

Man's Plan and God's Purpose

Acts 25:1-12 Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, 2 where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. 3 They requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. 4 Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. 5 Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there."

6 After spending eight or ten days with them, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. 7 When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them.

8 Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar."

9 Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

10 Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. 11 If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

12 After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

N.T. Wright: "This is an important point about the interaction between God's purposes and our praying. Sometimes, when we pray and wait for God to act, part of the answer is that God is indeed going to act, but that he will do so through our taking proper human responsibility in the matter. It's hard to tell in advance what the answer will be. There are times when it is "The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still" (Exodus 14:14), and other times when it is "Be strong and courageous, for you shall put this people in possession of the land I swore to give them" (Joshua 1:6). Discerning and discovering which applies in which case...is a major element in the discernment to which all Christians, and especially Christian leaders, are called."

How did Paul receive wisdom from God in making this difficult decision? What was it that allowed him to discern God's purpose and navigate a difficult and complicated situation?

There were 3 things that Paul was very certain of that helped him discern God's will. He knew...

1. He had a **PURPOSE**
2. He had a **PROMISE**
3. He had a **PROTECTOR**

1. Paul knew he had a **PURPOSE**

Acts 19:21 Paul felt compelled by the Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before going to Jerusalem. “And after that,” he said, “I must go on to Rome!”

Paul knew beyond any doubt that he was called by God to be a witness everywhere he went. This strong sense of purpose guided his decision-making in everyday life. The most important decision in life is not so much what we do or where we go. **What matters most is how we choose to live.** Just like Paul, each one of us is also called to be witnesses. When we embrace that calling and choose to serve Christ, not only as our Savior but also as our Lord, then we can also have that same confidence in daily living that the Apostle Paul had.

2. Paul knew that he had a **PROMISE**

Acts 23:11 That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, “Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well.”

God didn’t provide Paul with the timeline or details of how this promise would be fulfilled. The struggle for most of us comes between the “now” and the “not yet” of God’s promises. **But what matters most is simply knowing that He is in control.**

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

3. He had a **PROTECTOR**

Paul’s many experiences of trials and persecution taught him that he could trust in God as his protector. This allowed him to make important decisions based on his faith in God, rather than fear of man or circumstances.

Paul knew, just as we know today, that he had a good Heavenly Father watching over him.

As we’re told in 1 John 4:18, God’s perfect love for us is what helps us to cast out all fear.

As children of God, we are not called to live in fear. Instead, we can choose to walk in wisdom and live by faith. As God orders our steps, we want to walk in full assurance of faith that He is for us. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He truly is our Protector and Provider, and we can safely place our confidence in Him.