

FULFILLING GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. Please turn in your Bibles to Acts Chapter 13 as that is where we are going to be this morning. I am kind of sad about it because this is my last time speaking to you in the book of Acts and Pastor Dan is going to be concluding our Acts series next week. But I am excited to be able to share this because this is one of my favorite stories in the book of Acts. It is just three verses, but it is a powerful reminder of what we believe is possible today.

In 1967 the Senate Sub Committee was meeting to determine what was going to happen to Americans in light of all the technology that was flooding society. Now that was in 1967, and now we can chuckle about that. Right? But the reality is they were realizing that American life was going to change bit by bit with all the new technology that was coming in. And so they had futurists there at this meeting, as well as science fiction writers, and people who were designing these computers.

And they came to the conclusion that the greatest challenge that Americans were going to face at the turn of the century was what we would do with all of our leisure time. Because they thought with all of the new technology it would speed things up and we would have a lot of time being spent leisurely. They believed that the average person in America would work only 22 hours a week and only 27 weeks a year. Has that happened? No, if there is any predictions that have been more off than that you should let me know. That was a horrible prediction, wasn't it?

In fact it seems like with every single technological advance that we have had introduced that we think will simplify our lives it has actually complicated it. And I think sometimes because we are in the middle of the stream of everything that has been introduced over and over again, sometimes we have to ask ourselves, '*What is going on?*' And the reason why the story we are going to read about this morning hits us in such a different way is because many times we miss moments like this. I think for all of the things that are going on with all the technology, and with all the benefits of technology that we have seen, one of the signs that has been showing up recently with things coming up is we have become less connected emotionally in our relationships with each other. And I believe that we are less in tune with our own souls personally, and ultimately I believe we are less in tune with God. So I think with all of this happening we need to take a step back and ask ourselves what is going on in our lives.

So this passage we are going to read today, as well as the other stories in the book of Acts, are there for us to show us what should be happening in the church. I think a lot of times when we read about these stories in the book of Acts, and other things we read in the Bible, we think, '*Well, that was just for then; that is a nice story, but we are different today.*' And I believe if we treat the Bible like that we are missing a huge opportunity to

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realize what God was doing back then He still wants to do today. Amen? (*Amen.*) So we need to believe that. And as we read these first three verses in Chapter 13, notice what is happening. We have gone through the very beginning of the church with Jesus coming to the disciples after the resurrection and He tells them they are going to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Up to Chapter 12 the gospel has been advancing, the church has been growing from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. And now we are entering into the final stage with Chapter 13 and beyond is God's story of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. And how does He do that? He does it with a call. Let's begin reading in Verse 1 of Chapter 13:

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. “ So there are five men listed here. “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”

What we have here is the beginning of Saul and Barnabas' call to go plant churches around the world, taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. And we see it started in a moment by these five men who were leading the church at Antioch. We notice how the focus of the church is not about just an individual church; it is about the Spirit of God first working in Jerusalem, in Antioch and beyond. These five men from the church of Antioch met, they worshipped, they fasted, and they sought the Lord. We don't know what was stirring inside of them or why it was stirring in them, but there was something stirring in them that made them realize that God wanted to do more. So they were seeking the Lord through worshipping and fasting.

And the Holy Spirit speaks to them and tells them that He wants these two men, Saul and Barnabas, to leave the good work there in Antioch, and to go out to tell the Gentiles and the rest of the world about Jesus. They knew that they were to send Saul and Barnabas out, and that is exactly what they did. And for the rest of the book of Acts we see the advancement of the gospel through the Holy Spirit to these men.

Here is what I want to talk about this morning. I want to talk about how we hear God today. And how we hear the Holy Spirit's call on our lives, because here is what I believe, and I hope you believe it too, the Holy Spirit is still calling people today to follow Him. He is still calling you and I today to say that He has something for our lives that He wants us to do. Do you believe that this morning?

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I believe that if we don't believe that we are going to go through life with what I see happening over and over, and that is when I meet people whether it is in here, or out there, many of us are just existing and surviving, but we are not thriving in the call that God has for our lives. And He has something for each of us today that He is calling us to.

