

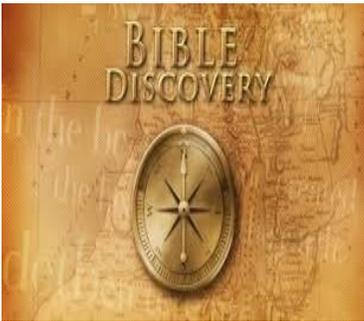
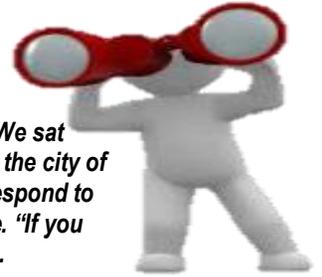
## Engage the Unexpected

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. <sup>8</sup> So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

<sup>11</sup> From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis.

<sup>12</sup> From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

<sup>13</sup> On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup> One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. <sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.



They say time heals all wounds. Yet as I remember the military exercise I participated in with the Canadian Forces years ago on Baffin Island in February I can't say time's *softened* my reflections. As a squad we were assigned as security for a DZ – a drop zone – out on the open tundra covered in deep snow to meet our resupply helicopter. We wore white camouflage over our winter battle gear and were instructed to remain still to ensure minimal visibility to the "enemy". We were assured that though it was cold, it was a dry cold (trust me when I say minus 35 doesn't differentiate between *humid* or *dry* conditions – *it's just cold!*) but we wouldn't be long 'til the helicopter resupplied. Right!

What was to be a brief security detail turned into several hours of waiting – and sinking – in the cold, wet snow. When the helicopter finally arrived after the wrong coordinates and being re-dispatched the pilot landed up-wind of our location meaning we'd guarded space for nothing. We literally climbed out of the snow where we'd sunk and with half-frozen bodies unloaded the supplies onto our toboggans for the long tow back to camp. When the military advertises there's no life like – *they mean it!*

I share this humorous tale as an example that *in life we must expect the unexpected!* Maybe that's why I can resonate with the Apostle Paul. He certainly had more than his share of occasions when things didn't go as planned. ***Can you relate?*** Consider Paul's ministry as an Apostle, willing to consider everything – his heritage, his education, his position as a Pharisee – "*a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*" [Philippians 3:8]. Surely though this meant he was secure with God. Do you think Paul had any idea what his life would be like when He professed Christ on the Road to Damascus? Looking through the rear-view mirror of Paul's travels, listen as He summarizes the unexpected events marking his ministry:

***"I've been in prison more often. I've been hurt more in beatings. I've been near death many times. Five times the Jews have given me their punishment of thirty-nine lashes with a whip. Three different times I was beaten with rods. One time I was almost stoned to death. Three times I was in ships that wrecked, and one of those times I spent a night and a day in the sea. I've gone on many travels and have been in danger from rivers, thieves, my own people, the Jews, and those who are not Jews. I've been in danger in cities, in places where no one lives, and on the sea. And I've been in danger with false Christians. I've done done hard and tiring work, and many times I did not sleep. I've been hungry and thirsty, and many times I've been without food. I've been cold and without clothes."***

[2 Corinthians 11:23-27]

In Paul's great trust of his Saviour and Lord, Paul notes he engaged the unexpected by knowing *the end game* was **ALL** about ***winning for God!*** Rather than concentrate on a ministry blocked, frustrated at every turn, or choosing to quit, the Apostle Paul persevered, later writing from prison awaiting execution, telling Timothy, his son in the faith, "*That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to*

Engage the unexpected by knowing *the end game* **ALL** about ***winning for God!***

guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day!” [2 Timothy 1:12] In all this we see Paul’s motivation for carrying the gospel. Imagine here, in our story today, Paul lying down to sleep, exhausted. He and his new preaching partner Silas along with Timothy, recruited in Lystra, had left Antioch and travelled overland to what is modern Turkey. So far, the trip’s fulfilled its purpose as “*the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers*”. [Acts 16:5] **Every preacher’s dream!**



They planned continuing west until the Holy Spirit prevents them. **God’s Spirit prevents them from preaching?** Though it’s strange they cooperate with God’s Spirit (*what choice is there?*) to turn aside toward Galatia. Heading north, they try Bithynia on the Black Sea, but again the Spirit says ‘NO’. Talk about being frustrated with a well thought plan! They continued (*and remember they’re walking all the way folks – no tour bus in those days!*) along the coast to Troas. It’s here in their rented lodging the exhausted Paul finally sleeps, though probably uneasily, and dreams. That’s not unusual, but this time he dreams something quite unexpected

–it’s a Macedonian (Paul can tell by his clothing) – a man from Northern Greece, who’s holding out his hands and pleading, “*Come over to Macedonia and help us.*” Talk about engaging the unexpected. No longer asleep, no longer tired, Paul’s filled with renewed energy and direction, unable to wait to tell the others. Notice Paul didn’t have a meeting, didn’t arrange a committee – they needed a boat to take them to Greece, not a debate over this unexpected change in direction.

