

I'm curious, how many of you want some divine direction, some guidance from God about where to go for your life? Maybe some of you do. I know that I do. We are in a third week of a four-part series in which we're taking a closer look at God's direction in our life. As a pastor, one of the common questions that I get is over and over again is how do I know what God wants for my life? Divine Direction. I think part of the reason that we are seeking divine direction is that many people today just aren't very good decision-makers.

But we've talked about a few other reasons over the last several weeks that making decisions can be difficult, but one of the reasons is that a decision that can be difficult is that we just have so many options. It seems more options today than there was in the past. Another reason that we talked about last week is this illusion of perfection. This idea that our lives might be perfect. We're a generation that can glimpse into other people's lives in ways that haven't been possible before through social media.

That person's life looks perfect — their family, their meal, their house. Our life appears to be, well, not very perfect. So we want this perfect life, and because of this illusion of perfection, we don't want to make an imperfect decision. So we can be paralyzed and not make any decision at all. But another reason I think why some people struggle with making decisions is that they've had too many decisions made for them. For children, you might talk about that as being overprogrammed that adults make decisions for them. They haven't been given the ability to decide. You're going here and here and here.

There's a lot of times that perhaps where this is helpful, but there can be a moment where that becomes unhelpful. This is something that I struggle with in my own life as well. I struggle with doing with our children, what decisions do I need to be able to let them make on their own and what decisions are okay for me to make for them? I want to provide the right amount of autonomy and the right amount of decision-making, but not too much ability to make decision-making. Also, give them the right amount of guidance. It's not just whatever goes.

It's a struggle at times to decide how much guidance to give as a parent, and this is what happens for many of you as well perhaps. But there's also this thing called the fear of missing out. You may have heard of this, FOMO, perhaps. I'm afraid if I say yes to this thing, it means that I'm going to have to say no to this other thing. And probably that other thing, and maybe that over there too. So my fear of missing out over there keeps me from making a commitment right here in front of me. An uncommitted life, many times, is nearly always an unsuccessful life, one where we don't keep making progress.

So how do we become more decisive? How do we make progress in making decisions? And how do we most importantly get God's divine direction? Our focus for today is trusting God's process, trusting the process, and we're going to take a closer look at the story of Paul's story from Acts, chapter 22, to see what we can apply to our own lives, and I want to give you a little bit of context for this passage. Paul is talking about a significant decision that he has to make in his life. Paul was in the town of Ephesus.

Later, he would write to them the book that we know as Ephesians, and he'd been in Ephesus for some time. These people were his people. This was his place. He felt at home there. Paul could've spent the rest of his life doing what he was doing. He was very, very happy. But then he felt prompted by God to leave where he was and to go somewhere else. He called the elders of the church and explained God is moving beyond, and he had a very emotional farewell with them. He loved where he was, but God was calling him somewhere else.

Listen again to how Paul describes this in Acts, chapter 20. We'll start with verse 22. "Now compelled by the spirit, I'm going to Jerusalem," Paul writes. "I don't know what will happen to me there. What I do know is that the Holy Spirit testifies to me from city to city that prisons and troubles await me, but nothing, not even my life is more important than my completing my mission. This is nothing other than the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus to testify about the good news of God's grace."

In these verses, we find four steps in God's process, and you'll find that over and over again in your life, as you follow Jesus and seek for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, four steps that we can trust God's process. The first step in this process is the guidance of the Holy Spirit, being compelled by the Spirit. Acts 20:22 says this, "Now compelled by the Spirit, I'm going to Jerusalem." Paul says, "I love it where I am, but God is calling me to go somewhere else. Compelled by the spirit, I'm going to Jerusalem."

The Greek word that's translated here is compelled. It means to tie or to bind. It's like you're being wrapped up in accord and pulled or drawn in a direction. Pulled and tugged, compelled by the spirit of God, and, "I love it where I am," Paul writes, "but something is pulling me in another direction." Let me give you an idea. Just a small trivial idea about what this is like in my own life. It's a bit like when you're trying to put better food in your body and eat a little bit healthier is something that I'm trying to do in my own life, and there's times when I do pretty good at avoiding junk food.

But then there comes this time of year. You know the time. It's girl scout cookie time. You want to support the scouts, of course, so you buy a few boxes. Then you bring them home, and they're sitting there in the kitchen, and for me it's Thin Mints. I walked by and then I think, "You know what? I'm just going to put these in the freezer so they're out of sight and out of mind." But then of course as you know, especially with Thin Mints, when they're in the freezer, they're just even a little bit better or just cold and delicious and that sort of thing.

And I'm, "Okay, I've got to this. I've got to resist this power." I put them in there, and then they kind of call to me through the freezer door. I go into the kitchen to put something away, and then all of a sudden, I get drawn to the freezer. You know how it goes. Then I think, "Okay, just one cookie. I'm just going to have one cookie." Then, "I'm just going to have a few cookies," and you know the thing that's coming [inaudible 00:06:25] anything. "I better just finish off this [inaudible 00:06:26]."

Pretty soon Nicole comes in and says, "Where's the girl scout cookies?" I say ... I have chocolate on my hands and crumbs on the desk and ... I said, "Well, I don't have anything to say." Now, I'm not suggesting that the Holy Spirit was compelling me to eat cookies. But that's the idea, right? You have something that's drawing you, something that's encouraging you that's pulling you in a direction, and there are times perhaps when we can sense that in. There are times in our life when that drawing, when that leading and direction that that compelling is the Holy Spirit.

