

“The Sovereign Work of the Holy Spirit”

Introduction to Philippians

Acts 16:6-14

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Bruce: Gracious and sovereign Lord, it's with a great sense of anticipation and gratitude that we assemble to sit at Your feet. Father, we are indebted to You and the ministry of Your Holy Spirit. We're absolutely dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher. We open the pages of Your word. We see who You are in all of Your glory and all of Your majesty. And Father, we just pray that You would remove those things that hinder our mindset from thinking about you and all the truth that's contained in Your word. Father, we just ask now that You'd be pleased once again to open our eyes and our hearts, that we might see You clearly for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen.

Bruce: I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 16. The passage I have selected for our contemplation and our learning today is found in Acts chapter 16, verses 6-14.

Now it is both historically and theologically significant. Now of course all of the Scripture is historically significant and theologically significant. But if you really want to know how the church that was begun at Pentecost began to expand, then this is your chapter. And if you really want to know how God did this expansion, these are your verses. Let me read chapter 16 of the book of Acts for us, beginning at verse 6.

“And they went through the region of Phrygia in Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Mysia they went down to Troas.

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us!’ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

“So setting sail from Troas we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.

“Now on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the river side, where we supposed there was a place of prayer. And we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The LORD opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” May God be pleased to open our eyes, that we might understand His word, for Jesus' sake.

Now this chapter gives a historic account of the planting of the church at Philippi, demonstrating a work of God in the bringing of the gospel to Europe and eventually to the rest of the world.

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Now we must note and take notice here of something, men, that the gospel didn't come from the west to the east. It came from the east to the west. It came from the Middle East. Then it came to Greece. Then it came to Europe. Then it came to Britain. Then it came to the United States. We must understand that we are not the originating members of the expansion of the ministry of the building of the church. It came from the east and came to the west. And this passage reveals how a sovereign God directed an invasion of the gospel in the continent of Europe, which eventually reached to the whole world.

Now the theme of this particular passage that I just read for us is *the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit*, as God is sitting on His throne on high, ordaining, directing, planning and exercising His ministry of bringing men and women into His dominion and into His kingdom. In these verses we see how He did that. If you want to know how God expanded the church from eastern Europe to the rest of the world, these are your verses. If you want to know how He did that expansion, this is also the chapter that tells us how He did that.

For the title of this particular message, I would call it “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit.” Now the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit that we find in this chapter is in two primary areas that we need to explore. First of all, *it's in the life and ministry of His servants*. How does God prepare His servants for this expansion of the gospel ministry worldwide? What does He do in people's lives to equip us to fulfill our duty? First of all, we want to look at *the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in equipping His servants to do their duty*. And then next we'll take a look at *the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of Lydia*.

Now we see the work of salvation in the rest of these verses. If you read on past the verses, where I stopped at 14 and continue reading, you'll see the sovereign work of salvation in a demented girl. And you also see the sovereign work of salvation in the Philippian jailer. In reading on in the rest of the book of Acts in that chapter, you'll see other converts described. In this chapter God is drawing people to Himself and establishing a work of grace in the city of Philippi.

Now one of the reasons I chose this particular chapter, if the Lord is willing and I'm able to come back with you more regularly, I'd like to teach us the book of Philippians. And this is an introduction to the book of Philippians. When you understand these chapters the book of Philippians makes much more sense. So this is an introduction to the book of Philippians. May the Lord be pleased to let us gather together to teach this.

So first of all, let's take a look at *the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in equipping His servants to be instruments to perform their duties for the Kingdom in the expansion of the gospel*. We see how God prepares His people for their duty, and for them to become useful, to see how their lives are prepared to be fit to be the instruments, so the grace of God may be proclaimed worldwide. What are the things that He does to make us qualified to fulfill our duties and responsibilities of sharing the gospel?

You notice from verse 6 on that they went through a lot of frustrations, disappointments and barriers. Read the rest of that particular chapter.

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Now notice. The Scripture says that they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia. How would you like to be a servant of God and the Holy Spirit says, “No”? (*Laughter*) Now if that’s not enough, the spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go into Bithynia.

So here’s the situation. Paul and his brothers were attempting to minister the gospel, and the Holy Spirit said, “No!” Now if that’s not enough, Jesus said, “No!” How would you like to have that clearly propounded and expressed to you when you’re following what you think you would heartily do?