### *What lessons do we learn?*

We’re not told exactly how the Holy Spirit blocked their ministry from going where they planned. Have you been held back, redirected, when tempted to go into new areas of service? I know I’ve experienced times when I felt certain I knew God’s call on my life only it didn’t work out; I’ve known times when doors previously open abruptly closed. I’ve come to accept that, for whatever reason and in unspecified ways, God’s Spirit at times prevents us from doing what we intended to do, stops us from going where *we* intended to go. But I also recognize the Spirit turns us in quite unexpected directions, *giving undreamed of opportunities* to accomplish God’s work. What a lesson we learn indeed! Paul and his associates, because of previous encounters, could’ve doubted but instead embraced this call enthusiastically trusting God implicitly to lead them where **His plan** would take them.

How’s it all work out? *That’s what any good campaign organizer wants to know, right?* Well we’re told they went to find a place of prayer, went to locate at least ten Jewish men, the minimum required for a synagogue, but instead find a group of *Gentile women* who’d gathered outside the gates by the river. Not exactly a promising start? *They’d come to teach Jewish men about the Messiah and instead found gentile women doing laundry!* Talk about engaging the unexpected! Yet Paul meets Lydia, a woman of commerce, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira – a woman who worshipped God. The Lord had worked in Lydia’s heart and she responded to Paul’s message. “*When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited (the missionaries) to her home offering them a place to stay.*” This event ushered in of the gospel not only in Asia but in the more important and wider field of Macedonia meaning Europe would receive the Good News of God’s grace.



We often overlook uncharted avenues of service, unproven opportunities for witness, long chances on following the Lord, because we feel they’re beneath us, or we’ve determined they can’t possibly be God’s leading. In truth, we’re simply unable to comprehend where following such directions might lead us; we’re unsure what engaging them might require of us. Yet engaging the unexpected when led by God brings incredible results!

What possibilities have you overlooked that God may’ve been calling you to? What have you dismissed as not being God’s will for you? Consider the possibilities in *your* community, in *your* workplace, in *your* home, in *your* church which may be the Lord drawing you to engage the unexpected and to be a part of **His** eternal plan?

It seems an unusual request for our North American mindset to relinquish our well established blueprints for life relying on God’s Spirit yet if you want *true happiness* in Christ, if you want to discover joy, peace and

contentment in following Jesus, if you wholeheartedly accept God's message – the message is “*He who breathes life into you, makes you alike with His own life - you'll accept it is He who has called you to live right and well, He who has taken responsibility for you to keep you save.*” [From Isaiah 42:5-6] You'll recognize, like Paul, like his fellow missionaries, that on your faith journey you'll encounter several unexpected turns. As you explore these new territories you'll also discover some of the most exciting aspects of life that present new opportunities of service and growth together with Jesus!

Finally, close your eyes – *don't go to sleep, we're almost done* – in your mind I want you to draw a riverbank - anything as simple or elaborate as you like – we're all artists here! Picture the flowing water, the trees breezing along the shore, perhaps some rocks on which to rest. Look now along this riverbank - your experiences this coming week – what “insignificant” unexpected opportunities show up for you as you prepare to go out *in step with Jesus*? My prayer is the same Holy Spirit who led the missionaries to Philippi, who led them on the Sabbath down to the river, will lead your imagination to ripple forward over the stones in your riverbed as you engage the unexpected opportunities God sends to you as you serve Him, and rejoice with you as you engage the unexpected.

May God indeed bless you this week and in the days to come as you discover what unexpected delights God has planned for you as you journey with Him. If that is not a reality for you, why not take time right now and ask Jesus into your life. It really is that easy – just tell Him that you agree with Him that you need Him, ask Him to accept you, a sinner, cleansing you from your sin, and choose to walk this amazing journey together with Him today!

*Blessings,*

*Pastor Dave*

### ***On your faith journey...***

- **You will encounter several unexpected turns**
- **You'll also discover new opportunities of service and growth together with Jesus!**