When you're seeking to follow Jesus beyond the lookout, and watch for those moments. When you're being compelled by the spirit, sometimes it's something really, really big, and the holy spirit redirects your life. Sometimes, it can seem insignificant, and yet it can turn out to have a tremendous impact. Sometimes I've had that the Holy Spirit speak to me through other people. This last week, on Friday night, our family was getting ready to go out to walk the Winter Wonderland at Lake Shawnee. We were about to head over, and I received word just a few minutes before we were about to head out that Doris Wallow wasn't doing very well, and I thought, "I saw her not too long ago, and she seemed to be doing pretty well. I'm going to meet with her on Monday."

Nicole said, "Well, you'd better go." Then I get this tug and this pull from the Holy Spirit, "Yeah, you need to go." And several of you helped make that for me when you contacted me, and so I went with, and I'm glad I did because she died that night. Sometimes, the tug of the Holy Spirit comes to you from other people, the words that others have for you in their life. There are times when I pay attention to the guidance of Holy Spirit, but I don't always. Sometimes, I think I missed the Holy Spirit altogether, and there's other times I confess to you that I feel the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but I decide not to listen.

I pray that those times happened less and less in my life. What about you? Are there times when you've been compelled by the spirit to say something, to keep quiet, to call instead of text, to stop by instead of call, to watch for moments when you are compelled by the Holy Spirit? You'll experience them in big ways and seemingly insignificant ways, but every time that the spirit of God prompts you, it's always important. Paul says, "Now compelled by the spirit, I'm going to Jerusalem." Trust God's process. The first step in God's process is being compelled by the Spirit.

The second step is what I'm going to call certain uncertainty. Verse 22, again, "Now compelled by the spirit, I'm going to Jerusalem. I don't know what will happen to me there. I know I'm called to go, but I don't know any details at all." So often what we want in life is to know the details, but God doesn't always give us the details. In fact, perhaps most of the time, God doesn't give us the details. Take the words from the psalmist in 119:105, "Your word is a lamp, but before my feet, a light for my journey." God's word is a lamp before my feet. It's a light for my journey.

Imagine being on the land and nature trails just down here, just south of the post office that goes down to the county line, all the way up to the Brown versus Board of Education site. It crosses Burton Road, just down here, and maybe it's in your backyard or maybe in a field in the middle of the night. If you're walking somewhere, and especially if it's a cloudy night, a flashlight is going to be helpful. But it's only going to go so far down the path. You could shine it where the trail might go, but it's not going to go all the way. It's best use it right at your feet to see where your next steps will be.

If you're driving on the road, your headlights will only show the road right in front of you. It's not like you're driving on a street where there's street lights along the way and the road is lit all the way through. You have light for what is right in front of you, and I think this is like God's word is a lamp to guide our feet, maybe not all the way into the future but right in front of us. The light just ahead, not the spotlight to the future. It's a light to our path, a lamp for our journey, and if you're anything like me, you want God to show you the way ahead.

[inaudible 00:10:50] one of those steps four, five, and six. I want to plan my life out. I want to know what I'm called to do, but I want to know the details. God responds, "I'm not going to show you four, five, and six until you take steps one, two, and three. I'm going to show you the next step," certain uncertainty. But even in the midst of that, there is some things that are certain. God will never leave you. God will never forsake you. God will guide you step by step.

Remember our verse last week that God will advise you. God will watch over you. God will keep God's eyes on you. All I know is I'm compelled by the spirit, and I have no idea where that's going to lead. Certain uncertainty. The third part of God's process is what I'll call predictable resistance. Mark it down on your calendar. The enemy won't resist what God leads you to do. Paul says this in verse 22 going onto 23. "What I do know is that the Holy Spirit testifies to me from city to city that prisons and troubles await me." Prisons and trouble. Sounds pretty good, right? Not really.

If you serve Jesus, sometimes, it will be difficult. We have to understand that being ready to face opposition is part of being ready to be used by God. Let me say that again. Part of being ready ... Being ready to face opposition is part of being ready to be used by God. One of the challenges that people face sometimes is that whenever things start to get tough, we start to think, "Well, maybe God must not be in this." Have you ever thought that? When do you think the forces of darkness are most active? Evil may be most active when you're doing things for the glory of God. Resistance is not necessarily a sign that you're out of God's will.

Resistance may be a sign that you're doing exactly what God is calling you to do. Just because things aren't going right doesn't necessarily mean that you're outside of God's will. Whenever you're being attacked, that may be a direct indication that you're doing exactly what it is that God has called you to do. Trust the process. Step one, compelled by the spirit. Step two, certain uncertainty. Step three, predictable resistance. It's not always going to be easy.

And then finally, the final step in this process is what we'll call today uncommon confidence. Paul writes in verse 24, "But nothing, not even my life, is more important than my completing my mission. This is nothing other than the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus to testify about the good news of God's grace." Paul says, "Even though there's going to be bad and difficult times, even though I don't know the details of what ahead, there is nothing, not even my life that is more important than to speak about the good news of God's grace," uncommon confidence.

Paul didn't know all the details. Yet, what did have was a plan to share the good news of God's grace. God's love is offered to each person regardless of what they've done, how they've lived their life. No matter where you find yourself, God's love is for you. It's for you, and we are called to invite it, to receive it. The good news is that God walks with you today. You don't have to worry so much about the future. Trust the process. Being compelled by the spirit, certain uncertainty, predictable resistance, and you can find uncommon confidence in Jesus Christ when you follow God step by step.

Will you pray with me? Oh God, we confess that there are times when we don't follow after you, and we ask for your forgiveness. Thank you that you died on the cross and rose for us. Oh God, we trust you with our lives. Help us to receive your forgiveness. Please fill us with your spirit and help us to follow you. In your holy name, amen.