You see, there’s something going on here in Paul’s life. And first of all, *he had to stop what he was doing*. So the Holy Spirit said no, and the Spirit of Jesus also said no.

Now can you imagine the frustration? Can you imagine the disappointment they experienced? After all, they thought they were doing God’s work. “We’re doing God’s work. This is what we should be doing.”

“No!”

“This is what we ought to be doing.”

“No!” It’s obvious that some barriers are being placed in his path. I can only imagine the frustration and the consternation Paul experienced, because Paul was what I would call a very strategic planner. He methodically went from place to place, always preaching the right message at the right time to the right people in the right timetable, preaching at the most critical places wherever he went.

But now his plans are being scuttled. “No! No!” It’s obvious who did it. Who scuttled his plans? God did it. God was the reason for his frustration. God was the reason for his disappointment. God was the reason for his consternation. “No! No!”

Now we need to pause for a moment and interject ourselves into the point of this historical story. How do you respond when you hear “No!”? We need to look at frustration creatively by asking ourselves this question. How do we handle frustration? How do you handle the *no’s* that God had given you in life? How do you handle the barriers that God places in front of you, the frustrations? How do you handle those things?

I think we need to look at them creatively. And by that I mean this. How do we handle our frustrations? We all have them. They’re a part of life.

On a personal level, I’m a planner. I plan my work, but I don’t always get to work my plan because of interruptions. There might be a phone call. There might be a knock on the door. It might be that somebody wrote me a card or a letter. So many of my plans have been scuttled. So many of my plans have been torpedoed by interruptions. And so the real question for me is this. How do I handle those frustrations when I get those interruptions?

Do you know what I’ve learned over the years, men? I’ve learned this: that mercy is the ministry of interruptions. So my plan is to do this. But I’ve been interrupted. And the real issue is this. Is the interruption my plan, or is it something of God that is leading me into His plan? You see, mercy can become the ministry of interruptions. How do you handle those interruptions? What do you do with them? Are you frustrated because your plan has been put on the back burner, and you don’t get to do what you want to do?

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Or do you say this. “Lord, what are You leading me to do? Am I being an aggressive responder to what You’re putting right in front of me?” We need to look at these interruptions and frustrations very creatively, in my opinion, because it may be exactly what’s happening to Paul. “No! No!” There was something bigger that Paul was called to do.

So how do you handle your frustrations? It may be part of an opportunity for God’s plan that may be different from the one we planned ourselves.

I plan my work. But I don’t always get to work my plan because of interruptions. But that may be an opportunity to share God’s mercy by interruptions.

In Paul’s case, he needed to die to his own plans so that he could live for God’s plans. Now again, place yourself in his situation. Which plan do you really want to follow? His or yours? Which one do you really want to follow? When you hear “No!”, Does your pride say, “Wait a minute! I know exactly what I should do. I’ve worked so hard, put all my efforts in it. And now You’re giving me a barrier, telling me no?” Which plan do you really want to follow, His or yours?

Paul had to learn that. But then God torpedoed your plans by placing barriers and closing doors. And you and I become wearisome and frustrated, because my plan is not going to happen the way it should.

And so when somebody asks you this question—who’s plan do you really want to follow, His or yours?—we would say this. “Oh, that’s a silly question! Of course I want His plan!” But down deep in our souls, what we’re saying is that the reason I give that answer is because it makes me look more spiritual. *(Laughter)* It makes me feel better about myself. Of course I want God’s plan!

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: Can you give us an example? Does an example come to mind for your own life when that happens?

Bruce: I’ll get to that in a moment.

Participant: Okay. *(Laughter)*

Second Participant: Is that your plan? *(Laughter)*

Bruce: Is that my plan? *(Laughter)* My plans have been interrupted. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Excuse me.

Second Participant: Very good. *(Laughter)*

Bruce: But I’ll be merciful only. *(Laughter)* The real question for Paul was this. And it’s the question for us. When these interruptions come, and these frustrations come about us and these barriers are put in front of us, are you willing to let your plan die, to give it up, to bury it never to raise it again, in order to follow His plan? Are we really willing to do that? That’s what Paul had to learn.

