

✠ An unexpected path

- *Has your life ever taken an unexpected path? Something(s) unforeseen happened that sent you in a direction you weren't expecting, and very possibly didn't want.*
- *This has been the case for all of us across the past two years- but you likely have a more personal example in your own story- most of us do*
- *I want to tell a story many of us will relate to. This story is true, but it is a blending of many different stories people have shared with me over the years. It's the example of caring for a loved one through the incredible challenge of mental health.*
- *Story starts with a household where things are going well. There are plans and hopes for the future. Optimism and peace carries the upper-hand over doubts and anxiety.*
- *But then, through a series of events, often over a period of time, things change. A child enters the dark world of depression, perhaps accompanied by rebellion and dangerous behavior.*
- *Through this journey, the perspective of optimism, hope, and peace is replaced by helplessness, fear, and great struggle. Relationships are strained.*
- *It's very common during this journey for parents or caregivers to get angry. Perhaps try to deny what is happening. Pray for God to change things. Find a cause of blame. Maybe doubt God's goodness, or even his existence. But more than anything, there is a desperate search for a way to FIX WHAT IS WRONG. If we can just figure this out, we can restore our plans, get things back to the way we originally thought they would be.*
- *Sometimes this happens. But more common, it doesn't. Instead it is a long journey of ups and downs, progress and setbacks.*
- *THEN, for some, the fight to FIX WHAT IS WRONG slowly is replaced by acceptance. Not giving up, not losing the desire for health, but an acceptance of what is happening- and the desperation to make things DIFFERENT transitions into a desire just to find the GOOD. TO LOVE- and a willingness to patiently walk a path with your loved one that is very different from what you thought it would be, but it is a journey of love and compassion, even in the midst of struggle.*
- *Then- again, for some- after a time has passed, you start to realize that the darkness has lifted- or at least has abated. Things are still different from what you had envisioned at the beginning of the journey, but once again, peace, hope, and even joy have slowly taken the upper hand.*
- *THIS STORY isn't just about mental health. It might be about physical health- yours or a loved ones. It might be about business struggles. Marriage struggles. There are as many versions of this story as there are people, and they don't all look the same.*
- *The common denominator, however, is there is a point when you realize the way you thought/hoped things were going to be, isn't the way they are.*
- *It is in that moment many are faced with crisis of belief. Where is God? Is God good? What going on?*

- **PAUL and his companions faced a moment like this- we saw it early in his second missionary journey. Paul has left the familiar city of Antioch in Psidia, in the region of Galatia, and his intention is to work his way through the province of Asia, toward the city of Ephesus. But this is not what happens...**

Acts 16:6-7 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. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

- **TWICE, in short order, Paul's plans are disrupted. He ends up in the city of Troas, where he takes a boat to Philippi, in Macedonia, or northern Greece.**
- **When we read this in the text, or look at the lines of Paul's journey on a map, it is all very condensed, seeming to just happen. But the reality for Paul and his companions was very different. I think we underplay just how difficult this all was.**
- **We're given a glimpse into what this journey was like for Paul, and we see it in his first letter to the church in Corinth. He will write this during the time period we will cover today.**

1 Corinthians 4:9-13 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! ¹¹ To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³ when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.

- **YES- Paul is exhibiting great faithfulness here, and trust in God... but this is a picture of VERY REAL pain, challenge, and emotional struggle. Paul knew what it was like to have your plans ripped from you, and to proceed by trust in God alone. In fact, more often than not, this was the case.**
- **SO, with this in mind, lets go to the beginning of this story. We pick things back up right at the end of the 2nd missionary journey, with Paul back in Antioch (in Syria) for a brief period of time. We see beginning of the journey near the end of Acts 18, V23, as Paul travels west through what, by now, is...**

† Familiar territory

Acts 18:23 After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

- **As you can see from the map, this path took Paul north into Cilicia and Tarsus, following the route of his first missionary journey, through Galatia, all the way to Antioch in Pisida, which was in the region of Phrygia. This is the same place where Paul was unable to enter Asia on his second journey. BUT this time, whatever barrier had existed before was removed, and Paul now moves west through the center of Asia, all the way to the city of Ephesus, on the coast of the Aegean sea.**
- **Ephesus is going to be the center of this journey, and as soon as he arrives, we find a story that is, to be honest, just plain confusing. It has to do with...**

† Ephesus, baptism, and the Holy Spirit... whaaaattt?

