

“FOLLOWING THE HOLY SPIRIT’S DIRECTION”

Mark 13:5-11, Romans 8:12-17, Acts 16:6-15

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“Erik Weihenmayer is blind, yet on May 25, 2001 (Nepal time), he reached the peak of Mt. Everest. Suffering from a degenerative eye disease, he lost his sight when he was 13, but that didn't stop him. On a mountain where 90 percent of climbers never make it to the top--and 165 have died trying since 1953--Erik succeeded, in large measure because he listened well.

“He listened to the little bell tied to the back of the climber in front of him, so he would know what direction to go. He listened to the voice of teammates who would shout back to him, "Death fall two feet to your right!" so he would know what direction not to go. He listened to the sound of his pick [axe] jabbing the ice, so he would know whether the ice was safe to cross. [He listened and succeeded in his journey.]

“When we take a perilous journey, listening well can make all the difference.”<sup>1</sup> If we attune our hearing to the voice of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, we will find the direction that God wants us to take. When we listen well to the Holy Spirit, we, too, will have success in the things we are called to do.

Listening to the Holy Spirit also helps us to remember what Jesus tells us in the Bible. Our Gospel text of Mark 13 helps us to recall what Jesus said about the things that would take place during the Last Days before He returns. With His warning, we are to be alert to false teachers, we are to take current world situations into perspective, and we are to be aware that following Jesus will not always be easy here on the earth (Mark 13:5-9). Yet, as we continue to follow Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, He will use us to share His Good News of the love of God for all people.

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<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *MORE Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2023] pg. 164-165)

But this takes staying in tune with all that the Spirit tells us. We must live in the world guided by the Holy Spirit if we expect to live an abundant life. Living by the ways of this world brings death, but living in the ways of the Holy Spirit brings life (Romans 8:13). Those living by the ways of the world (the flesh, as Paul states it) will not hear the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so they will do whatever they please, much to their demise. But those who hear the Holy Spirit and live according to His ways will find guidance and direction in order to bring abundant life, here in this life, as well as beyond this earthly existence - we'll have eternal life with Jesus. But it takes us constantly being aware of how the Holy Spirit speaks to us in order for us to find His blessings in our lives.

In his book, *Character Forged from Conflict*, Gary Preston writes:

“Back when the telegraph was the fastest means of long-distance communication, there was a story, perhaps apocryphal, about a young man who applied for a job as a Morse code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper, he went to the address that was listed. When he arrived, he entered a large, noisy office. In the background a telegraph clacked away. A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office.

“The young man completed his form and sat down with seven other waiting applicants. After a few minutes, the young man stood up, crossed the room to the door of the inner office, and walked right in. Naturally the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. Why had this man been so bold? They muttered among themselves that they hadn't heard any summons yet. They took more than a little satisfaction in assuming the young man who went into the office would be reprimanded for his presumption and summarily disqualified for the job.

“Within a few minutes the young man emerged from the inner office escorted by the

interviewer, who announced to the other applicants, ‘Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has been filled by this young man.’

“The other applicants began grumbling to each other, and then one spoke up saying, ‘Wait a minute—I don't understand something. He was the last one to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair.’

“The employer responded, ‘I'm sorry, but all the time you've been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse code: “If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.” None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. So the job is his.’

“God uses many means to demonstrate His care—not only through His Word, His Spirit, and the midnight sky. We need only to be alert to these signs.”<sup>2</sup> Those who are ready and willing to hear the Holy Spirit speak to them will be able to do great things as the Lord enables them to. But we have to be listening in order to get our instructions.

And that is the situation we find in our lesson of Acts 16 today. Listen to how Paul and his companions were in tune with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and ultimately what it led to. This is Acts 16:6-15. (READ Acts 16:6-15)

Having just separated from the company of Barnabas, Paul had traveled into the region of Pamphylia, visiting the churches in Lystra, Derbe and Iconium. From there he continued through Phrygia and Galatia, sharing the Good News that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Messiah. Many people came to faith in Jesus because of Paul's witness for Jesus. But as they traveled on toward Mysia, they were prevented from entering the region of Bithynia. Agonizing that they were not able to reach the people of that region for Jesus, they began asking God for directions as to where they might go. And it was then that God spoke through His Holy Spirit to guide

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<sup>2</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 128-129)

them into Macedonia, to Philippi. God knew their hearts, and directed Paul to begin sharing the message of Salvation through Jesus with the people there.

It's interesting how God guides us, if we are attentive to His direction. Sometimes it might be a dream or a vision. Sometimes it might be through circumstances that line up everything to work just right. Sometimes it's through people making requests or telling of opportunities for ministry. Sometimes we just "stumble onto" those who need to hear the Great Good News of Jesus Christ. But unless we are ready to hear and respond to those situations and conditions, it is more than likely that they will pass us by and we miss the chances to be ambassadors for Jesus.

Paul, having seen a vision of a Macedonian man calling out for him to come to them (Acts 16:9), decided to act on that vision and gathered his companions together to go where God was leading. He was listening to where the Holy Spirit was directing him, and then he acted in faith that it was the right thing to do. They made their way from Troas to Samothrace, on to Neapolis and into Philippi (16:11-12). And just as the man had stated in the vision given to Paul, there were people who were ready to hear about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

If we pay attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will direct us to someone who needs to hear a word from us. I try to start each day by praying, "Lord, let me be used by You today to touch the life of another. Direct me to even one who needs encouragement and support, in Jesus' Name. Amen." And during the day, God gives me hints, and suggestions as to people to speak to. He sets up His divine appointments for me and if I stay in tune with hearing His voice or direction, I am able to touch the hearts of many. It might be a "Good morning" to a person walking along, or saying a prayer for person serving me at the store or the restaurant, or even sharing a verse of God's Word to someone who is questioning their faith or hurting from

life's daily ware. It might be just listening to another tell their story, and spending time with them. It could be teaching a Bible study, or sharing a meal together, or even singing a song to lighten the heart of someone who is burdened.