Now my plan was to become an admiral. From first grade on and into grade school through high school and in the Naval Academy days I worked very, very diligently to plan on becoming an admiral. And one day by Viet Nam it was interrupted and the plan went out the window. It was torpedoed by my injuries. I could not fly anymore. All of a sudden, that which I had given myself to for 16 years—this is the plan that I want to do;

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it’s really going well. I know I can make it happen. I know I can become an admiral. I’m keeping my nose clean. And all of a sudden, “No! No!” And the Lord was pleased to take me in a different manner, in a different role. And that was to take me into the role of being a pastor/teacher of God’s grace.

Men: Amen!

Participant: I thought you were a banker. *(Laughter)*

Bruce: I just worked at one. *(Laughter)* So men, what do you really say when these barriers come up? How do you look at them? You see, the reason that Paul had to learn to say no was because what God had in mind for him was far bigger and far better than what he had planned himself, even though he spent a lot of time and effort doing it.

Now there are several things think we can learn from Paul’s example in this as we study his life, seeing how God sovereignly prepares His instruments for the work of the gospel. Let me give you some of the principles I think we can learn from this narrative in Paul’s life.

The first one is this. *God’s leading closes doors as often as He opens them.* In John’s letter to the churches in Revelation in chapter 3, there is a closed door that no man can open, and an open door that no man can close.

Now I often find out that when a person wants to find out God’s plan for his life, he’ll go from pastor to pastor, from leader to leader, from friend to friend, from brother to brother and sister to sister, family member to family member, until they find somebody who agrees with them. *(Laughter)* And they’ll say, “Yes, that’s your plan. Go ahead. Proceed and do it.”

But notice what Deuteronomy 29:29 says. *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God. But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children, that we may do all the works of the Law.”*

Men, you’ve heard me teach this before. But there’s a difference between God’s revealed will and God’s secret will. Don’t try to find out God’s will; be found in His will. The only way that you will find out His will is to be found in His will. And where do you find out what His will is? You find that in the Scripture. You don’t find that by finding somebody who agrees with your plan. Don’t go looking for it. Make sure that you’re found in it. And when you’re found in God’s will, guess what? You’ll find out the secret things that God has for you. That’s what Paul had to learn.

So God closes doors as often as He opens them, because what He has is far better for us and bigger for us than what we had planned for ourselves. And men, how grateful I am today, as I stand before you, that the Holy Spirit said, “No!” to Paul. And Jesus said “No!” to Paul, to stop him from doing what he was doing, so that he could make an invasion of the gospel into the country of Greece, and therefore take it to all of Europe and eventually to the rest of the Western world. I’m so grateful that God closed that door for Paul back in the days at Philippi. What he had in store for Paul was far better and far bigger than what Paul had envisioned for himself.

Participant: Amen.

Secondly, I would offer this for your consideration, men, that *God’s leading us is part of God’s loving us.* And how often we respond to a closed door with this peevish little

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feeling that says, Oh, God doesn't love me because He didn't give me what I wanted! It's a peevish little thought that we have. It's really quite the opposite.

You know that God answers every prayer in one of two ways. He either provides or He protects. If it is His will, meaning what is best for us and what will glorify God the most, He will provide.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And conversely, if He gives what is best for us and will glorify God the most by denying it, He'll protect us from ourselves.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: But every prayer God answers by either providing or protecting. And the two issues are these: what is best for us and what will glorify God the most? He'll protect us from ourselves by not providing. “No!” It's exactly what Paul needed to hear—not only from the Holy Spirit, but “No!” from Christ. That's what he needed to hear, because God was protecting him by not providing what Paul was asking him to do. Sometimes as a loving Father He must put pressure on us to prevent us from doing what we want to do so we might follow what he would do, preventing us from not doing what He wants us to do.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: But notice this. I'm reminded in Matthew 7. He always does it as a loving Father. *“If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”* You see, our gracious God is the all wise heavenly Father who leads us as part of His loving us. And part of His loving us might be a “No!” It might be a no.

Thirdly, I'd offer for your consideration that *God's leading contains a perfect timetable.*

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Now Paul may have thought that his waiting was a waste of time. Have you ever been there? Have you just wondered what's going on? We need to whet ourselves not only to God's will as revealed in the Scripture, but also to God's timetable. If God has you waiting for what you perceive to be a long time, it's because He has a perfect timetable as well as a perfect will.

