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SERMON TITLE: How to Be Directed by the Holy Spirit
SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:6-15
DATE August 7, 2022
Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Ezekiel 43:5-9.

We talked last week about the extraordinary power of God's wisdom, and the need to take in God's wisdom so that it molds our way of thinking. Our wisdom grows through connection with God. The first step to gaining that true wisdom is to encounter God's love, which is proved by Christ's dying for us. That's why Paul preached "Christ crucified." That incredible love story accomplishes our salvation. Thus, we begin there, with Christ's crucifixion, to find true wisdom.

You have a living future only through Christ's death and resurrection. That fact answers one of the Eight Great Mysteries of Philosophy which human wisdom tries to answer: *Is there life after death?*

In Christ's resurrection, the answer is a RESOUNDING YES! This is good news! If there is life after death, then we can answer another one of the Eight Mysteries of Philosophy: *Does God exist?*

Only God has the power to resurrect someone: if Christ is raised from the dead, God does exist.

Again, this is very good news! Turn to your neighbor and say, "You need to tell someone!" Now reply to that neighbor and say, "So do you!"

We have been sharing the good news for the past fifteen years! That is one of the things this church is about. We share it through the Parking Lot Ministry, sandwiches for Austin Street Shelter, doing storytelling concerts in Armstrong Park, telling the story of the cross on Good Friday. We did this online during COVID! That is just to mention a few things you have done.

Today, we talk about how we connect with God so that we hear the Holy Spirit. This is a two-way street; you have a part to be actively looking for how you can share your faith. But let's remember, God has put the Holy Spirit in you, not only to secure your salvation, but also to lead you forward in this adventure we call "The Christian Lifestyle," sharing about Jesus' passion.

Now you might be concerned about God's leadership because Ezekiel wrote, "Then the Spirit took me up!"

Are you thinking, *'I don't want any unexpected trips! I am not ready for that!'* Or, perhaps you think, *'I wish it was that easy!'*

Just so you know, theologians call Ezekiel's experience a "heightened experience or a vision." He was actually not physically

taken there. Ezekiel lived during the exile. He has lived in Babylon for twenty-five years. We know this because his book precisely dates the year, month, and day he's writing. Twenty-five years of exile is a long time. Will God's people ever get to return home to Jerusalem? Ezekiel has these vivid visions of the Temple, so vivid it was as if he were there. Where is the temple? Jerusalem.

God shares what God is going to do to give the people hope. The people thought God had abandoned them, but now they can look forward.

God initiated the visions through the Holy Spirit. They signal, *"This is what God intends; it is not something happening randomly."*

The vision included worship at the temple, which is what God wants for us. Through attending Sunday School, bringing children and grandchildren, participating in corporate worship each week, it allows us connection with God. This increases our spiritual wisdom. This keeps our mind on God's path.

God's plan is positive for God's people. Eventually they returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple—just like the vision said.

Let's stop for a moment. If the outcome is positive for God's people 700 years before Christ, and if Christ is the single-most positive outcome of God ever, and if God's followers can still be identified today—we are them—what better plan could we have to help us look forward?!

The Spirit gave the people a way to look forward.

Now let's look to the New Testament. Christ gave his disciples the Holy Spirit and then the Holy Spirit began opening and closing doors to guide them. READ Acts 16:6-15a

This passage raises many questions.

- How did they know it was the Holy Spirit?
- When can we rely on the Holy Spirit?
- How do we know when to act and when to wait?
- How can we ensure we are on the right path?

It takes flexibility to follow God's lead. We make our plans, like Paul. But the Holy Spirit guides us—so when a plan or initiative does not go through, take heart that someone who is *fully invested in you* is guiding you in a different direction.

This can take a whole lot of pressure off of you if you let it.

For instance, have you ever insisted on a particular outcome, something that you feel you must have? You feel that God has

given you this goal; or maybe you don't but it is the one you want. You begin. But then circumstances lead to one obstacle after another. Finally, your plan does not materialize. You think God does not care.

What to do then is *to not focus on the outcome*.

You may have the right goal but the wrong place. Or, sometimes you are being told *to just wait*. Other times the problem dissolves unexpectedly and you have an open door to move forward.

To help avoid frustration and disappointment, we need to hold the goal loosely but hold the connection to God tightly. Our own goals can be encumbered by our longtime fears or self-centeredness or prejudices. Those things might potentially prevail over the movement of the Spirit.

When you are a willing servant laying your goal in God's hand first, God will bless you.

Are you wondering why God would bless you? Do you think you are not on God's radar? Or, that God would not want to help you?

Not true! God has already invested a great deal in you. God wants to bless you!

God knows the bigger picture. God is concerned with development, not just outcomes. God wants us to grow in discerning the Holy Spirit's presence; mature in faith and trust; be strong in the face of opposition.

Most importantly, we must wait on God's perfect timing.

Are you willing to give God your time and priority?

Is your goal to raise yourself up? Or is the goal to serve others?

Jesus told His followers, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). **Witness is broad—it happens through any good work.** It happens when you point others to Christ.

As they set out on a missionary journey, the disciples were led by the Holy Spirit who forbade them to continue on the first path and stopped them from taking the second path, until the opening came through a vision. That dream, not Paul's own strategic plan, became their road map. Paul knew in his heart that God was speaking and guiding him where God wanted him to go.

The Holy Spirit called them to something new! You can tell it was the will of God because the group of women they were called to received Christ, and a new bridge was built between formerly discordant cultures.

Following the Holy Spirit can be an adventure!

We make all kinds of decisions. Where to work; where to go to school; what to volunteer for; whether we should change a career path. You may lack confidence that you can be led by the Spirit. The disciples were certain of one thing. They knew God wanted them to serve in helping people connect with God. They trusted God would lead them, and so they went with the Holy Spirit.

Be encouraged by the presence of the Holy Spirit within you. If a door does not open, then it's not your door. You may be called in another direction or called to wait. Do you trust that God has the greater wisdom and will guide you? Are you close enough to Him to hear and follow? Be confident that the Holy Spirit is invested in you and aims to bless you.

AMEN