Acts 16:1-10

Give to God Your GPS

Sermon

We are starting a new series for the next three weeks and then, God willing, we will get back into the book of Ephesians starting a new series there in chapter 3. As we approach the New Year, we're going to consider together three "resolutions" for us to be committed to this next year. Today, we are going to consider the following resolution: "I resolve to follow God wherever He may lead me." It sounds very cliché…but is it true of me? Can I with honesty and integrity say, "I will follow God wherever He will lead me"…even if it's somewhere I don't want to go? Peter, you remember, was told by Jesus, "when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and *carry you where you do not want to go*." (John 21:18). God at times leads us to places we "do not want to go". Sometimes God leads us to places we desire to go but we're afraid to dream big or step out in faith to do what God is really putting on our hearts. Often times excuses come flooding in and they prevent you from the big things God would have for you – we get "tied to our own GPS"…what is logical choice, what is the straight path. Then there is the problem of course of really knowing how to discern God's leading.

Whenever you sit in your car to go to a new place…what's the first thing you do? You type the address into your GPS. The job of the GPS is to tell you the best, easiest, quickest course to your destination. The problem is that when we are guided by God through life, God often has a GPS that is very different than ours. To be sure, God has given us brains, discernment, logic, wisdom to make wise choices…and most of the decisions we make are made through simply "choosing what seems best in the moment". There's nothing wrong with that. However, there are times when God will take us off the normal path. God loves to redirect our course and take us onto a path that is less traveled, and appears at first glance to make no sense. Our GPS immediately cries out, "redirecting" or "make U turn at next stop"!

This morning, I want to consider how God redirected Paul in our text, but also I want to share with you our story how God led us here to the Midwest.

If you look at my life and the directions that I've taken, it seems as though my GPS is broken. Almost 20 years ago I married my lovely wife Lorrie. God sat me next to her at church one Sunday morning. We became best friends and she continues to be my best friend. But poor Lorrie…she was brought into a marriage where her husband has a broken GPS. Yesterday as we were driving, Lorrie, holding tightly onto the handle, said, "When I see brake lights I think STOP…when you see brake lights you think, 'eh, I'll get there.'"

I **have this picture of Lorrie from when we visited Italy on our 10th anniversary.** She is holding up her arms in the air in excitement in front of the Duomo in Milan. She has a mixed look on her face of excitement and terror. We had a layover in Milan that was unexpected…so I decided to toss aside the itinerary…and to Lorrie's disapproval I said, "Let's go see Milan while we wait!" She was terrified we'd miss the next train to our intended destination, Venice. It's not like we have any idea where we're going or how to use the train system accurately. "Naw…we'll be ok.", I said. That picture of Lorrie with her arms in the air, scared, nervous, but excited and exhilarated, is a microcosm of our last 20 years together.

If you aren't willing to go off the path a bit, you might miss the Duomo's of life.

Our timeline is definitely not the typical timeline – school, graduate, college, career, meet the spouse, get married, have kids, have grandkids…etc. Our timeline has unfolded very differently, and we thank God that it has.

When Lorrie and I got married in 2006, I had a promising career in construction. I was making a good salary and part of a huge residential builder as a warranty manager overseeing several tracts of homes in So Cal. It seemed like life was finally becoming "normal" for me. My life up to then was a tornado of events – they led me to Jesus, the most important destination of my life. If I were to be honest, I didn't feel particularly called to be a warranty manager and I always felt like God was calling me to something more – but it was safe, secure, and provided for my new family. Two years later the market crashed in 2008 and I lost my job along with many others. I was on unemployment and there was NO WORK. At that time I had been teaching a Bible study through the book of Romans and I was struck with Paul's words in **Romans 15:20 – "and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation."** Those words convicted and challenged me that I knew a big God but wasn't dreaming big enough. Paul had that apostolic spirit that was needed – "GO OUT AND START SOMETHING NEW AND UNPREDICTABLE AND SEE GOD DO BIG THINGS". This excited Paul and it fueled his ministry. That was the moment when God began to put within me an apostolic spirit to see God do big things in new areas. I looked at the map around me in So Cal. I was a part of Calvary Chapel and there were healthy churches everywhere…to plant a church in that area seemed like building on someone else's foundation. I looked at my GPS – "destination unknown".