Ecclesiastes 3. *“For everything there is a reason, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted.”* And Romans 5: *“At just the right time Jesus died for the ungodly.”*

When did Jesus die? Not one second too soon, not one second too late. He died at the perfect timetable. And friends, we need to understand as part of God's will in leading us that it is not only His will but also His timetable for what He has for us to do.

I've told you before about my friend Pastor Win from Vietnam. So I got involved and we helped to build the orphanage together in the early stages. That's when I met Tin years later.

Now Pastor Win was an escaped North Vietnamese citizen who came south into South Vietnam, converted by a French missionary, and started the church in Hue, the Evangelical Bible Church of Hue, in the city of Hue.

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The North Vietnamese wanted him dead because he was an escaped North Vietnamese who started a church in South Vietnam. They wanted him dead.

The South Vietnamese government wanted him dead also, because they prohibited the South Vietnamese people from having contact with the Montagnards, who were the mixed-blooded people back at the Laotian Cambodia border. I used to fly in the helicopter up to the Montagnards and visit them, taking food and other things to the Montagnards. The South Vietnamese government wanted him dead also.

How are you going to handle that? People on both sides are after you. I asked him one day. I said, “Dear brother, how do you handle the pressure of knowing that when you walk out your door, both sides want you dead?”

And this is what he said. “God will not let me live one second too long or take me home one second too soon.”

Men: Amen! Wow!

Bruce: Men, we have to realize that part of God’s will is a timetable. When I heard that man say that statement to me, I said, “Lord, thank You for bringing me to Vietnam to sit at the feet of this young man who I can learn so much from.”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: I went over there thinking I could solve the war myself because I had red and gold veins in my blood. (*Laughter*) But the Lord was pleased to take me down and put me in front of a Vietnamese pastor who taught me about God’s timetable. We need to submit not only to His plan but also to His timing. Part of His will is His timetable.

So we’ve seen three principles that I trust will be helpful in understanding how God is pleased to prepare His servants for their duty, preparing us in our inner character so we’ll be the kind of men that God wants us to be. So let’s now take a look at the second obvious point of this particular passage, as we observe *the sovereign work in the salvation of Lydia*. We’ve seen the sovereign work of how God prepares His men for service. Let’s take a look now at Lydia.

Now I would guess that Paul had no understanding as to why he was led to go to Troas. He had no idea, because that is not what he thought he should do.

Now the Scripture says that either by some dream or by some vision he heard a very passionate cry from across the Aegean Sea, and this is what he heard. “*Come over to Macedonia and help us!*”

Now one of the evidences of spiritual bankruptcy in the United States, in my opinion, is that the church has not learned lessons from past history. At a time when we are most economically prosperous and we’re generally at peace, but are spiritually bankrupt and experiencing a spiritual decline in our nation, we do not hear people saying, “Come over and help us!”

Transcriber’s Note: Bruce pounded the lectern as he said this.

Bruce: When was the last time you heard anybody say that in America? “Come over and help us!” And quite honestly, men, in my remaining days that’s what I’d like to give my ministry to, to respond to those people who say, “Come over and help us!” When was the last time you heard that in the church? “Come over and help us!”? Yes?

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Participant: I had a pastor in January ask me to come over to Kenya to help him start a camp.

Bruce: Amen. Be an aggressive responder and respond to that voice. Those are the voices we need to respond to, because the Holy Spirit is doing preparatory work for that person, and may be qualifying us to be the ones to spread the gospel. So be an aggressive responder when you hear people say, “Come over and help us!” I would love to hear that more in the U.S. from our churches.

Now when Paul sailed across the Aegean Sea and arrived at Philippi, all he found was a group of praying women. But that was the group that the Holy Spirit was using to plan the ministry of the invasion of Greece. It was those women. So let’s examine now closely the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of the woman Lydia.

First of all, we see this: that *the Holy Spirit was at work, preparing the field for harvest before Paul arrived*. The Holy Spirit was preparing the harvest of the field before Paul arrived. Look at verses 13 and 14.

Lydia was seeking after God. The Holy Spirit was doing something. She was seeking after God. The Holy Spirit was on the move.