So this idea of 'call,' what does it mean? What does it mean to be called by God? The Bible is very clear about it. The word 'call' in the Bible is used two different ways. There is a general call by God, by which Jesus calls people to follow Him. That is the initial call, a call by which God offers to all mankind. *'I want you to come and follow me. I want Jesus to be your Lord and your Savior.'* So there is a part of the initial call that we all need to obey. But once we follow Him and make Jesus Lord of our lives, what Paul is talking about here when it says, ***"For the work to which I have called them,"*** that is not so much a call to be a follower of Jesus; rather it is a call to a specific way in which God is telling us how He wants us to glorify Him and to show people His goodness.

And that is what God is doing for us today. For every single one of us God is saying, *'Now that you are following me I want you to do this now to represent me, to show people my glory, and my goodness in the world around you.'* And every one of us has this invitation from God. So here is the question this morning - why do we feel so disconnected from the call of God in our lives? Why is it that all we do is go through events, but there is no call, and no connection to the call of God?

And I have been there. I was called at an early age when I was 16 years old to follow Him into full time ministry. But there was a time in my life about four years ago when I was struggling with, *'What do I do now?'* It just felt like there was a fork in the road for me. And I think sometimes we all feel like that at different stages in our lives. Maybe you are a young person in the room this morning, and you are feeling like you don't know what to do with your life. Maybe you feel like you need to make a career decision and you don't know what you should do. And maybe you need to invite God into this idea of what He is calling you to do.

Maybe for some you are on a career path but you don't really connect your career with your calling. Maybe you are going through a midlife crisis. Maybe you are an empty nester. Maybe you are heading into retirement. Maybe you are just sitting there thinking, *'I am a blank sheet, God, I need you to show me what to do.'* And here is what I know - all of us at different stages, at different levels, come to a fork in the road and we don't know what God wants us to do. And we need to ask, *'God, what are you calling me to do for you?'*

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So the reason why I think that is so important is because when I was going through that inner turmoil, it was hard. It felt dark. It felt confusing. It felt like a cloud hovered around my entire existence. And I knew that was not what God wanted for me, but I didn't know what to do. One of the things that my wife and I did when I was going through this situation was to find a StrengthsFinder coach. And I wanted him to give me the answers. And one of the things he kept saying was, '*You just need to move forward.*' And I would ask him, '*Move forward to what?*' And he would say again, '*You just need to move forward.*'

And I think for a lot of us, those of us that feel stuck, those of us who feel confused, those of us who feel like fear is keeping us from things, I believe that the call for every one of us, no matter where we are in life, is to move forward. Now moving forward can look different for all of us. But if God is calling us into following Him in greater ways, then we need to ask ourselves if we are being obedient and moving forward with the choices we are making in life.

So what we see here in this passage is that these men moved forward. We see Saul and Barnabas moving forward. We see a church that is moving forward. Now the question is - how did they move forward, and why did they move forward? I believe that how we move forward today is through two ways. We move forward in clarity and we move forward through courage. We move forward in clarity and we move forward with courage.

I believe that for some of us moving forward is confusing to us because everything feels cloudy to us. We are not sure what we should be doing. And maybe for others of us it is not about confusion, it is not about being unsure what we should do, it is more of knowing what we need to do but we just feel stuck, or we just feel like fear has a grip on our heart and we don't know how or when to take the next step.

This is important for us because one of the things in our church is we have for the letter F in L-I-F-E is 'finding your purpose.' It is important to our identity as a church, and also it is important as followers of Jesus Christ that God is calling us to find our purpose. Why has God placed you here in this church? Why has God called you to this state of North Carolina? Why has God called you to this community? Why has God called you to your neighborhood? Why has God called you to your job or your school? God has you here for a reason.

