

GOD DREAMS: Discerning God's Dream

January 23, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord's Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world awakens from almost 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming "the year of the Lord's favor" is a dream whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the 'year of jubilee' of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can dream God's dream.

Reflect on this Scripture: Acts 15:36-41; 16:4-10 NRSV

15:36-41 ³⁶ After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. ³⁹ The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. ⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

16:4-10 ⁴ As they went from town to town, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily. ⁶ They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; ⁸ so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

This Week: Acts 15:36-41; 16:4-10

This episode begins with good resolve: "*Let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing*" It is Paul's initiative to do so and his suggestion to Barnabas neatly summarizes their earlier mission together. Barnabas wants to take John Mark along (v. 37). Perhaps it is for family reasons, since John Mark is Barnabas's cousin (cf. Col 4:10) or because John Mark's mother is the apostle Peter's patron (see Acts 12:12) or because Barnabas, who is generous of heart (see 4:36-37), is himself a patron of second chances. We simply do not know. What Luke does tell us, however, is that Paul will have none of it. Paul disqualifies John Mark for two reasons: He lacks field experience – he is not a witness to "*all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles*" (v. 12) – and he is a defector from their prior mission. Barnabas's "sharp disagreement" with Paul and his subsequent decision to take John Mark on an independent mission to Cyprus (15:39) leads to separate paths.

The book of Acts follows Paul's next fledgling steps. It seems as though some prayerful trial and error is going on as the Spirit shuts doors on both his attempts to reach out in the province of Bithynia and Asia. After a series of closed doors, Paul becomes receptive to a vision in the quiet of the night that provides clarity. In Paul's vision, "*there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'*" (v.9). Luke's use of the Greek word for "help!" is almost prayer-like and recalls the invocative language of cries for assistance in the psalter. The proclamation of the good news is in response to the urgent plea for help.

Paul's response is immediate: "We *immediately* tried to cross over to Macedonia, being *convinced* that God had called us to *proclaim* the good news to them" (v. 10). The rest of the book of Acts hinges on this text.

-Adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol X, p. 225-227

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. What do you think of the sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (v.39)? How can dialogue (and even conflict) lead to clarity and further God's mission/dream through different paths?
2. What do you make of the doors that closed for Paul as he sought to go to the province of Asia and later Bithynia? Have you experienced a 'closed door' that led you to discern a new, perhaps even better path? Discuss.
3. Finally Paul gets quiet enough in the stillness of the night to receive guidance through a vision. Have you ever received clarity through a 'quiet time' in your life?

4. In Acts 16:9 the vision of the “man from Macedonia” beckons Paul and his companions to embark on a totally new, but ultimately very fruitful, mission in Europe. To our knowledge, Paul had never been out of the Middle East and this mission may have been way outside his comfort zone. Have you ever had a stretching experience that led to a season of fruitfulness? If so, what did you learn from that experience?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC
2. Read and reflect through your **God Dreams** journal (page 6).
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: **Acts 16:9-10** ⁹ *During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”* ¹⁰ *When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.*