Another example of the Holy Spirit preparing the person is the Ethiopian eunuch who came to Jerusalem, now knowing why. But his heart had been stimulated by reading the Scriptures. At the very same time Philip was directed to meet this man on the road to Gaza. We read about that in Acts chapter 8. He had already found this man who had been stimulated by reading the Scriptures. He had no idea why he was called to go and meet Philip on the road to Gaza. And Philip met him there, explaining Isaiah 53. And he introduced him to the good news about Jesus Christ.

You see, the Holy Spirit prepares the field for harvest. We need to be aggressive responders and respond when the Lord leads us.

Now I find it interesting that when I have the opportunity to counsel young men who are going into the gospel ministry, I remind them of this. God is not only preparing you for a people, but God is preparing a people for you.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: We need to help people understand that.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: God is preparing you for a people, and God is preparing a people for you. The Holy Spirit works in advance. We need to be aggressive responders when we hear people say, “Come! Come over and help us!”

Secondly, I want to offer this for your consideration. *The heart of Lydia was closed to God*, even though she was a worshiper of God. She was a worshiper, but the Scripture says that her heart was closed. She was like so many in our churches today who could be described as lovers of religion, active in the church, but not knowing anything about the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Something had to happen to Lydia. She was a worshiper, but she wasn’t a worshiper of God. What was she worshiping? We don’t know. The real question was who was she worshiping? Was it the god of her human imagination or the God of Biblical revelation?

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That’s the critical issue. Who do you worship? Something needed to happen to Lydia, and the Holy Spirit was actively at work.

The Holy Spirit’s work is heart work. And we see the heart work of the Holy Spirit in verse 14. *“The LORD opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”* What was needed was the ministry of the Holy Spirit to open her heart. She was a worshiper of God, but she was not one who was saved.

This describes the work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. And men, we need to understand this: that *regeneration is something that only the Holy Spirit can do*. We can plead, we can cajole, we can manipulate. We can sing “Just As I Am” 92 times.

(Laughter)

Participant: Very good.

Bruce: But only the Holy Spirit can penetrate the darkness of the soul and bring light into their eyes and change their hearts. Heart work is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Yes, please?

Participant: I have a question in that regard. What part does prayer play in that?

Bruce: I’ll get to that. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Was that part of your plan? *(Laughter)*

Second Participant: You haven’t changed, buddy. That’s good. *(Laughter)*

Bruce: I’ll work my plan. *(Laughter)* I’ll get to that. Notice Isaiah 50 and other verses. We need to understand what regeneration is.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It’s not making a decision. Regeneration is something the Holy Spirit does to open their eyes, to open their hearts so that they can believe! It’s something unique to the Holy Spirit, not something that man has been given to do. We can plead and cajole and manipulate. But if the Holy Spirit is not working in advance in opening their eyes to see, nothing is going to happen.

Notice Isaiah 50 verse 5. *“The LORD God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious. I turned not backward.”*

How about Luke 24:45, on the road to Emmaus? *“He opened their minds to understand the Scripture.”* How is that going to happen apart from the work of the Holy Spirit? It doesn’t happen.

Now notice the very first consequence. *Her view of God changed*, because she what? She listened to Paul. Read the next verses and see the impact. The Scripture says that she paid close attention to what she was learning from Paul. She was concerned about what Paul as saying. Prior to that she was a worshiper. Now she’s concerned about what Paul was saying. What happened? The ministry of regeneration, the heart work of the Holy Spirit, opened her heart so that she could be responsive to the gospel.

Now one of the features of true regeneration is *one’s changed view of the Scripture*. That’s one of the classic important features of true regeneration. You change your view of the Scripture. And why does God change your view of the Scripture when He opens your heart? So you can see who He is. What does the Scripture primarily do? It’s the ministry of redemption in the Person and work of Christ. When you change your view of the Scripture, you’ll see who God is.

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So the first consequence was that the very first thing that happened to her was that after her eyes were opened by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, her view of Scripture changed because she had an eagerness to listen to what Paul had to say.

Now as we’ve seen, men, regeneration is something only God can do. That being true, what is the most important thing, the most important activity in which we in the church should be involved?

Participant: Prayer.

Bruce: Prayer. Is it not asking God to do what only He can do? That’s what we ought to be involved in. If God is the only One who can change the heart, should we not be asking God to change the hearts of people that we know by name? Should we not be on our knees, asking God to regenerate them, to give them sight, as He did Lydia?