So as we look to move forward, the first thing we need to look at is moving forward in clarity. How was it that these men were able to hear the Holy Spirit, because it said, "***Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.***" How did they do that? I think they moved forward and the way that God brought clarity

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to their lives was through community and through communion. I believe that through that they were able to get clarity. And if you are sitting here this morning and you are thinking, *'Ben, I want to do something. I want to feel the sense and the call of God in my life, but man, it just feels so confusing. There are a million different options and I am just confused.'*

If that is you, I can tell you the best thing that you can do is surround yourself with people who love Jesus and who love you, let them speak into your life, and let God speak into your life. You can see that right here. There are these five men and they are all different. They all have different backgrounds. Barnabas is from Cypress which was an island in the middle of the Mediterranean. Simeon, who was called Niger which simply means 'dark' or 'black,' was probably from the deep part of Africa living in Antioch. There was Lucius of Cyrene which was a country or an area in northern Africa. And there was Manaen, a lifelong friend of Herod, so you have a Greek person.

Remember Dan's sermon last week as he talked about the crazy ruler, Herod? This Manaen was his childhood friend. And then there was Saul who was a Jew. So there were Jews and Gentiles, there were Africans and Europeans. They were all different kinds of men in station, background and life. They were different ethnicities, had different economic backgrounds, with different educational backgrounds, but all of these men came together as prophets and teachers in the church.

Listen, here is what God uses. God used these men to sharpen each other, to build each other up, and to help each other understand the call of God. And you and I need the same help today. God does not expect us to go through this by ourselves. And if you are feeling lonely, if you do feel isolated, if you feel like no one is speaking into your life, you are missing out on one of the great opportunities that God has given to us. That is why we are supposed to live in community. That is why we have Life communities, because we know that we need people to speak into our lives.

Those two words 'prophets' and 'teachers' were significant. We talked about prophets a few weeks ago, prophets were not simply those people who told the future. By and large prophets were people gifted by God who could declare truth accurately. They were the people who could say, *'Hey, this is what I believe is right and wrong.'* They were truth tellers, and they confronted sin, they spoke directly, and they called people to obey wholeheartedly. That is what prophets did. And we need prophets in our lives. We need prophets who are able to help show us what the light is, and the difference between light and darkness, good and evil, right and wrong.

And then you have teachers. Teachers are people who can go deep with you. They can show you the deep things of God's Word and they can talk to the deep things in

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your heart. And here is the thing - we need both kinds of people in our lives. We need people who are going to talk to us directly, and we need people in our lives who are going to help us go deep.

I think about my own life and how God has done this for me. Here is what it comes down to - we need people who will tell us what we need to hear, and not just what we want to hear. It is easy for us to surround ourselves with people who will tell us what we want to hear. Just go online if you want to surround yourself with people who believe like you do and think like you do. But sometimes there are things that we need to hear in our lives. And if you don't have people like that in your life you need to understand that is what the church is for.

I think how God has given me one of the greatest gifts in my life, and that is my wife, Liz. When we got married I didn't know what a great gift she would be to me, not just in my personal life, but also in ministry. When I was going to seminary we were a young married couple, and there would be times whenever she would speak truth to me like, *'Hey, I think this is what God wants us to do.'* And I would be like, *'I have the Master's Degree, right?'* But God has taught me over and over again that I need to listen to my wife because she just has a keen ability and a wisdom that I need to hear.

I remember this one time when we were at a job interview and we were having lunch with this person. I just thought this person was the best, the greatest ever, and I thought he would be great to work for, and work with. And then after the meal I said to my wife, *'Wasn't he great?'* And she said, *'I really don't know, there is just something about that guy.'* And I didn't understand what she meant because I thought he was great. Two weeks later we got a call from someone, and they said that man was having an affair, and I would no longer be working with him. And I looked at my wife and said, *'How did you know?'* And she had just gotten this vibe that something was not right.

Here's the thing, some of you need to look at your spouse right now and say *'Thank you.'* And that is because God has given us people in our lives to speak what we need to hear. The truth spoken in love is something that is very important to all of us. And we need to surround ourselves with people who will speak truth to us.