When I look at the NT I realize I am in good company. Paul clearly had a broken GPS. When you look at the map **of Paul's journeys**…**it looks totally illogical, and yet every step was completely logical because every step of the way Paul was guided by the Lord**. Now the context: here in vv.1-5 we see that Paul is going on his second missionary journey, He has taken with him Timothy. He is traveling back through the churches that he had planted on his first missionary journey (Iconium, Antioch, Lystra, Derbe). Why go to places you've already gone! Love is why! Paul wanted to strengthen the churches and he needed to deliver to them the letter that James had written concerning the decisions the Jerusalem council had made regarding the Gentiles that were now coming into the church.

Paul is an example of someone who resolved to break the GPS and follow God wherever He would lead Him.

That summer of 2008 when I was laid off, Lorrie's work sent her to a seminar in Milwaukee. She had a cousin who lived in Oak Park IL. at the time. I wasn't doing anything, so I came with her on this trip. We knew nothing about Chicago – deep dish pizza, Al Capone, the Bears…that's about it – just thought it would be a casual trip…but Romans 15:20 was heavy in my heart and mind. When we came out from the Blue line subway downtown Chicago we were blown away at the beauty of the city. We went up the river on the famous architectural tour. On our way to Milwaukee Lorrie looked over at me and said, "this would be a great place to live!" Lorrie is very calculated and logical…God knew I would need her to stay grounded. For God to be putting this on Lorries heart was a big thing - all our family and all we knew was on the west coast (Cali, Seattle).

It started with a simple desire, but we prayed and prayed, and sought counsel from God's Word and counsel from others. God was gracious to confirm the decision in some pretty amazing ways. It was a two year process…between 2008 and 2010 – GOD CAME DOWN AND SPOKE TO US. We came to the

point where it would have taken more faith to stay in California than to come to Chicago – God had made it so abundantly clear. We packed up a Budget rental truck to "go off course".

The day of the move, I preached at the church plant that we were a part of in Riverside. Right after I raced home and we packed up everything – the truck was bursting and we could barely get the doors closed. But we were off…excited, terrified. We had no idea what God would do. I didn't even have a job yet. We didn't know where we'd live yet. A pastor friend in Blue Island was going to let us stay at his home for a week while we found a place. God had miraculously provided a job for Lorrie which was a huge confirmation for us. Off we went into the unknown. We had mapped our course in the most logical way. Go through the San Bernardino mountains, through Las Vegas, over the Rockies and across the plains to Illinois.

We got to the San Bernardino mountains, and the truck broke down. Ok…no biggie…we'll call Budget. They sent out a mechanic who worked on the truck for about an hour or so…we lost a few hours total but we got back on the road. We're now coming into Las Vegas – if you've ever been to the desert outside of Vegas at night it's beautiful – you can see the lights off in the distance…and the truck began to shake…VIOLENTLY SHAKE. The cats are crying out. Lorrie and I are holding on. We finally get into Vegas and we call Budget again, "I think there is something seriously wrong with this truck." They agree to send out a new truck, along with some guys to unload and reload the new truck. Something you should know, I HATE VEGAS. It's dirty. It's dark. It's gross…even before I was a Christian I didn't like it…it's just nasty and depressing. The LAST place on earth I want to be is in Vegas – I wanted to drive through Vegas, quickly, and get on our way. We were stuck there for three days. It was 116 degrees. The computer in the truck melted. They reloaded the new truck and couldn't fit everything the way we did so we lost one of our mattresses – "whatever we just want to go!" We're finally on our way…we get in the truck, I turn the key and the new truck won't start.

It's at points like this when you start to doubt God's leading. "Did I hear Him correctly? Does God not want us to go? Why is this happening?"

You need to know that if God is calling you to do something for Him, there will be opposition. That's normal! It doesn't necessarily mean you didn't hear God correctly. Opposition to God's calling is the norm.

We called Budget, "This truck doesn't work either!" They send out another mechanic who found some electrical problem in the ignition…he fixed it and we were on our way….UNTIL. We get to the Hoover Dam and there are all of these officers on the bridge and they were checking every vehicle. They get to us and tell us they need to check inside our truck. I'm thinking, "good luck!" I opened the back door and stuff is practically falling out, "you guys have to turn around and go back." So we're redirected back to Vegas, the happiest place on earth.