You see, the most important thing about an evangelism campaign is prayer, asking God to do what only He can do. We can’t do the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Only He can do that. Should we not be on our knees begging God to do that, pleading with Him to do that, mounting up resources to pray to make that happen?

You see, the critical feature of our evangelism is prayer. Prayer precedes anything like that.

I’m told by historians that in World War II the most difficult feature of the conflict was to determine where the front lines were. Now is it not the same with the church? Isn’t it hard to find out what the front lines are in the church? It’s also tragic, because you don’t have too many people participating in the front lines of the church. The front lines of the church is prayer.

How many of you have prayer meetings at your church? How many people show up? We had four the last time I was there. You see, do we understand the work of regeneration? That is something only God can do. And should we not be on the front lines of the ministry of evangelism and the preparing of the gospel presentation by praying that God would do what only He can do, and that is to open the eyes of the blind and change the hearts of those who are deceived? Men, we need to be about prayer much more than we are, because we’re asking God to do what only He can do, and that is regeneration.

Regeneration is the act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man. The governing disposition of the soul is made holy. And the first exercise of the new disposition is secured. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

Now this stands to reason in my mind, for in Scripture it is especially the third Person of the Trinity who is represented as the Bestower of life, hence also the spiritual life. Also it is He, the Holy Spirit, who takes the lead in the working out of making men and women holy.

Participant: Hey, Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: You hit one of my hot buttons. You quoted Revelation 3 there, about the open door.

Bruce: Right.

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Participant: I see that correlating with Matthew 16, where Jesus gives Peter the keys of the kingdom. Do you see that correlation? In Revelation 3 it says, “*He who has the key of David, who opens and no one can shut, and who shuts and no one can open.*” So to me, how is that tied up with prayer, what Jesus said?

Bruce: Well, the significance of prayer is this. We’ve got to first understand what regeneration is. That is something that only God can do. So what should I be about in my life? Asking God to do what? Only what He can do. That’s what prayer is. That’s the correlation between prayer and evangelism and regeneration. I’m asking God to do what only He can do, and that is to open the eyes of the blind and change the hearts of those who are lost. That’s what I’m trying to do, because I know this. You’re the only One who can do that! He’s the only One who can do that!

Regeneration is a single act. Sanctification is a multiple act that goes on differently. But regeneration is a single act. Should I not be on my knees for my friends who I really love who are lost, begging God to open their eyes, like He did Lydia? You see, prayer is the most important thing we can do.

Participant: What is the consequence if we don’t pray? What is the consequence?

Bruce: I’m sure you’ll be miserable.

Participant: Does the salvation of people hinge on it?

Bruce: No.

Second Participant: Correct.

Bruce: No. Somebody says, “If you don’t pray, somebody won’t come to Christ.” The reason the Lord Jesus Christ has not come back in His second coming is because not all of the elect have come to saving faith.

Participant: Right.

Bruce: However it’s going to happen, the elect will come to saving faith before the Lord returns. If you don’t pray, you’re missing the joy of being involved in the expansion of evangelism.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: For me it’s the loss of my life when I don’t pray. But God will redeem those whom He has called to Himself. Jesus says this. “Not one that You gave Me will be lost.”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: So it’s not dependent upon my prayer. I’m participating in my prayer because of the joy I bring in participating with God in something only God can do. It’s the joy that I get by praying. Yes?

Participant: Nearly everything that we get to do is out of gratitude that we get to serve. We have the privilege of being able to serve by praying and by using the gifts that we’ve been given. So if we don’t pray, if we don’t use those gifts, we really lose out on that privilege.

Bruce: We’re the ones who lose.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: We’re the ones who lose.

Participant: Right.

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Bruce: It’s my opinion. I’ll just give you this, and you can take it or leave it. I think that the church in America has been relegated to worshipping a God who doesn’t do much. Oh, I’m sorry.

Participant: That’s okay. I also think that sometimes we forget that we should pray in God’s terms, not in our own terms. It’s not what I want, it’s what God wants. And sometimes we pray for this to happen because we want it to happen, rather than that it glorifies God, or maybe He prevents something from happening because it’s not in His grace. We forget that.

Bruce: Prayer is a matter of obedience.

Participant: Yes. Amen.

Bruce: Prayer is a matter of obedience. Let God take care of the results. We need to be participating in the calling that we have to pray unceasingly in all situations. Yes, Sig?