I remember when I was pastoring on the other side of the Lake, and I knew that Dan was here at Life. Dan has been here about nine years. We have known each other for twenty-five years. A couple of times a year I would call up Dan to meet me for breakfast, because there was something I was going through and I needed to meet with someone who could sharpen me. Someone I could tell what I was going through and asking them what they thought about the situation. I knew that I needed voices in my life

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if I was going to follow God more accurately. And we all need those voices. We all need people to speak truth into us.

Not only do we need community, but we need communion. And in these verses it says, “*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said.*” God still speaks to us today. He still wants to speak to us today. The Holy Spirit still wants to say, ‘*Hey, this is what I want you to do.*’ But I think for some of us, our relationship with the Holy Spirit is more intellectual, it is more at a distance, and it is not this every day dependency to have communion with God at a deep level. We just are going through life without seeking God’s guidance.

These men were worshipping the Lord and fasting. And I think fasting is one of those spiritual disciplines that we have lost by and large today. We don’t fast today the way that they did then. I don’t want to go too deeply into what fasting is; maybe we will save that for another sermon at another time. But here is what I know, any time people were fasting it was the way they were saying, ‘*We are turning away from something and we are turning wholeheartedly to God. We want God to do something and we are desperate for God to do it.*’

So they were denying themselves food so that they could cry out to God in greater ways. They could let God know that they wanted Him more than they wanted bread. So these men were seeking the Lord. They were probably very busy men but they knew that they needed to hear from God. We don’t know what God was stirring in their hearts, but there was something in them that let them know they needed to hear from God more.

How many times do we do that in a regular week? Or do we just go through life day after day with meetings, appointments, deadlines, car pools, emails, texts, and Netflix. Right? Now Disney Plus is coming out this week - oh dear, the apocalypse is upon us. What we need is another streaming service to binge watch shows we do not need. Amen? (*Amen.*) But here is the thing, we have all these things bombarding us. When do we take the time to be silent? When do we take the time to sit back and to stop listening to all the different distractions that are pulling at us, and to say, ‘*God, I want to hear from you first. It is you that I need to hear from.*’

The book I am reading now is called, ‘The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry.’ It is a great book. I can recommend it to you even though I am only three chapters into it. It is by the author by the name of John Mark Comer. I got this book as an application of the sermon I spoke a few weeks ago on redeeming the time, the time factor of the Art of Neighboring. I came away from that sermon and I was coming down from the season of my life where I had just been feeling so busy. And I realized something, all of us hold

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our busyness up as a valuable thing, like ‘*Man, I am so busy.*’ People ask us how we are doing, and we reply, ‘*Good, but I’m very busy.*’

And one of the things John Mark Comer talks about in his book, ‘The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry,’ is that with all the busyness that we are experiencing, we are missing so much of the presence of God in our lives. He uses this analogy that for many of us where we used to be able to go deep with God, like a scuba diver going into the deep waters of our own soul, reflecting and listening and asking God what He is leading us to do, what He is saying to us, and what He is wanting to confront in our life; instead now we are not scuba divers but we are people on jet skis, skimming across the surface with a million messages a day that we are trying to consume.

There is a great quote in this book that the author said: “*The average iPhone user touches his or her device 2,617 times a day.*” And if you are a Millennial in this room or a Gen Xer, you most likely touch your iPhone twice as much as that. That is from a study in Business Insider. The author also said this: “*What would my life be like if God touched my mind as frequently as I touch my iPhone?*”

That is a wakeup call, my friends, that we are not hearing what the Holy Spirit wants us to do, because we don’t even give the Holy Spirit time to do that in our lives. And we need to step back, we need to say ‘no,’ we need to eliminate, we need to be silent, we need to make choices in our lives that we will make time to commune with God, to hear from Him. And we just can’t do it when we are so busy, when our lives are filled with so much.

The reason I believe so many of us don’t have clarity from God about what He is calling us to do is because our lives are so filled with stuff. We don’t have true friends speaking into our lives. And we are not taking the time to make the changes necessary for the Holy Spirit to speak to us. If we need clarity, we need some time with the Holy Spirit because He is faithful, He will talk to us, He will lead us and He will guide us. In the same way that the Holy Spirit said: “***Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them,***” He will lead us and guide us in the same way. And if we need clarity this morning, we get it through communion and through community.

