

Always Be Sensitive to the Holy Spirit's Promptings

During the apostle Paul's second missionary journey, he was determined to go from the Galatian region to a place called Bithynia, in what is now northern Turkey, near the Black Sea. There was nothing wrong with Paul going to that place—the people there needed the gospel. And yet Acts 16:7 says: "...they were trying to go to Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them."

This must have been frustrating. The fire of the Holy Spirit burned in Paul. He wanted to tell more Gentiles about the salvation of Jesus. But the Spirit put on the brakes.

Acts 16:6 says Paul, Silas and Timothy were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit" to go north. The Greek word for "forbidden" can refer to the way a horse is restrained by a bridle. The Holy Spirit was literally pulling on the reins and saying, "Whoa!"

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Thankfully Paul did not trudge ahead willfully. He wasn't bullheaded. He paid attention to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, and he tried to be sensitive to His voice. Shortly afterward, Paul had a vision in the night of a man from Macedonia saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us," (see Acts 16:9).

Everything shifted when Paul took a left turn and went westward. When he arrived in Troas, a city on the Aegean coast, the pronouns in the narrative in

Acts change from “they” to “we.” This is where Luke joined Paul’s team. Together they sailed to Philippi, and the gospel began to spread throughout Greece.

Has the Holy Spirit ever put the brakes on your plans? Have you ever had your entire journey mapped out, and then the Spirit changed the directions? Here are three ways you can develop the ability to follow the Lord’s supernatural leading:

Surrender your schedule to God daily. James tells us that we should walk in humility when it comes to making plans. It’s perfectly fine to have a schedule, but we should surrender that schedule to the Lord since He is our ultimate authority. James 4:13 and 15 says, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and make a profit.’ ... Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this and that.’”

Many Christians lose their joy if they experience a disruption or a delay. But I’ve learned that God allows our schedules to be interrupted so He can have His way. Don’t be so proud that you can’t accept it when God overrides your plans. Embrace His unexpected detours.

Ask the Lord to break any stubbornness in your life. King David prayed for God’s clear guidance, and the Lord promised him: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go,” (Ps. 32:8). But then the Lord gave David a

warning: "Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check..." (v. 9).

Mules have to be dragged to go in the right direction. Don't be a spiritual mule. Stubbornness frustrates the Holy Spirit. Some Christians are obstinate when it comes to God's leading. They make plans without consulting the Lord, and then they lock in their coordinates. If you look at their journey with God, you will see skids along the path! They Lord may give them continual promptings and even warnings to change course, but they are inflexible.

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Expect God's leading. This week I began feeling troubled about an event I was scheduled to do in a few months. Whenever I prayed about it, I felt a sense of heaviness. I began to realize that the timing for this event was off track, and the right people were not on the team. So I decided to postpone it until next year. When I did I felt an overwhelming sense of God's peace.

Paul told the Romans: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God," (Rom. 8:14). The Lord uses different means to guide us. He can speak through a Bible verse, a dream or vision, a pastor's sermon, a gentle nudge, a nagging sense of urgency or a prophetic message from a friend or a minister. Always keep your spiritual eyes and ears open for heaven's directives. And learn to obey.

God has a specific path for you to follow. Just as Paul was willing to scrap his original plan, always yield your itinerary to Him. Don't be so self-willed and headstrong that you can't change course. Give the Lord your "yes" daily, and He will guide you.

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