Sig: In my selfish nature I want to know how I get found in God’s will as I discern a call to ordination or the diaconate. I love what you said, Bruce, and I’m greatly reminded of all the things you’ve taught us over the years. Is there a real specific way, or do I just at some point have to trust in God’s direction? I mean, you say it so beautifully and I am captured by it. But I’m selfish and I want to know. Any chance by 7:30? *(Laughter)*

Bruce: You’ve got four minutes. *(Laughter)*

Sig: I mean, could you let me know if I’m found in God’s will by 7:30? *(Laughter)*

Bruce: Okay. There are six verses that I would suggest you look at. Remember that little card we passed out?

Sig: Yes.

Participant: There you go.

Bruce: Do you have one of those?

Sig: Charlie’s got one right there.

Bruce: Let me show you that. Now here are the six verses that I have found that reveal what God’s will is, where we are found in His will, not finding it out. So it doesn’t tell you what job you should take. It doesn’t tell you that you should go to seminary. That’s what you will find out when you understand these things. This is being found in God’s will.

First of all, *that you’re saved*. Do I have a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I saved?

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Secondly, *am I Spirit-led?* Is the Holy Spirit sovereignly working in my life as I read the Scriptures and become obedient?

Thirdly, *am I sanctified*, which means *set apart for holiness*? Am I becoming more holy? You see those things that are active going on in your life. They’re visible in your life.

#4. *Am I submissive?* Am I submitting to the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Scripture? Do I understand the sufficiency of Scripture or do I jettison it for political correctness? What am I submissive to? To the best of my ability I think I’m submissive to the Holy Spirit because of God’s leading in my life.

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#5 is this. *Are you willing to suffer?* Maybe God wants you to suffer. There are several verses on this card that reveal that God might want you to suffer. It’s part of God’s will!

Participant: Can we put that aside for a while?

Bruce: That’s after 7:30. *(Laughter)* And lastly, *saying thanks*. “*In all things give thanks.*”

Now this is very simple. But I created this for myself, because I wanted to find out how I know actively day by day if I’m in God’s will, not finding it out. Am I in God’s will in these six descriptions of my relationship to Christ. If I am, guess what? You’re going to be an aggressive responder as the Holy Spirit is leading you to make a decision as to what job you should take, how you should act at that job, or if you should go to seminary or not. Be found in His will so that you can find out His will.

Well I think the church in America, unfortunately,--

Sig: We’ve got plenty of those cards too on the book table if you’d like, to remind you.

Bruce: I think the church in America is really ready to worship a God who doesn’t do much, because we don’t spend time asking Him to do what only He can do.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And that is to open up the hearts of people so they might believe. We don’t ask Him to do that enough because we don’t believe that He can do it.

Participant: Bruce, you’re hitting my heart. Whew! So what if all these men put names of people who are lost on the wall and pray for them every week when we come together? Do you think there’d be a change? Do you think people would come to know the Lord? If we do, why don’t we do it?

Bruce: Only you can answer the question why you don’t do it; I can’t answer that for you.

Participant: What if we do it collectively as a group, as a church?

Bruce: Let me ask it another way.

Participant: Okay.

Bruce: Whenever you study the Scripture, there’s only one question you need to ask yourself, and that is this. *What am I going to do with what I’ve just learned?*

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s the only question you should ever ask yourself when you read the Scripture. What am I going to do with what I just learned? So I would say, men, you heard about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. What are you going to do about that, now that you’ve heard that? That’s the only question you can answer. That’s the most important question every time you study the Scripture. What am I going to do about what I just learned?

You see, the Scripture talks about knowledge. It talks about truth. It talks about application. It talks about wisdom. Wisdom is the application of knowledge.

God has given us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit some great knowledge. Wisdom is how I apply that in my life. And the way you do that is by asking yourself the question. What am I going to do personally?

Participant: May I make a suggestion?

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Bruce: Sure.

Participant: I have 700 children coming to my camp this summer, and at least half of them know Jesus. I would love you to pray for those children. I want every single one of them to know Him. That’s my life.

Bruce: Amen. Men, there’s a challenge for us.

Participant: We’ve got lots of these cards, Matt, if you want to take them to your camp. You know, Tom Hans printed these for us and it says, “*God’s Revealed Will For Us.*” So I just wrote on top of it, “How do I know if I’m in God’s revealed will for me?” That’s what you’re teaching us, right?