But as busy as my days are, I have to consciously tune myself to hearing God's voice. It can be so easy for me to become too busy to find and follow God's direction to the ones He has set up for me. Unless I intently listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I am easily distracted and I miss the opportunity to bring life to another. Listening well helps us to accomplish so much more than we could ever do on our own.

“Robert Kupferschmid was an 81-year-old with no flying experience. However, due to a tragic emergency, he was forced to fly [and land] an airplane. On June 17, 1998, he and his 52-year-old pilot friend, Wesley Sickle, were flying from Indianapolis to Muncie, Indiana. During the flight, [Wesley,] the pilot, slumped over and died at the controls. The Cessna 172 single-engine plane began to nose-dive and Kupferschmid grabbed the controls. He got on the radio and pleaded for help.

“Nearby were two pilots who heard the call. Mount Comfort, Indiana, was the closest airport, and the two pilots gave Kupferschmid a steady stream of instructions of climbing, steering, and—the scariest part—landing. The two experienced pilots circled the runway three times before this somewhat frantic and totally inexperienced pilot was ready to attempt the landing.

“Emergency vehicles were called out and ready for what seemed like an approaching disaster. Witnesses said the plane's [nose] wheel nudged the center line and bounced a few times before the tail [wheels] hit the ground. The Cessna ended up in a patch of soggy grass next to the runway. Amazingly, Kupferschmid was not injured.

“This [new] pilot listened and followed those instructions as if his life depended on it—and it did. Imagine what would take place in the lives of believers if **we** listened to and obeyed the Word of God with the same earnestness.”<sup>3</sup>

Paul, Silas and their companions listened to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and sought out the Jews on the first Sabbath in Philippi. They were directed to a place where a prayer service was taking place. Joining the group, they “*began to speak to the women who had gathered there*” (Acts 16:13). These were Jewish women meeting outside the city walls for worship and prayer, and they were diligently seeking to remain godly people amongst the pagan society of the Roman culture. So Paul’s company would have been an added relief and encouragement to those who had previously been a part of the prayer gathering.

As they shared the message about Jesus being our Messiah, the women listened intently. And one in particular, Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, accepted their testimony of Jesus being the Savior, and received Him into her life. Her conversion is attributed to the fact that “*the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message*” (16:14). It was tribute to what the missionaries had been called to Philippi to do; to present the message of Jesus Christ so that the people could receive it “*not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction*” (I Thessalonians 1:5).

Folks, think of what could happen if we were to share the message of Jesus Christ to those around us so that they might hear the Word, see the power of the Holy Spirit, and find full conviction about Jesus Christ as their Savior? How many people might we transform into children of the Light of Jesus Christ? How many might we be able to save from the darkness of sin and death? How many might we be able to lead into eternal life? That’s the purpose of the Church, regardless of the different denominations. There are so many who have not put their

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<sup>3</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 195-196)

trust and faith in Jesus Christ right around us, and they're just waiting for someone to come along to tell them the Good News about Jesus. They are steeped in the ways of the world and they are slowly starving and thirsting to death spiritually, trying to find life from the destructive things of our society, yet crying out for the fulfillment of glory of the Lord.

Think about the folks you know who need the Lord Jesus Christ. How will they hear about the message of Salvation? How will they be able to find their lives transformed by the goodness of the Lord our God if we don't tell them? How will they be able to find their way out of their death spirals unless we help them?

So consider this: would you be willing to support and encourage and mentor single mothers so that they might grow in their faith? Would you be willing to interact with and support teenagers who are struggling with addiction and depression? Could you give three hours a week to help a young person discover the truths of the Bible so that they might have hope and reassurance that they are special? Could you give some time toward encouraging and working with the elderly so that they don't feel forgotten or left out? Could you give a few hours a week meeting the needs of the hungry here in Sheboygan? Could you work with folks who need to find adequate housing? Could you give some of your income to support ministries right here in this community - or around the world?

You see, there is plenty we might do if we listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and follow His lead so that people might find hope and life and joy and love in the Lord. There is ample opportunity to work for the Lord, but the question comes, "Will we listen to God's direction through the Holy Spirit, to go where He leads us and to talk to those whom He leads us to go too?"

Lydia accepted Jesus as her Savior when Paul told her about Him. She believed and was baptized along with every member of her family in the Name of Jesus Christ. She received Jesus, and then she began serving the Lord right where she was.

The way the Church grew in the time of the apostles was that those who had received Jesus Christ as their Savior and made Him Lord of their hearts, TOLD OTHERS about the transformation that took place in their own lives, so that the others could receive Jesus, too. They followed the Holy Spirit's direction and went to those who were willing to hear about the Salvation given to us through Jesus.

So, what's holding us back from doing the same thing? Is it our own personal comfort in our own faith? Is it fear of being rejected? Is it fear of where the Holy Spirit might send us? Is it some sin keeping us from being obedient servants of Christ Jesus? Is it the demand that things get done our own way rather than the Lord's way? What is it that keeps us from following Paul and Silas' example of going out to the people?

I invite you to consider listening intently to what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. Then, trust that He is leading you, and then step out in faith to follow His lead and tell another about Jesus Christ. Let's follow the example of Paul and Silas and all the early Christians. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus! He is our Savior, our Messiah and our Master. Give us the heart to not only listen to Him, but to do what He commands us to do, even to help one person find Jesus as their Savior. Help us to put feet on our faith so that we might touch the hearts and lives of those around us for His glory and for Your kingdom. This we pray in Jesus' great and powerful Name. AMEN.