

DIRECTION WITHIN FRUSTRATION

Acts 16:1-10

Before we went into writing full-time, we experienced three frustrating years as Dale searched for God's will for a specific job. Many times doors appeared to open, then were abruptly shut. We prayed, researched diligently, traveled for interviews, and consulted knowledgeable people. Finally, one night after a disappointing rejection letter, Dale sat down on the bed and said, "Why don't we forget it all and just go write?" Sandy thought that was the greatest idea she'd ever heard!

Why did it take us so long to get to that decision point? Would we have been ready for that decision three years earlier? We still aren't sure. But several decades later, we know it was the right decision.

After a time of fruitful ministry in Asia Minor, Paul, Silas, and Timothy found their way blocked by the Holy Spirit. As they searched for the right direction to go, they must have been mystified. What was going on? What did the Lord want, and what was he doing?

Group Discussion. What are some good and bad ways that people deal with frustration?

Personal Reflection. What are some unusual ways that the Lord has led you?

In Antioch the Holy Spirit set aside Paul and Barnabas for the work of spreading the gospel into the wider world (Acts 13:1-3). Accompanied at first by John Mark, they set out and proclaimed Christ to both Jews and Gentiles throughout Asia Minor (Acts 13-14). The fact that Gentiles were turning to Christ led to a consultation in Jerusalem to decide

whether Gentile Christians needed to conform to Jewish law (Acts 15). Later, Paul proposed a return visit to the young Christian churches in Asia Minor. Disagreement over John Mark's desertion caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas. Paul chose Silas to accompany him, and they set off with the blessing of the Antioch church (Acts 15:36-41). Later they were joined by Timothy and Luke.

A map of Paul's missionary journeys, often found in Bibles, will be helpful for this study. *Read Acts 16:1-10.*

1. How would you describe Paul and Silas's journey in verses 1-5?
2. From apparent success, how did the missionaries' journey abruptly change in verses 6-8?
3. What questions about the Lord's sufficiency would reasonably arise in Paul and Silas's minds (and perhaps Timothy's also) at the circumstances in verses 6-8?
4. Recall times you have felt frustrated at being prevented from doing what you thought was the Lord's will for you. How did you pray during those times?

5. How did Christ show his sufficiency for the missionaries in the radical change that took place in Troas (vv. 9-10)?

6. A few brief sentences tell the story of the missionaries' travels in verses 6-8, but the journey consumed weeks as they traveled hundreds of miles on foot. The Holy Spirit could have told them to go to Troas—even to cross over to Macedonia—while they were still in Derbe or Lystra (Acts 16:1). What value can you see in the Holy Spirit's delay in guiding them to Macedonia?

7. Think again of the times you recalled in question 4. What did you learn through the experience of waiting for guidance?

8. After Paul received the vision, what was the missionaries' responsibility?

9. While visions such as Paul's do happen, the Lord usually guides in other less dramatic ways. What principles do you use to determine the Lord's leading?

| 10. Right now, in what area(s) of your life do you need clearer direction?

| 11. When Paul and his companions were blocked from ministering in one area, they tried other places. How can you follow their example of investigating possibilities even while waiting for guidance?



Pray that you will believe with heart and mind that the Lord is fully able to guide you in the way he wants. Pray also for courage to go ahead when the way is clear.

NOW OR LATER

Consider again your responses to questions 10 and 11. Find objects to represent those areas in which you want clearer direction from the Lord. Any objects will do. Place them where you will see them often and let them remind you of the assurance of guidance as well as your need to be aware of how the Lord might be guiding you.