Now I want to pause here in our story, because I see in our text some similarities with Paul's experience…look at Acts 16:6-10 with me…

6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. [Now…you have to understand the GPS route here. Paul wants to travel straight west to Asia. Probably because Ephesus was there along with the seven churches of Asia Minor that hadn't been planted yet. Ephesus was a logical place to go! It was like the Chicago of their day. So much

work to be done there! However, God redirects Paul "having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit". What did that look like? How did that happen? We don't know – but the writer attributes this to the HOLY SPIRIT. I'm glad we don't, because it leaves the possibilities for God to redirect in ways that are open and endless. God can redirect through sickness, through material/physical circumstances, even through sin, through closed doors, through visions and fresh direction – Luke says, "forbidden by the Holy Spirit" – God was redirecting them. God can use a myriad of ways to redirect you. So now Paul is going north rather than west…rather than going to Asia, rather than going to Chicago, he is going to Sheboygan…but Paul has already surrendered His GPS to the Lord. Wherever God would Lead Him…He would follow.] **[7] And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.** [another redirection! Paul is now going way off the original charted course**.] [8] So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.** [now Troas is right on the sea coast of the Aegean Sea far north of Asia. I can picture Paul looking out at the sea…perhaps it occurred to him that endless possibilities lay before him as he gazed out. A story was building. You have to have a story of what God is doing in your life. A track record to look back on when you hit the walls of opposition. You can look back and see clearly how God has guided you to the point where you are.] **[9] 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." [10] And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.** [open door. Now it all made sense. God was redirecting Paul for a reason – to go to Macedonia. The verb "concluding" in v.10 is an interesting word. It's used to logically evaluate several points of evidence so as to come to a settled decision (evidence 1,2,3 – and a logical decision is made). How does that logic play out for Paul? Evidence one – God forbid me from going to Asia. Evidence two – God sees in ways I do not…He knows the future, and His plan is always a good plan. Evidence three – God spoke to me in a vision to go a different direction. Evidence four – I need to follow God immediately. It isn't that following God means forsaking logic…it means changing the way you "recalculate"…it means giving God your GPS and allowing Him to redirect you. It made perfect sense for Paul to change his direction in the middle of the story – He's God! He knows the future and He has a plan and it is for good – so I will follow.]

So there we were, on our way back to Vegas. Redirected. You can imagine the frustration at this point, and really the fear, "Maybe we heard wrong from God."… OR… *maybe God was simply trying to redirect us and change the story*. Often times God uses the devils' opposition to redirect you. We pulled out our GPS - We went a totally different route. Instead of straight east we decided to go south through New Mexico. While we were in New Mexico, I pulled over at a gas station for gas and some food at the Subway. Outside the gas station there was a woman, she was very distraught and she asked me for money to get something to eat. I told her, "I won't give you money but I'll buy you something to eat but only if you'll come inside and sit with me so I can talk with you." She agreed. I asked her what her story was. She was running away from her husband who had been violently abusing her. I shared with her my story a bit…but most importantly I shared with her the gospel and she gave her life to Christ. It was amazing! Tears flowing down our cheeks. As we were leaving she came running out to the truck, "Take me with you!", "I can't we don't have any room in here…and TRUST ME LADY YOU DON'T WANT TO GET ON THIS TRAIN." We go on…through the pan handle of Texas and up through Oklahoma. We get to a BBQ diner for dinner, the place is about to close, and the waitress slides in next to us and begins to pour out her story to us. Lorrie and I begin to share the gospel with her and we pray with her, again, amazing. We go on, up through Missouri, and finally we made it to Blue Island just south of Chicago to my pastor friend Steve's house.

Here is the point. We would not have met the woman in New Mexico or the woman in Oklahoma had God not redirected us in all the ways he had. At the time, the path seemed broken and the timing was way off…but to God, we were right on time. Paul would not have planted the church in Philippi had he not been forbidden and redirected by the Holy Spirit. Lorrie and I would literally not be here in Trevor right now, had we not been guided by God to come here.

Now as we come to a close I want to share some lessons we've learned along the way:

