Paul.

### Discovering God's Specific Will For Our Lives

1. God had a Specific Will for Paul
2. God uniquely created Paul to fulfill His plans and purposes
3. God communicated His Specific Will to Paul

#### 1. God had a Specific Will for Paul (Gal 1:15-16, Col 1:1)

God had a plan for the Apostle Paul. He set Paul aside before he was even born. In Galatians 1:15-16 Paul wrote that God had set him apart even from his mother's womb. Even though Paul was ravaging the church as a Pharisee, God had already set him apart from His mother's womb to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul did not know God's Specific Will for his life at that time, but then the Lord revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus.

(Gal 1:15-16) "But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased {16} to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,"

In Colossians 1:1, Paul wrote that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. God had set Him apart from His mother's womb to be an apostle to the Gentiles. That was God's Specific Will for Paul's life. I believe God has a Specific Will and plan for each of our lives.

(Col 1:1) "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,"

I do not believe these Scriptures just apply to Paul; I believe that God creates, fashions, and forms each of us with a plan in mind. I believe He sees all of us before He has formed us in our mother's wombs. I believe He has plans for each of us. Sometimes it takes a Damascus road experience to see it and to stop kicking against the goads. God has a call on each of you. He had a plan for you before you were even formed in the womb.

## **2. God uniquely created Paul to fulfill His plans and purposes (Acts 22:3, 23:6, 1 Tim 2:7, 2 Tim 1:11)**

Part of God's plan for Paul was for him to write half of the New Testament. He prepared him for this calling and work. He was the son of a Pharisee and had grown up as a Pharisee. He got to see first-hand what being a Pharisee was all about. Paul studied under Gamaliel, and had the best education and training possible. Paul knew the Scriptures very well. God used his family and his education to prepare him for the work that God was calling him to do.

(Acts 22:3) "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today."

(Acts 23:6) "But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"

Paul was given the gift of teaching and preaching. In 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11, Paul identifies himself as a preacher, apostle, and teacher. He does not just say he is one; he says he was appointed as a preacher, apostle, and teacher. It was God who appointed him. It was God who created him and gave him these gifts so that he could do the work that God called him to do.

Teaching and preaching are two different things. Teaching gives understanding to people. Preaching also gives some understanding, but I believe that preaching includes a lot more exhortation. I also believe that preaching is often to larger groups and settings. Some people can teach, but pulpit ministry is not part of their calling. They are effective teachers in a small group setting. Some of these skills can be learned, but part of it is the calling of a person. Paul was going to need to teach and preach, and the Holy Spirit gave these gifts to Paul so that he could fulfill God's calling on his life.

(1 Tim 2:7) "For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth."

(2 Tim 1:11) "for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher."

**3. God communicated His Specific Will to Paul** (Heb 11:1, Rom 1:10-13, 15:20-24, 16:13, 1 Cor 16:5-7, Acts 15:36-41, Rom 8:14, Acts 9:3-6, 9:10-16, Acts 26:13-19, 16:9-10, 13:2-3, Acts 21:10-14, 27:23-26, 23:11)

In Hebrews 1:1, we read that God spoke to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways. He can speak through natural means and He can speak through supernatural means.

(Heb 1:1) “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways.”

**a. Natural ways**

**Desires**

We saw last week that God puts desires in our heart to do things. Paul wrote a number of times about the desires and longings that he had. In Romans 1, Paul said that he longed to go to Rome to see them. He wanted to impart a spiritual gift to them and to help them get established. He also wanted to encourage them, and to be encouraged by them. Paul not only desired to go there, he planned to go there. We saw in Proverbs 16 that the plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. God had thus far prevented Paul from going to them, but he still had a longing to go.

(Rom 1:10-13) “always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. {11} For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; {12} that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. {13} I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.”