Bruce: Just read those six verses and ask yourself the question. Examine yourself. The Scripture says, “*Examine yourselves to see if you’re in the faith.*” I can’t do that examination for you. All I can do is take you to the Scriptures that will do the self-examination. Examine yourself. Am I in His will to the best of my knowledge? And God, would You lead me in that more clearly? And I think, men, that when you and I work on being found in God’s will, we’ll find out what God’s will is.

Well, we’ve been given a wonderful challenge to us as men. Pray for those 700 kids coming to camp. What are you going to do about what we’ve just learned? Yes, sir?

Participant: What I wanted to say is that one of the things that has blessed me mightily, being a great gift from God, is to understand that in all things that we might want to do, and look in the Scriptures to do, is remembering that He gives all that is necessary for you to do. It is not about oh, I’d better do or I’ve got to do and I don’t feel like it. And I have a little story. We don’t have a lot of time.

I was being renewed. I wanted to be obedient. I was led to go see an aunt who had just gone and had another leg removed from diabetes. She had no feet now. I didn’t want to do it. I didn’t know what I could say. I said, “But Lord, I want to be obedient.”

I went and I opened the door to her room. I realized that He taught me a great lesson that day. It wasn’t about me going to give the blessing. He sent me in there to get the blessing.

Bruce: Amen.

Participant: I opened the door and His glory was aglow in the room. She sat there in the Lord just radiant with happiness. And she soon went home with the Lord afterward. And I learned a great lesson.

Bruce: Amen.

Participant: I don’t have to struggle. Just trust Him, look at Him, look at His word, and He’ll give you the strength. You asked the question. Are you in? You’re going to be in. He always affords you to be in. Just accept it and see what happens with His leading.

Bruce: Remember grace, the definition of the acrostic g-r-a-c-e—God’s resources at Christ’s expense? God will give us the grace at the moment of our application, not at the moment of contemplation. You’ll get grace when you need it, not when you’re thinking about it.

Participant: Right.

Bruce: You have all the resources you’ll ever need for God to have you become all He wants you to be. Yes, please?

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Participant: I just want to make two comments. When you started, you were talking about being an admiral in the civilian army.

Second Participant: Navy!

First Participant: I’m sure that we see you as an admiral in God’s army. And the other comment that I wanted to make was that a friend of mine, a pastor, said about suffering that yes, everybody’s a Christian till it’s time to bleed.

Bruce: It may be that God will want you to suffer. That may be the way in which we are in His will. Now I’ll be honest with you, if we have a couple moments. My last eight months have been rather difficult. The whole basis of my self-worth and my whole value was wrapped up in two things—my physical ability to do what I wanted to do, and my ability to teach. Both of those have been removed for a while.

Now I don’t know what the Lord is going to do with that. But physically I have a tough time buttoning my shirt. I’ve told some people that I’m going to start the Parkinson Olympics. *(Laughter)* My two events will be how fast I can get my underwear on, *(laughter)*, and secondly, how long it takes me to button a shirt. *(Laughter)* That’s why I wear stuff like this. *(Laughter)* I can’t button my shirt anymore.

You see, the two things that were my whole sense of identity in the last eight months have been removed. And I just have to say, “Lord, what are You going to do with me now?” I’ve got to be open to that, whatever that is. And when I find out what that is, I need to be an aggressive responder.

Participant: Praise God!

Bruce: I need to be an aggressive responder.

Participant: God’s still good.

Bruce: Amen. *(Applause)* It’s great to be back with you. I trust that the Lord is pleased with our meager efforts to present who He is in all of His sovereign grace, to understand the magnificent sovereign work of the Holy Spirit not only in preparing us for service, but also preparing the lost for salvation. May it be so that we pray that God would do both of those things, because He is the only One who can do it. Let’s pray for Jesus’ sake.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Let’s pray. Father, thank You for the strength to get through this. Father, I just pray that if I’ve said anything that’s inconsistent with who You are in all of Your glory, all of Your majesty or Your character, that You would remove it from our minds, knowing those things that are consistent with Your revealed will in Scripture will be the things that we remember. Father, help us recognize this, that we need to be asking You to do what only You can do, and that is to regenerate the lost. May it be so, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Men: Amen. *(Applause)*