

*Read also 2 Samuel 22:26-36. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

When you are to make a decision and you pray, what does your theology spring from? Is it the thought that in general God oversees everything and what will happen will happen? Or, does it spring from the belief that God is actively involved in this world, responsive to your prayers in love, and actively willing to bless you with the ability to do far more than you can imagine, if you actively follow Him?

In Samuel we hear David's conversation with God about that very subject. David depended on God explicitly, not implicitly. David relied on God's specific presence in each venture. "With your help" I can do this, or that. "God arms me with strength." "God makes my feet swift." "God trains my hands."

"God stoops down to make me great." David relied on God explicitly. God was in the details of David's life. God opened doors.

David would have been the pattern Paul followed. He would rely on God's providence not as a distant reality, but as closely involved. It shows here in the record of Acts. READ Acts 16:6-10

The Holy Spirit explicitly opened doors and closed doors in order to guide them to Macedonia. If it doesn't open, then it's not your door. But, a vision was given, and Paul willingly followed.

Do you trust that God will guide you? Are you close enough to hear?

Paul, Silas, and Timothy made this missionary journey, with Luke joining them in Troas. At the direct prodding of the Holy Spirit they went to Philippi, a Roman colony of 10,000 people where they were treated atrociously. That's where Paul and Silas were publically beaten, then thrown in jail, where at midnight they were singing praises to God, and an earthquake happened and the jailer believed and was saved, and he tended to their wounds from the beatings they received.

Like David, they found rescue. God's will is not necessarily easy but God rescued them and gave them success. They went on from there to Thessalonica. It was a 90-mile walk. (see map)

Thessalonica was a major seaport city centrally located on the eastern and northern routes; the men walked the Egnatian Way highway. It was a free city of 60,000-85,000 people, all crammed into apts. The Roman proconsul seat was there. It was the "Mother City" of Macedonia and prided itself on being a colony of Rome.

Today, Thessaloniki is the second most important city of Greece and home to a million inhabitants. There is a great deal of excavation going on there so we have verifiable history. We have the forum where Paul would have spoken, and parts of the Egnatian Way.

Just as the city is perpetual, so is the letter. It was written to the Thessalonians with God's intent that it is for us in the twenty-first century also.

Inhabitants there included both Jews and Greeks, and both Jews and Greeks responded to Paul's message, just like different ethnicities respond to Paul's letter here in this church. Paul and Silas were Jewish and Timothy was Greek. So the Church is multicultural. That is God's rich church.

Paul had been a missionary for fifteen years. He was seasoned now. Let's read his opening to the Thessalonians. READ 1:1-3<sup>NIV</sup>

Paul, Silas and Timothy,  
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

"To the church IN God . . ."

We might think *to the church at Duncanville*; or First Presbyterian Church *of* Duncanville. Paul thinks of us as the Duncanville Church IN God.

The Jews and the Greeks and the Texans belonging to the church do not belong from the outside looking in. We enter a new life.

This is beautifully described in The Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>1</sup> Let's read it. (see page 3)

- You belong to Jesus Christ
- You are freed from the dominion of the devil
- You are protected and directed by God
- You are assured of eternal life
- You are to live for Jesus Christ

You are to live for Jesus Christ because He is trustworthy, faithful, here for you, and despite the good and bad, He will make a way through, just like he did for David; just like he did for Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke.

Hello Duncanville Church IN God,  
Grace and peace to you.

Paul was so grateful for this church. Paul overflows with thankfulness for them. Paul is ecstatic that they have left the old life and entered this new one. It's like having a new baby or grandchild, or someone else enters INTO your family or your church.

Would you please turn to your neighbor and say, "I am so thankful for you."

Would you please say, "I am ecstatic you are here."

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<sup>1</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism was composed during the Reformation by theologians Kaspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus at the request of Frederick III, Elector Palatine of the Rhine in 1559. He commissioned the catechism to order the life of the church and to educate people "according to the pure and consistent doctrine of the holy gospel." See the end of this message for question #1.

Let's say together, "We are IN God."

- We belong to God
- We are freed from the devil
- We are protected and directed by God
- We are assured of eternal life
- We are to live for Jesus Christ

Now what does that mean we do each day? What does this life involve?

Paul said three things about the Thessalonians, and let's see if it is true for us at Duncanville too:  
*Whenever I think of you, I remember:*

1. Your work produced by faith,
2. Your labor prompted by love,
3. Your endurance inspired by hope

### **Your work produced by faith,**

Let's list some of your work produced by faith over the past five years. You have kept the church going for nearly ten years since I have been here. What do you see? List things your faith has produced?

### **Your labor prompted by love,**

Think of all the people who brought you here, who have mentored you, and helped you deepen your faith. Write them down. This week, look at your list and thank God for that person. Then write them a note or an email or call them – *I thank God every time I think of you. I remember your labor of love toward me to help me grow in faith.*

### **Your endurance inspired by hope**

That church was made up of Jews and Greeks. To become a Christian was to leave their families and even their entire culture. It was a huge life change. Often both Jews and pagans were even thrown out of their families. But they endured it because of hope. They endured hardship because of this new faith. Do you hope in Someone? What if all your hopes disappoint you? What disappoints you now? To live there is unproductive. Name your enemy, and realize you are freed from that by the hope of Christ.

How can your personal life reflect this radical hope? Live IN God. You belong to him. Your faith is a blessing to someone. Your faith blesses God and he will reward you.

AMEN

Q1. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.