At the end of Romans 15, Paul gives another reason that he has been prevented from coming. God called him to go where the gospel had not been preached, and not to build on another man's foundation. Although I have helped a number of churches, I aspire to lay foundations and not to build on another man's foundation. Paul added that he has had this longing for many years. I believe it was God's will for him to go to Rome, but it was a matter of timing. Now, many years later, Paul was going to get to go to Rome. I believe there was still another reason why Paul had a desire to go to Rome. Apparently, his mother had moved to Rome. At the very end of his letter he extended his greetings to various people and churches in Rome, and he said to give a greeting to Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. Apparently, his mother was in a church that Rufus was pastoring in Rome. I believe Paul wanted to go visit his mother. There is no mention of his father, so Paul's father may have died. I believe Paul's mother was a widow and possibly could have been living with Rufus' mother, which is why both are mentioned.

(Rom 15:20-24) “And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was *already* named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation... {21} but as it is written, “They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.” {22} For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; {23} but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come

to you {24} whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while.”

(Rom 16:13) “Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.”

In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul told the Corinthians that he was going to come to them after going through Macedonia. He wanted to stay with them and spend the winter there. That was his desire. Then, he said, “for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.” Paul had these desires, but he submitted them to the Lord and was willing to follow God's will if it was different than his own will.

(1 Cor 16:5-7) “But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; {6} and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. {7} For I do not wish to see you now *just* in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.”

We see another example of the Lord leading Paul by his desires in Acts 15. After the first apostolic journey with Barnabas, God put a desire in Paul to return to all the cities and churches that they had planted and to see how they were getting along. He and Barnabas got into a disagreement about who to take, and they ended up going separate ways. Paul took Silas with him and returned to all the churches and strengthened them. God had placed this desire in him.

(Acts 15:36-41) “After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are...{40} But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. {41} And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

## **b. Supernatural ways**

In Romans 8:14 Paul wrote that all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. So, God leads believers by His Spirit. These are spiritual and supernatural ways. They include visions, prophecies, dreams, angelic visitations, and other ways. We will see a number of these supernatural ways in Paul's ministry.

(Rom 8:14) “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

### **Visions**

Paul had a number of visions. While he was on the road to Damascus, the Lord revealed Himself to Paul in a vision. He saw a bright light from heaven and he fell to the ground. The vision was so bright that it blinded Paul, and he had to be led by the hand to Damascus. He and his companions heard the voice. God asked Paul why he was persecuting Him. We are the body of Christ, and Paul was persecuting the body of Christ. God told Paul to go ahead and enter the city.

(Acts 9:3-6) “As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; {4} and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” {5} And he said, “Who are

You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, {6} but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."

When Paul had entered Damascus, the Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision and told him to go tell Paul a message. At the same time, the Lord gave Paul a vision of a man named Ananias coming to him, laying on his hands, and restoring his sight. The Lord told Ananias to tell Paul that he is a chosen instrument of God, and that he will bear God's name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel. He also said that he would suffer for the name of Jesus.

(Acts 9:10-16) "Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." {11} And the Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, {12} and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight...{15} But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; {16} for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

In Paul's conversation with King Agrippa, he described the vision and told him that he saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun. The Lord said to Paul, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads?" God had a plan for Paul's life and Paul was fighting and kicking against what God wanted him to do. Jesus revealed Himself to Paul at that time. In verse sixteen God appointed Paul as a minister and a witness. In verse 19, Paul said, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision. God can speak to us and give us direction through visions.

(Acts 26:13-19) "At midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. {14} "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' {15} "And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. {16} 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; {17} rescuing you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, {18} to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' {19} "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,"

Later on in Paul's ministry, he was in Troas, and the Lord gave him a vision of a man of Macedonia, who said, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." So Paul concluded that God had called them to go to Macedonia and preach. So Paul and Silas went to Philippi. Lydia and her household got saved. The jailer that was about to take his life received Christ, and he and his whole household got saved. God had a plan for the city of Philippi to hear the gospel and He gave Paul that direction through a vision.