Number two - let’s look at how we move forward with courage. Listen, some of the ways in which we have to confront the things in our life that are holding us back is to walk away from them. And sometimes that is difficult and painful, and we need courage. For some of us it is fear that is holding us back. It is not confusion; it is fear. And we are just not willing to take those steps forward because we are not sure where God is really going to take us.

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And how God works, how God builds courage in our lives is to understand that we get courage through confrontation and through consecration. What God wants us to do is to confront our lives, to realize where we are at, and to realize that He wants to set us apart. That is what is said here: ***“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ ‘Set apart’ is the consecration. And then you have ‘The work to which I have called them,’ and that is the confrontation.***

Here is the thing that is so interesting. It says He has set them apart for the work to which He has called them. The verb tense in that word ‘called’ is a perfect tense. Do you know what that means? It means that this has happened before. This is not the first time Saul and Barnabas have heard this call. In fact we are going to find out that Paul actually heard this call from God at the moment of his call to salvation.

In Acts Chapter 26 and beginning in verse 13 we see this call that Paul talks about. The moment that Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him, we see this same call for ministry later on in his life. Paul is in court here and he is being cross examined. He is trying to defend himself and whenever Paul is under a microscope and people ask him why he has been arrested, or what he is doing, he always shares his testimony. Always - he always tells the gospel story.

So this is what he says beginning in verse 13: ***“At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles - to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’”***

Paul heard it from the moment of his call to follow Jesus, God had also called him to do what He wanted him to do. Paul was going to be God’s mouthpiece to the Gentiles, to the people outside of the Jewish tribe. Now why would God do that? I find it so fascinating why God would call Paul, a Jewish Pharisee, to reach out to the Gentiles. If you look at Saul’s life prior to this, he hated people who were not following the Law. He didn’t like Stephen; he didn’t like Jews who were Hellenists who had Greek names. And

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he most certainly didn't like the Romans or the Gentiles, the people who were pagan in nature. He hated those people. And yet those were the very people that God was telling Saul that He wanted him to reach.

So here is what I think when it comes to confronting, to moving forward in courage for some of us. It means confronting some of the deeper issues in our lives. And what I know is for so many of us God calls us into a work in which He wants us to help people by which we have experienced failure, by which we have experienced trouble, that our battle, our struggle in life can be the very thing He wants us to do to help other people. See, God is a redeeming God. And He wants to take the parts in our lives that are the deep dark parts that we want to just bury, forget, and ignore, and to use them to help other people.

And for some of you God is saying those are the very things He wants to use in your life. That is the very thing He is calling you to, because if you can find the freedom and the power and the goodness in the love of Him in that moment, if you can find forgiveness and healing through the blood of Jesus Christ, then how many more need to hear your story? For some of us confronting who we are, confronting those dark things that we want to keep hidden, may be the very things God may be calling us to step out and to use those very things we don't want to talk about.

So not only do we have to confront the things that are holding us back, but we have to confront the issue of where God has us. Now notice Paul not only heard the call at the moment of salvation but here he hears the call again in Acts Chapter 13: "***Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.***" God is going to send them out to the Gentiles now. Do you realize there was probably about ten years from the first call to the call here?

Now imagine God says, '*Hey I am calling you to something.*' And you are like, '*All right God, let's do this.*' And God says, '*But you have to wait.*' Paul spends three years in the wilderness, and then he spends years in Tarsus. But here is what we know, Paul is on the sidelines. Do you ever wonder what God is doing with your life? You have a call, you understand what God is calling you to do, but you feel like every time you want to move forward that God is pulling you back. What is God doing? I believe the other way that God confronts us is He confronts our character. And there might be something He is calling you to do but He is saying this first: '*There are some things in your life that you need to address before I give you that platform, before I give you that audience. I have to make sure that this is about me and not about you. I have to make sure that I am humbling you enough that you understand that you need to be obedient in every single thing I ask you to do.*'

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Sometimes God has to have us work through things, and we have to confront where we are. We may have that clear call but we need the courage to confront our character that might be keeping us from being useful to Him. One of the great stories I see in Scripture that is not really overtly found, but if you put the pieces together it is there. It is the story of the Apostle John. John showed up on the scene, and he was the youngest of the group of Jesus' disciples. He was probably around fourteen or fifteen years old. But he was a part of Jesus' inner circle; he is part of the three - Peter, James and John. They go with Jesus everywhere. Jesus is very close to them, and at the Last Supper John is so close to Jesus that he is leaning his head on Jesus' shoulder. That is how close they were.