Acts 19:1-7 While Apollos was at Corinth (**we learned about Apollos at the end of the second journey**), Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism,"

they replied. ⁴ Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

- **Okay... just what is going on here. Not going to spend a long time on this, but a few things.**
- **FIRST. This passage is sometimes used as a ‘proof text’ for the concept of ‘second baptism’, or ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’ taught in more Pentecostal traditions. The idea is that believers receive an initial physical water baptism as a confession of their faith, and, some time later, a ‘second baptism’ when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, accompanied by the sign of speaking in tongues.**
- **Doctrinal issues with this view are many- but perhaps the biggest is that the events here are NOT normative- or prescriptive- of God’s act of Salvation and the understanding of believers baptism drawn from the broader New Testament. Luke tells us these men were disciples, but the sense is their knowledge was limited to John the Baptists prediction of the coming messiah, and their knowledge of Jesus and his teaching was very limited.**
- **It is debated by NT scholars whether or not these men were even yet really believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, the baptism here is much closer to the NT concept of believers baptism, as it immediately accompanied their hearing and believing in the Good News about Jesus, at which time, with no delay, they received the Holy Spirit.**
- **It’s important to note that there is NO consistent PATTERN in Acts for how, or when, believers receive the Holy Spirit.**
- **Another important lens here is how we have discussed that Acts is a time of TRANSITION. The action of Paul laying his hands on these men when they received the Spirit, and the accompanying phenomenon of speaking in tongues and prophesying, is rare in ACTS (Acts 8, Apostles in Samaria), and is not taught as normative anywhere in the rest of the New Testament.**
- **Bottom line, here we see Luke DESCRIBING how the brand new Gospel of Jesus made its way across the Mediterranean world, and prior to the existence of any authoritative scripture, how God worked in a unique way through Paul and the other Apostles to establish the authenticity of the Gospel. We will see other examples of this in the weeks to come.**
- **NOW WE move into the heart of today’s text. Paul has now arrived in Ephesus, and once again, the first place he goes is the local synagogue. It’s hard to keep count how many times Paul has been run out of synagogues- in a very real way, Paul’s philosophy seems to be....**

† If at first you don’t succeed...

Acts 19:8-9a Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way.

- **Just a note here. Luke says they ‘refused to believe’- the sense of this ISN’T that these people weren’t convinced by what Paul said, but that they purposefully hardened their hearts against the clear and evident Truth Paul presented.**

- *Why would they do this? The same reason we reject truth today- because truth demands that we surrender. The truth of the gospel demands that we lay down our pride, and release the control and sovereignty over our lives into the hands of God. AND, we don't want to do this.*
- *But for the people of this synagogue community, it wasn't enough to refuse Paul's message, they actively and publically tried to discredit him and his message.*
- *AND SO, as he also has done multiple times before, Paul looks for another opportunity... he finds it in what was probably the LEAST attractive option available- this was the...*

† The lecture hall of Tyrannus

Acts 19:9b *So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.*

- *This would have been a large open room or school building of some sort, and Tyrannus was likely the owner.*
- *Luke doesn't tell us this, but early church tradition and writings say that Paul met during the middle of the day- from about 11 am to 4 pm. This was the heat of the day, when most shops closed down and people rested- what we would call the siesta.*
- *One commentator said that in this culture, at 1 pm there were probably more people asleep than at 1 am. This was NOT a key strategic time for Paul to evangelize a city!*
- *On top of this, in other writings Paul tells us that he worked to support himself during his time in Ephesus- SO, Paul is getting up early, working, then teaching for 4-5 hours in the heat of the day, then likely working again in the evening.*
- *In addition, the dynamic here isn't one of Paul building a church- Ephesus was a port city and transportation hub, so Paul's audience was constantly changing, made up of whoever would sacrifice their afternoon time of rest to come and listen. Luke tells us this went on for TWO YEARS.*
- *In a way, the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus is like a symbol- think of what it represents...*
 - *Inconvenience. The path you are forced to take, rather than the path you wanted to take*
 - *In our modern church culture consumed with strategy, Tyrannus was decidedly un-strategic, other than the fact it was cheap and available.*
 - *Tyrannus represents the willingness to be a SEED PLANTER. In any of lifes endeavors, there are times of sowing and times of reaping- and reaping is way more fun. Reaping is when the hard work pays off, the profit is realized, and the ministry is successful. Reaping is where the glory is. But the hall of Tyrannus was all about sowing- patiently planting seeds through hard work, one day at a time.*
 - *BUT PERHAPS more than anything, Tyrannus represents FAITHFULNESS. Luke is about to tell us that Paul' preaching during these two years, in fact, had a TREMENDOUS impact. But Luke saw this in hindsight, several years later- in the moment, Paul couldn't see what has happening- he only saw a constantly changing stream of faces, who he would meet, teach, maybe get to know, and then watch them leave as they headed back to their home city.*
 - *IF I had been Paul in this situation, I wonder how many times I might have thought "THIS IS HARD WORK... hard to see if it's having any impact... how long is all this effort worth it?"*