(Acts 16:9-10) "A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." {10} When he had

seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

### **Prophetic Words**

In Acts 13, Paul and the other four elders of the church at Antioch were praying and ministering to the Lord. The Holy Spirit gave a prophetic word to them to set apart Barnabas and Paul for the work which He had called them to do. God had already told Paul that he was to be a witness to kings, Jews and Gentiles. He had already told him that he would suffer. This prophetic word was confirmation, and it was also a word initiating that apostolic ministry right then.

(Acts 13:2-3) “While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” {3} Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

In Acts 21, Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, and he had stopped in Caesarea. While there a prophet named Agabus came and gave a prophetic word and picture to Paul that he was going to be bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. They tried to persuade Paul not to go, but Paul was not going to budge. In Acts 19, he had purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem and then to Rome. When they saw that Paul was not going to be persuaded, they fell silent, remarking, “The will of the Lord be done!”

(Acts 21:10-14) “As we were staying there for some 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, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" {12} When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging 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 bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." {14} And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!”

### **Angelic Visit**

Just as the Lord sent Gabriel to Zacharias and to Mary, He sent an angel to Paul while he was on the ship headed for Rome. A big northeastern storm had blown in and everyone on board was fearful of losing their life. The angel told Paul that he would stand before Caesar and that all the lives of those with him would be spared. Paul encouraged everyone on board that things would turn out just as had been told to him.

(Acts 27:23-26) “For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, {24} saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' {25} "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. {26} "But we must run aground on a certain island.”

## Personal Encounter

In Acts 23:11, Paul was in prison in Caesarea and the Lord came to Paul and stood at his side and said, "Take courage, for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also." The Lord was giving clear direction to Paul. He did not send an angel. He did not give Paul a dream. He did not have someone give him a prophetic word; He came to Paul Himself and stood by Paul's side. God is not limited in how He communicates His Specific Will to us.

(Acts 23:11) "But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

## Conclusion and Applications

As we come to a close this morning, I want to reiterate that God has a unique and special plan for each of us. He had one for Paul, but Paul did not know it. Paul was doing the things that he thought he should do, and the Lord told him that it was hard to kick against the goads. God's plan for your life begins with a relationship with God. God had been preparing Paul for the work that He had purposed for him to do, but Paul was not following God's plan because he did not know God yet. Have you met Christ? Have you come into a relationship with Christ. That is the starting point of your journey. That is the starting point of knowing God's Specific Will for your life.

Jesus said in John 6:40, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." God's will for you is to believe in Christ. It is not just God's will for you to believe and put your trust in Jesus Christ, it is the starting point of your journey. If you have never received Christ into your life, you can do that right now. Simply pray this with me.

"Father God, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that He came and died for our sins. I believe that You raised Him from the dead. I ask You to come into my life and to forgive me of my sins. I ask You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I ask You to reveal Your plans for my life. I ask these things in Jesus' name, the only name given among men by which we can be saved. Amen.

There may be others in here who have received Christ, but you are not sure of what God has planned for your life. I want to pray with you. If this is you, please raise your hands and I will lead us in prayer.

"Father God, we know that You have plans for all of us. You have made and fashioned us uniquely to carry out Your plans and purposes. Father, we ask You to reveal Your plans for our lives. We ask You to speak to us through dreams, visions, angels, prophecies or whatever other method You may choose. Give us ears to hear, eyes to see, and a willing heart to do the things that You show us. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Introduction**

- 1. God had a Specific Will for Paul** (Gal 1:15-16, Col 1:1)
  
- 2. God uniquely created Paul to fulfill His plans and purposes** (Acts 22:3, 23:6, 1 Tim 2:7, 2 Tim 1:11)
  
- 3. God communicated His Specific Will to Paul** (Heb 11:1)
  - a. Natural ways** (Rom 1:10-13, 15:20-24, 16:13, 1 Cor 16:5-7, Acts 15:36-41)
  
  - b. Supernatural ways** (Rom 8:14 Acts 9:3-6, 26:13-19, 16:9-10, 13:2-3, 21:10-14, 27:23-26, 23:11)

**Conclusion and Applications** (John 6:40)