John had a position of privilege. He got to see and experience more than most of the others. And we see in the gospel of John that in one of Jesus' last moments He looks down and sees John who was the only disciple who has followed Jesus this far. John is standing there next to the women and Jesus looks at His mother, and then at John, and He says He wants John to take care of His mother. Now here is what is so fascinating, the book of Acts covers about thirty years of church history, and there is one person we rarely ever read about in this book. And that is John. The only time we see John is when he is walking with Peter to the temple to pray, and then that is it.

We don't read about John leading anything, and we don't know what John is doing for these thirty years. But we do know this, from what we can piece together, John starts coming back on the scene and his voice becomes a major voice to the church right around 70 AD when he writes the gospel of John. He also writes his three letters, I John, II John, and III John, as well as the book of Revelations from the island of Patmos. The last twenty years of John's life were packed with ministry. But isn't it fascinating that for thirty years we don't read about John. And I think what was happening is that John was taking care of Jesus' mother for thirty years. I think John was watching everyone around him. He saw Peter do this; he saw James do that; he heard about what Paul was doing. And he is just there taking care of mom.

Some of you who have little kids to care for may be wondering if that is going to be your life, and sometimes we feel like we are on the sidelines. But it is not really the sidelines, because what is amazing is by the time John comes on the scene and he starts writing his letters and his gospel account, no apostle talks about love more than the Apostle John. He is a changed man. When John was following Jesus, when he was a teenager and he was in the village of Samaritans and they could have cared less about Jesus, John was the one who asked Jesus to call down fire from heaven to burn the people up. That was John, and he was ready to burn people up for not following Jesus. And

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now we see him thirty years later and he says, “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God.*”

You see a man who has changed. You see John after God has chiseled him into a person with tenderness and grace by taking care of Jesus’ mother. And for many of us we need the courage to confront some things in our own hearts. Yes, we may have the clear call from God, but we feel like we are stuck, and maybe what God wants from us is to confront the issues in our lives before He gives us a platform. He wants to make sure that when He calls us to do something it is going to be for His glory and not ours.

So we not only have to have confrontation, but we need consecration. The verse says, “*Set apart for me.*” Set apart is where we get word ‘holy’ from. Setting apart means there is something that is dedicated to this. Setting apart means there is a specific use for it. The Holy Spirit is saying, ‘*Listen, Paul and Barnabas you have done some great things. You have done a great job taking the money down to Jerusalem. You have helped out the church, but here is what I want you to do now. I want to narrow your focus and I want you to eliminate some of the good things that you are doing because I have a better thing for you to do now.*’

So for some of us moving forward means eliminating some of the distractions, eliminating some of the things that are pulling at us, and saying we are going to do what God is calling us to do - this one thing. We have to eliminate not only the wasteful but even some of the good opportunities in order to follow Him. We have to be aware of the pull of money, the pull of status, the pull of pleasure, the pull of personal fulfillment, because all of these pulls are going to keep us grounded instead of putting one foot here and one foot there. Many times it is like playing the game of Twister, where you put one foot here, an arm there, another foot there and the other arm over here. We try to keep our hands and our feet in as many things as possible. And what God is saying to us is He wants us to stop playing Twister because there is one thing He wants us to do. And that is hard, and it is easier said than done because we have all these pulls, and we have all these connections to things. And it is scary to step forward into something that we are not sure of.

Like I said before, this is something that I experienced a number of years ago. And I believe I have shared this story with you already, but there hasn’t been any greater illustration in my life of knowing what this feels like than this story. I wrestled with God for a year about whether or not to leave the church that I was leading, or to stay there. I just felt like there were two paths, and one week I would feel like God wanted me to stay there, and the next week I would feel like God wanted me to leave. It gave me a roller coaster of emotions every week.

