

- **Question... have you ever had plans thwarted? I'm talking about major life plans...**
- **You're going along when something happens, taking you by surprise, completely puts your plans on hold. Maybe derails them altogether.**
- **Have you been there? WHAT DO YOU DO THEN?**
- **The internet- and Christian culture- is full of stories about people overcoming great obstacles to move on to something even better. Some of these are genuinely inspiring. BUT RIGHT THERE IN THE MOMENT these can be of little value.**
- **AND- as believers- people who at least verbally confess that God is our strength, our refuge, our provider- WHEN LIFE HITS A WALL, the truism's and platitudes of Christian culture can be less than helpful. If you've been there (or ARE there), you may be asking, deep in your heart, questions like...**
 - o **Did God cause this? If not, why did he allow it? Where is He- We say that God knows me, that he is a personal God... so what is God doing?**
- **What do we do when it seems like God- actively or passively- has changed our plans?**
- **THAT'S where we are going today. Print out notes- MAP- Get your Bible... if you have a few extra minutes, I have a personal note about this message at the very end, after the outro music. In any case, SUNDAY August 29th, this is PE, TO, thanks for joining us.**
- **Last week we launched with Paul, Silas, and Timothy into Paul's 2nd missionary journey.**
- **Story today is fascinating detail about how God intervened into this venture- but not to accelerate or expand Paul's plans- but to stop them. You see, JUST AS Paul, Silas, and Timothy are launching full bore into the mission, God puts on the brakes.**

✠ Paul, Silas, and Timothy... When God changed the plan

Acts 16:6-10 *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. ⁷When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.*

- **LOOK AT MAP! We left Paul & team in LYSTRA, region of Galatia. From there they head northwest toward border of ancient Asia. Sense is Paul planned to head west through Asia, bringing Gospel through center of region, and heading toward important port city of Ephesus. That was plan- but somehow the Holy Spirit prevented this. ROAD BLOCK 1**
- **For Paul, had to be confusing. But they regrouped and headed NORTH toward prosperous and culturally significant region of Bithynia. Just as they were about to enter, God stopped them again. Blocked road #2.**
- **I can imagine Paul thinking "Uh, God, wanna make up your mind? We can't go into Asia, we can't go North, seems pointless to go backwards to the east, I guess we'll just head through this border region towards the coast. THIS took them to Troas, port city on East coast of Aegean sea. NOT original plan- here that God reveals His plan.**

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ 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.

- **"Macedonia? Really?"** 300-400 years earlier, Macedonia had been most powerful state of ancient Mediterranean world. In the mid-300's BC its ruler was a guy named Alexander. Paul's day, the Greeks viewed Macedonia as land of barbarians.
- **WHY GO THERE?** From what appears to be Paul's initial strategy, it didn't make sense. **BUT** faced with the evidence of God's leading, Paul concludes this is where God is sending them. **SO**, they go.
- **That's today's story-** short, almost easy to miss, but incredibly relevant because what happened to Paul, Silas, and Timothy is one of the most common dynamics we face... we are going about our plans and purposes, when something happens to block them- change them.... Life hits a wall.
- **HERE**, we know that God is the one putting up the road blocks. How did this happen?

✠ When God changes the plan... what does this look like? Few thoughts...

- **For Paul, sense of text, God likely worked by...**
 - **Direct revelation-** Vision, angel visit- literal presence
 - **Common to see God work this way in scripture. BUT IMPORTANTLY-** we are not taught that God will necessarily work this way now. I've never experienced this.
 - **God certainly can do this, and in parts of the world there is evidence He still does. BUT IN SCRIPTURE** these instances are **DESCRIPTIVE, NOT prescriptive.**
 - **REALITY... WE ALL** have received revelation from Lord- **SCRIPTURE!**
- **Spiritual leading**
 - **Classic study 'Experiencing God'** states it this way- God will work by the Holy Spirit, through Scripture, prayer, circumstances and the church to reveal himself, his purposes, and his ways.
 - **Sometimes in form of a 'check in my spirit'...** On a path that has been right, but now a sense that God is leading in a different way... concept of 'spiritual discontent'. Things need to change.
 - **God will never lead us away from him, or counter to his nature-** but He may be leading us in a different direction. I READ- "God doesn't change our primary calling (To know Him), but at times he changes our assignments"
 - **ONE MORE WAY OUR PLANS** may be made to change- This is the hard one... **WHEN OUR PLANS HIT THE WALL BECAUSE WE ENCOUNTER...**
- **External resistance**
 - **Something happens, situation we are in, path we are on, JUST DOESN'T** work anymore.
 - **Doors close. Obstacles arise. Lack of resources. Situations/dynamics change. Change of health.**
 - **Sometimes such resistance happens gradually, sometimes it can be like hitting a wall.**
 - **As I said earlier, this brings up the essential questions-** **IS GOD DOING THIS? IS HE JUST ALLOWING IT? WHAT IS GOING ON?**