- ***But led and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, Paul remained faithful to his task... and as we close this part of the story, Luke tells us the result of Paul's faithfulness, and it's nothing short of remarkable.***

† The result of faithfulness

Acts 19:10 *This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*

- ***SO SIGNIFICANT! Look at the Maps I provided- 1st & 2nd MJ- This region of Asia was completely avoided- even though Paul had tried to go there. Let me contrast two things Luke tells us...***

- ***First, regarding the second MJ, Luke told us this in...***

Acts 16:6 *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.*

- ***NOW, about 5 years later, after Paul's two years of teaching in Ephesus, we are told "that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."***
- ***How did this happen? Other than his route from Antioch to Ephesus, Paul didn't travel throughout this region. Paul wasn't the one to plant all the new churches that appeared across the province of Asia. IT HAPPENED as men and women heard the teaching about Jesus and the Grace of God from Paul, there in the hall of Tyrannus, and God opened their hearts to believe. THEN, it was these new believers who took the message of New Life in Christ back to their hometowns, back to their local Synagogues, as the Gospel organically spread across the very region Paul himself was unable to enter.***
- ***It's worth noting that among the churches planted in this way were the seven churches from the opening chapters of Revelation.***
- ***SO- what do we do with this story? How do we apply it- and I want to be really honest here.***

† An honest application

- ***FIRST***, What this story doesn't teach us
 - ***It doesn't teach us that if we just are patient, wait long enough, and work or pray hard enough, that God will eventually do what we have asked him to do.***
 - ***YES, Paul's original desire to evangelize the region of Asia DID come to pass- but he personally never saw this. He may have received some reports about how the Gospel was growing, but we don't know that, and he might not have known it. Within 5 years Paul will be living under house arrest in Rome, and he will never travel to this area again.***
 - ***Take the generalized story we started with. For a family struggling with the mental health of a loved one, this is a long and incredibly difficult journey. For some, health and stability may return. For others, it may not. These are situations over which we can have great influence, but we have no control.***
 - ***To uses biblical stories such as this to tell someone- just be faithful, keep praying, and eventually everything will work out the way you hoped.... This is not only a distortion of scripture, it can be borderline spiritual abuse.***
 - ***The reason is that it places our hope in an outcome- an outcome we may or may not see.***

- ***But for the disciple of Christ, our hope is NOT in any circumstantial outcome- sometimes always just over the hill in the distance. NO. Our hope is in the PRESENT, in the RIGHT NOW, for our hope is in the goodness, the kindness, the love, the supernatural courage and peace, of JESUS CHRIST, dwelling in our lives, as our source of life itself- in the midst of life as it really is.***
- ***SO, wrap up by humbly suggesting***
 - ***How this story should encourage us***
- ***First- on the unforeseen paths of life- we can lay down our desire for control and trust God with the outcome. THIS IS HARD, because we WANT to control, or dictate, the outcome. But we can't. We can't. And in God's Grace we have the GIFT of letting go of that which we can't hold in the first place.***
- ***Paul's journeys did not go the way he had expected- but he didn't lose faith. He simply took the next step, motivated by God's love for the people he was with, the people he encountered, one day at a time.***
- ***Second- IN CHRIST, by FAITH, we have the confidence that God is at work. We may not always see it. Sometimes we will.***
- ***What we ALL share- as believers- is that when we TRUST HIM, live in dependence upon him, and LET THE FRUIT OF CHRIST'S NATURE WITH US be expressed through us....***
- ***Then, one personal engagement at a time, God will work through us to influence those around us for GOOD.***
- ***Our sight is limited to where we are right now. But we have the gift of living by FAITH in the presence and purposes of God- and God's purposes always are working toward what is GOOD. THAT is a source of hope. THAT is a source of peace.***
- ***End with Romans 8:28. If right now you are on a path you didn't expect, that you didn't want- and you can't see around the next corner... THIS PROMISE OF SCRIPTURE is a gift of God to you. To us all...***

Romans 8:26-28 *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*