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I just remember that time in my life so well. And I remember being in a prayer meeting one morning as a group of men from our church met weekly for prayer. And one of the men prayed this: *“God, many times you don’t part the waters until we first step foot into them.”* And the Holy Spirit said to me, *‘Ben, that is for you. That is for you, Ben.’* Again communion and prayer is how the Holy Spirit speaks to us. I remember thinking about that and thinking, *‘Okay God, but...’* And it took me six more months before I was ready to step away.

I am not sure how many of you have ever wrestled with God, but maybe you are there this morning. You are wrestling with God over what He is calling you to do and He is asking you to step out into something that feels unknown. And you don’t feel in control, and you are anxious, and you are worried. And God is saying, *‘You have to trust me.’* Part of trusting God requires courage to step out into the unknown.

The night before I was going to read my resignation letter to the church I was pastoring, my wife and I sat our kids down and we told them what we were going to do the next day. And this was a hard decision because this was a church that we had started, and we had a lot of family and friends that we were in a deep relationship with. This was the only church that my kids had known. So we were sitting down together, and I shared what we were going to be doing knowing it would be a shock to them. And one of my kids said this: *‘Dad, I feel like we are about to go on an adventure.’*

And you know what - it has been. It has been an adventure. And isn’t that great? One of the things that I have learned is that when you follow God, when you listen to Him, when you take those steps of courage, step out and let Him part the waters, it is an adventure. Some of you think that following God is so boring and stale, but I am here to tell you that it is not. He wants to use us in ways that will blow our minds. It is not what we expect, but it is something that He is asking us to trust Him in this. Whenever we step out in courage, it is always an adventure.

Three questions I want to leave with you. Number one - are you aware of God’s call in your life? Maybe you are sitting here with morning thinking you have your ticket to heaven, you are following Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and that’s all you have ever thought through. And you don’t really understand what God is calling you to do now with your life. All it takes to know is to ask Him. If you simply start praying, *‘Lord, show me what you want me to do,’* the Holy Spirit will answer that. I promise you that. Are you aware of God’s call in your life?

Number two - what clarity do you need from the Holy Spirit? What is the clarity that you need right now? How are you going to move forward in asking God to speak clearly to you? What will you do to get that clarity? What steps are you going to take to

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surround yourselves with people that are going to speak truth to you, and not just words you want to hear? And how are you going to take time to commune with God deeply like a scuba diver? We need scuba divers in this church, and not just jet skiers.

Number three - how will you move forward in courage? What is that step you need to take in order to move forward in courage? What does that look like for you? Maybe it is just means having a conversation with someone. God is calling us this morning to be obedient to the call. The same way He called Paul and Barnabas is the same way He is calling us today. We are just a different group of people and we have different gifts that He has given us, but He wants to use us to bring His glory and His good into this world.

Let's bow our heads and close our eyes. I don't know what God is asking you to do this morning. But I believe that every person in this room has either an issue of clarity or an issue of courage. So whether you want to pray right in your seat, pray with your spouse, pray with your family, or come forward to one of the crosses, I encourage you to spend some time reflecting and seeking the Holy Spirit, asking Him to speak clearly in your life. We are going to have a pastor up here in the front that would love to pray with you. If you are seeking clarity or seeking courage, one of the best steps you can take to move forward is simply praying with someone else.

I encourage you to do that. There is also a prayer room to the side in the lobby you can go to after the service. Maybe you want to do that later this week at your Life Community. Maybe there is someone else in this room that you need to sit down with and talk together with. Let's listen, let's obey, and let's move forward.

Father God, I pray right now that you would confront every anxious feeling, every confusing thought, every issue that keeps us bound to this world. God, we want to see people come alive for the adventure that you have called them to. God, I pray that you will work in us, and that we will be vessels that can be used for your honor, your glory and your goodness. There is a call that you have placed on every person in this room. Help us to listen and obey. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.