1. **The Bible is God's primary means of directing you.** You need to saturate your mind and your decisions with the Bible. If God's Word doesn't support the choice I'm making, I should immediately toss the idea. You should scan the Scriptures for a divine imperative telling you to go, or to tell you stop, or wait. I have an entire GPS chain of Scriptures that God gave to me during that two-year season that are still precious to me to this day of God leading us here. One verse in particular that God gave to me was Isaiah 54:2, a relatively obscure passage, unknown. Shortly after I attended a Calvary Chapel conference at Blue Island CC. Mike Macintosh, a pastor from Cali I really looked up to, get up and shares. At the very end of his message, his last words, he says, "I'm not sure who this is for, but I really think God wants to speak this to someone here." He then quotes Isaiah 54:2 – **"Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. (Isa. 54:2)**. We've seen over the last 14 years here how God has done exactly that…our tent has been spread across the entire Chicago land area, we have strengthened our stakes here as we've given birth to two lovely kids (Isaac and Sarai) and the Midwest has become our home. Now God has stretched our influence over all of you here in Trevor, WI. **Psalm 119:105 – "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path".**
2. **Pray, pray, and then pray some more**. Bathe every decision in prayer. Ask God to reveal any and all self-centered desires within that would lead you to make poor decisions. Ask God to confirm your decisions through His Word**. "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psa. 37:4)**. I don't think that's saying, God will give you what you desire (as though God were some kind of Genie), it is saying, as you delight in the Lord, God will place within you the right, Godly desires. Ask God to give you the right desires, desires that would honor Him. Pray for God to open and close doors. Pray for God to give you wise counsel through others. Lorrie was praying, and she finally felt it was time to talk to her boss about her desire to move to Chicago. She was terrified, but felt it was the right thing to do. She goes in, sits down, and tells Phil her boss that she is planning to move to the Midwest. We had no jobs yet, and remember this is during a recession…Lorrie was also in the construction industry as an estimator and architectural drafter. Phil looks at her and says, "Did you know that I'm from Chicago?"….ummm…no! I didn't know that, she thought! "I know plenty of people in Chicago maybe I can set up an interview for you?" That interview became Lorrie's first job in Chicago when we moved here. ***Pray, and seek to do all things with honesty and integrity along the way – God takes your moments of obedience along the way to open doors ahead.***
3. **Seek Wise Counsel from others**. During the two years of waiting God was faithful to put people in our life that helped us discern the health and wisdom and purity of our desires and the decision to move. One good friend in particular, Josh Hays, was there with me, in the Word…many many times we met at Starbucks talking through the decisions he was facing with grad school and the decisions I was facing with moving. The added blessing of following God is

that He knits your heart together with brothers and sisters who walk through your story with you. My marriage got stronger through this process. The stress and anxiety of this season didn't tear us apart…rather it built us up in our faith with God together. Lorrie and I have the blessing of a glorious story that God has brought us through together. Those moments in the truck when we were singing songs and laughing with tears streaming down our face as we had NO IDEA what God was doing. The hours of laying in bed and dreaming of all that God would do. The moments where we had to lift one another up when we were stressed or second guessing God's plans. ***God speaks through the counsel and friendships of others…who will tell you what you NEED to hear, not what you WANT to hear.***

4. **Be open to God speaking in unique ways**. Now here, I know, is where many Christians depart from me. I still think God is able to lead us in unique ways…and I have a story to tell that confirms it. The Holy Spirit's PRIMARY way of speaking is through His Word, but I could go on and on telling you of the unique ways God confirmed our calling here. He knows how to get your attention. It may not make sense to others, but if you give to God a blank check and tell Him to fill it however He wants…watch out! God will direct, and redirect your life. It will be scary, and it will be exciting, and you will feel like you're living a story with God at the center.
5. **When God gives you a closed door, look for Him to be redirecting you**. A closed door is just as good as an open one! When doors close, and you feel like you heard from God and it seems like God has closed the door on His leading…fall back on what God has already shown you and trust Him. He is good and He often redirects and He doesn't want to confuse you or lead you astray. If you are honestly seeking to follow God wherever He will lead, God can use it all to get you where you need to be. Look back on what He showed you last, and keep doing that while you wait for the next thing. Troas can be a difficult place to be, the place of waiting for the next move. Some of you may be in Troas waiting right now. God will direct you…seek Him in His Word, in prayer, in the wise counsel of others, ask for Him to direct you in unique ways, and trust that God will get you where you need to be.

I'm convinced that the problem isn't God's inability to lead us, it's our inability to be in a place of real surrender. As we get older we become more practical, and more chained to the GPS. We stop dreaming. Caleb, the man of faith, had seen God do big things, and at the end of his life he wanted his portion in the land to be a place where battles were still to be fought – "Give to me this mountain!" Will you take some time as you cross over into the New Year and simply ask God, "God what would you desire to do with and through me this year, or this stage in my life?"

Will you make a resolution to give to God your GPS? What might God do in and through you this year if you were to honestly surrender your plans to Him? It's scary, and exciting, and there is no better way to live.

Let's pray.