

Providence

By

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prov-i-dence [prov-i-duhns] noun

1. the foreseeing care and guidance of God or nature over the creatures of the earth.
2. God, especially when conceived as omnisciently directing the universe and the affairs of humankind with wise benevolence.
3. a manifestation of divine care or direction.

“In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.” Proverbs 16:9

If you have been through The Journey, you will never forget the session on the Holy Spirit, where the illustration is made about our lives being like a sailboat and He being like the wind. The wind is an unseen force on the planet, always moving, sometimes with force, and we are to raise our sails and be filled with this wind so that He may direct us where we should go. At birth, we were given “free will”, so we have the right and the ability to keep our sails lowered so we can have more control over our lives, and we may even choose to keep our boats at bay, so as to avoid any danger.

But for the man who abides in Christ, who seeks Him in His Word, who examines himself to remove any idols or hindrances in his life, whose heart has been awakened to new life in Him, this man desires the Holy Spirit to guide his life. This new man longs for the adventure that only God can provide. One thing he must learn, however, is that the journey will have twists and turns that he did not expect, and this is where the man of God learns to have faith in God’s providential will for his life.

In Paul’s missionary journeys, an interesting account is told, *“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Acts 16:6-10*

Now, Paul was all about following the Lord, and you might think that “preaching the word” would always be in God’s will, no matter where or when. However, this passage tells us that God prevented Paul from preaching His Word in a particular

region. The Scripture doesn't give us details as to how the Spirit stopped Paul from entering Bithynia. It could have been a bad storm that forced them a different direction. It could have been an unfriendly army waiting on the shore. It could have been any number of things, but one thing is clear- Paul believed he was supposed to go there and was prevented, and later concluded it wasn't God's will. It is interesting that at the same time he was stopped from going to one place, God sends him a vision which prompts him to go somewhere else.

If Paul was like me, when he had his heart set on going to a particular place and he knew it was for a good cause, and then was thwarted, he would have thought immediately that it was Satan. After all, Paul was called by Jesus Himself to go and preach. So, anything preventing that mission must be evil, right? No. The Spirit apparently had other plans, and Paul, being in tune with Spirit, yielded himself to God's plans and moved on in obedience.

If we are truly abiding in Christ and following His Spirit, we will have to learn to accept disappointments and challenges to our logical thinking at times. It is true that we have an enemy who wants to thwart God's plans in our lives, but remember what the Word says to us about evil spirits in 1 John 4:4, *"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One Who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."* So, God's Will trumps evil in the man who follows the Spirit.

This has proved true in my life many times. I remember a few years ago when my church wanted to do a big launch of The Journey and planned a cookout with 300 men planning to come. One of our pastors had planned on me being the speaker to present The Journey to the men. The only problem is that he didn't ask me about the dates when he scheduled it. We had already planned our summer vacation and it really couldn't be changed. My pastor was so disappointed, for I was the logical choice to champion The Journey at my church, but the event could not be changed and neither could my vacation. Immediately, I thought Satan must be trying to shipwreck our Journey efforts. Well, I asked my Journey brother, Frank, if he could take my place and he agreed, though he was a little intimidated, and he didn't even go to my church. While I was in New York, feeling helpless and worthless, Frank was sharing his heart about being a police officer and how The Journey changed the way he treated the criminals with whom he interacted every day. In the middle of his talk, a man stormed out of the door and was very emotional. One of the pastors ran after him and calmed him down enough to find out his story. You see, he was an ex-con and a cop-hater. He couldn't reconcile what he was witnessing, a cop who loved Christ. He was filled with

conviction and torment. In that moment, the pastor led the man to Christ. A few moments later, the man was allowed to share his story before all the men. It was an amazing moment which ended with an embrace between Frank and the ex-con. Right after the event, the man was baptized to the cheers of hundreds of men. These men witnessed The Journey being lived out in an unmistakable way.

When I heard this incredible story, I knew what Paul knew in his story. It was not God's will for me to be there that night. There have been countless other times where in my mind and heart, I thought I was supposed to do a certain thing for God, but strangely, I could not make it. I'm finally starting to get it. God is in charge of my life, and He is directing my steps, even when those steps don't line up with my thinking. I am learning to hold my days and my time loosely, always prepared for diversions in the plan which always seem to arise. I am growing in peace of trusting in God's providence.

So, I would tell you to keep abiding and keep praying for God's will to be done in your life, but as you move through your day and your schedule, don't be surprised when God takes you down unconventional paths. This life in Christ is a wild adventure, so relax and enjoy the ride.