- **BIBLICALLY, Reality is at times God DOES cause changes in our circumstances, for HIS purposes (such as our story today). When this happens, very likely we won't understand why- at least initially. That's also a biblical pattern..**
- **On the other hand, there are times we experience the inevitable change and difficulty that comes from living in a fallen world.**
- **BUT REGARDLESS of WHY we face adversity and resistance...**

‡ **When life hits a wall, how do we respond?**

- **If we are honest, sometimes we...**
 - **Just fight it!**
- **Don't care what it takes, damn the torpedos, we are determined to make our plan work. We push, force- often at great cost, not just financially.**
- **As Christians we can try to dress this up spiritually. "We've got to have faith! God can make a way! We can't give up on him!" PROBLEM IS the resistance we face may be God seeking HIS purpose, not ours. Remember Peter? When Jesus foretold his death?**

Matthew 16:22-23 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" ²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

- **This is where we really need to allow God to challenge our thinking, our motivation, our hearts. It is possible my motivation isn't faith, but PRIDE? I've worked so hard, WANT something to happen, we've allowed our identities to get wrapped up in an outcome (rather than our identity being In Christ), and we just can't let go. Can be a dark road.**
- **NOW... HEAR! There may be times when God leads us to stay the course in face of resistance and barriers. FRUIT OF SPIRIT is patience... long suffering! BUT, God WON'T lead us to violate his nature, his wisdom, in order to make our plans work.**
- **If our efforts to stay our course have us stressed out, worn out, angry, bitter... considering compromising integrity or values... JUST POSSIBLE we are fighting, not following.**
- **MOVING ON- In Christian culture, we see another response- especially when we face adversity in ministry- we may blame resistance on the ENEMY.**
 - **We cry 'spiritual warfare'**
- **My plans are falling apart, seems opposition is cropping up everywhere- this must be spiritual opposition. AND IT MAY BE! BUT CHURCH... hear...**
- **In humility we must recognize that failure, struggle, adversity, opposition is a FACT OF LIFE for EVERYONE. Every human, company, relationship, and nation has faced this.**
- **When we face great adversity, we are NOT experiencing something unusual and unique!**
- **THAT SAID, SPIRITUAL WARFARE IS REAL.**

1 Peter 5:7-9 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

- **WE DO have an enemy- and the primary way the enemy seeks to devour us is through lies. Deception. Confusion. You see...**

The enemy's strategy isn't primarily derailing our plans, but using lies, deception, and confusion to draw our hearts and minds away from Christ when our plans don't work out.

– *One other way Christian culture can be less than helpful- when..*

- *We turn to truisms and platitudes*

– *Simple answers that sound spiritual, have seed of truth, but ignore the complexity and nuance- not to mention great struggle- that is life in the midst of change, loss, and adversity. TWO EXAMPLES...*

- *“Just wait for God's perfect timing”*

– *If I just give God enough time, He will do what I'm asking. He will cause my plans to work, remedy my situation, answer my prayer.*

– *GOD'S TIMING IS A REAL THING! It turns out God will work through Paul to bring the gospel to ALL of Asia- just not now, not in the way Paul thought.*

– *Problem is when we tell ourselves we just need to wait for God to do what we ask, our focus- and our hope- can easily become centered on our desired OUTCOME, rather than on God- and this makes us easy prey for the lies of the enemy when things don't happen as we had hoped.*

- *“God has something better planned”*

– *Not unusual testimony. A person experienced great adversity, loss, difficult change. Yet, after some time, God led them into life better than had before.*

– *You may hear this in churches, and it's a staple of testimonies on Christian radio, conferences, and Christian speakers- may be YOUR testimony.*

– *CHALLENGE is this can imply (and some people outright teach)- that in every difficult situation, if we maintain our faithfulness to God, that he will bring about something better- and we define 'better' according to our terms, our plans.*

– *This may happen, and praise God when it does. But this is not a promise. GOD'S PROMISES are true for ALL believers, everywhere, all the time.*

– *FRIENDS... THIS IS DEEP WATER FAITH- but when life hits the wall, OUR HOPE, OUR PEACE, is not God eventually making our external situation better... our hope is GOD HIMSELF- and HE IS HERE RIGHT NOW, IN THE MIDST OF LIFE AS IT REALLY IS.*

– *You may hear a person share that after much waiting, God finally did what they had been praying- maybe something even better. They may say “after much time, God finally showed up”... NO! He was there all the time- and his invitation was for you to find your peace, contentment, in HIM- and not make it contingent on your desired future outcome.*

– *Reality is, God DOES have something better for us- AND IT IS HIM. In Ephesians one Paul prays God would give us the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation so we might know HIM MORE. That the eyes of our heart would be opened so we would know HIM- the HOPE of his presence- his power in our hearts- NOW.*

– *SO, what does that look like? When life hits a wall, when our plans all are changed- instead of doubting God's goodness and presence, how do we experience God's goodness and presence. WELL, that is the message of the gospel. TWO THOUGHTS to close- a principle and a promise- you know both well.*

✠ When life hits a wall: **The principle of Proverbs 3:5-6**

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

- Trust in the Lord...

- **God is at work. We don't know what tomorrow will bring, but He is with you, and he sustain you step by step through this time. You are not out on a limb by yourself. We can't see what tomorrow will bring, but God is not caught by surprise here. We can trust.**

Ephesians 1:11-12 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

- **God DOES have a purpose in this time. He calls us to look to him, take next step, and trust Him with the outcome.**

- Lean not on your own understanding...

- **We don't have to understand everything. God calls us to be discerning, to seek wisdom- BUT by faith in God's goodness we can lay down the burden of thinking we must have everything figured out, in our control. WE CAN TRUST THAT GOD IS AT WORK, EVEN WHEN I DON'T SEE IT.**

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.
⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (I have a plan to bring you goodness and fullness you will not understand.. and it is ME! Messianic prophecy- verses 1&2)

- In all your ways submit to (acknowledge) Him

- **This is to say- from depths of our heart- Lord, in all of who I am- what's going on inside of me, in all the details of life right now- I'm looking to you. I desire to be yielded to you.**
- **Submitting to God isn't just moral obedience- it IS that, but so much more. It is submitting to his TRUTH. In midst of our storm, our struggle, with all the input swirling around in our soul- to submit to what GOD SAYS IS TRUE. Truth of who GOD IS. Truth of Who YOU ARE in HIM- that you are his child, holy and dearly loved, forever forgiven, redeemed, made new, accepted and in union with Christ right now. LIFE MAY NOT FEEL like this is true, but BY FAITH God invites us to submit- acknowledge in all of my life- that this is true.**

- He will make your paths straight

- **With our faith and hope in Christ- submitted to his truth and goodness- we won't fall prey to the temptation of frustration, anger, jealousy, despair, fear. WE WILL STAY ON THE PATH of God's presence, his nature, his goodness- of INTEGRITY, CONTENTMENT, FRUIT OF HIS SPIRIT, HIS WISDOM, FREEDOM. And when we do stray off the path, he is there with outstretch arms to take our hands, bring us to our feet, steady us, and by faith take the next step with him.**
- **CLOSE WITH THIS.**

✠ When life hits a wall: **The promise of Philippians 4:4-9 Promise of peace.**

Philippians 4:4-9 *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* ⁵ *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* ⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* ⁷ ***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** ⁸ *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* ⁹ *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. **And the God of peace will be with you.***

Closing blessing: Ephesians 3:20-21 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*