

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to help you talk about God's word and Pastor Brian's message with friends and family. You of course can use your own questions, but we'd like to give you this tool to encourage Biblical fellowship and discipleship in your circle of relationships. We hope you are well and discovering new ways to relate to God and His Word.

"UNDER PRESSURE" | ACTS 21: 1-16 | PASTOR BRIAN

WARM-UP QUESTION:

What's your favorite movie or tv show that shows the pressure (and humor) of traveling?

"Under Pressure" - (Acts 21:1-6)

Paul is constantly facing people who are worried about him and sad to see him go, adding social and emotional difficulty to the physical journey he is on. What kinds of pressure do many people face today ?

"Releasing Pressure" - (Acts 21:7-16)

Paul faces more believers and even his close friends, all who are against him going to Jerusalem. What kinds of pressure are most difficult to face?

"Withstanding Pressure" - (Acts 21:12-26)

Paul remains convinced of God's will for him to go to Jerusalem. How do you know when to listen to advice and when to reject it from others?

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Pastor Brian gives us 4 reminders of how to seek God's will: Spend time with God regularly, seek good counsel, realize God's will may not be what you want, and to be obedient to God's will. Pray and take a look at your life right now, which of these areas do you feel you are strong? Which areas are weak?

Under Pressure

I. Slide1 Announce:

- A. Slide2-5 Lar/AL: Giving Tree. Xmas Eve Service Times. Sun Night Prayer. Wed Nt
 B. Prayer:

II. Slide6 Intro: Under Pressure

- A. Luke now devotes **5 ½ chapters** to an account of *Paul's last visit to Jerusalem*.
1. **5 Incidents:** Paul speaks to a **hostile Jewish crowd** in Jerusalem (**who** he is & **why** he went to the *Gentiles*). Paul meets the **Jewish Sanhedrin**. He speaks to **Felix**, **then Festus**, **then King Agrippa**.
- B. In decision making, how do we know when to listen to others advice or when to reject it? David Russell said, *The hardest thing to learn in life is which bridge to cross and which to burn.*
1. It's easy to have good christians give bad counsel. And it's easy to misunderstand man's advice, for God's Voice.
 2. Why is it whenever we see the first sight of **suffering** or **discomfort** we think...*that must not be God's will???*
 3. Regarding knowing God's will, remember your **4 counsels:** *the counsel of God's Word, the counsel of the Holy Spirit, the counsel of your conscience, and the counsel of others.*
 - a) Take them together they often reveal God's will, *but not always.*
- C. Slide7 It was one of the greatest moments in the modern history of the world... On April 14, 1521 **Martin Luther** was on his way to the *Diet of Worms*. The emperor had forbidden the sale of all the reformer's books and order them to be seized. Luther's life was in great danger. Luther's devoted friend and confidant, **George Spalatin**, had sent word through a special messenger *not to come to Worms less he suffer the same fate as John Hus*. Luther Comforted his fearful friends, saying, *Though Hus was burned, the truth was not burned, and Christ still lives.*

Then he sent *Spalatin* the now famous message, *I should go to Worms, though there were as many devils as tiles on the roofs.*

1. How did Martin Luther come to such heroics - standing alone before the world? He knew God's will. And he chose to do God's will. And this is what set him apart from ordinary men. Let's meet back up w/Paul as he marches towards difficult decisions.

III. Slide8 **UNDER PRESSURE (1-16)** [Queen & Bowie 1981] **READ**

- A. I don't have a lot to share as far as a running commentary on this section of the chapter. It's a pretty straightforward **travelogue** of Paul getting down to Jerusalem.
1. But what I **do** want to spend our time on is looking at the **difficulty** and **confusion** of the counsel that was coming Paul's way. *Namely because we all wrestle with this in the same way.*
- B. Slide9a Paul had to face **his own opinions** (convinced he was supposed to go to Jerusalem). So far we have *Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome* (19:21). Then we have him *hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost* (20:16). Next Paul states, *behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there* (20:22). He **knew** he was going to *suffer, imprisonment and afflictions await me* (20:23).
- C. Slide9b Next, Paul had to face **the disciples at Tyre** for a whole week, hearing over & over, *through the spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem* [*note: NASB says, they kept telling Paul...*].
- D. Slide9c Next, Paul had to face **the prophet Agabus**. Back in 11:28 Agabus prophesied about the great famine, which history recorded it happened 10 yrs later.
- E. Slide9d Lastly, Paul had to face **Dr. Luke & the other disciples from Caesarea**. *We urged him not to go to Jerusalem.* Finally Luke wrote, *And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."* (14).

1. So many were saying *Paul you shouldn't go*, but more likely **the Spirit** was **predicting what would happen** and the disciples were *misinterpreting* those **predictions for prohibitions**.
 - a) **Slide10a** John Stott, *The **warning** was **Divine**, while the **urging** was **human**.*
- F. Think of Paul resisting the powerful influence of his closest companions in order to *walk Christ's narrow road*.
 1. Not one person said to him, *Hang in there, Paul. You obey God's plan for your life, & I'll stand with you.*
 2. Paul's response, *What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?*
 - a) **Slide10b** I think they all were just looking after **Paul's good, the Church's good, & their own good**. Maybe, they were just forgetting about **God's good!** *The will of the Lord be done!*
- G. **Slide10c** There is a lot of sage wisdom out there today, *like, When **in charge**, ponder. When **in trouble**, delegate. When **in doubt**, mumble.* (works for me!) Let's see if we can find better than that :)

IV. Slide11a **RELEASING PRESSURE**

- A. I'm new to the Instant Pot game. Being a *pressure cooker* there is a *Quick Pressure Release* & a *Natural Pressure Release* for releasing its pressure.
 1. The *Quick Pressure Release* is to **quickly stop the cooking process to prevent overcooking**. **We all like when God uses the Quick Pressure Release in our lives**. But some foods are best to let it **sloowly** release.
- B. **Slide11b #1** Do not be quick to know God's will...for someone else.
 1. Avoid making snap judgments or offering spiritual formulas.
 2. What matters is God's will for us, **not** what others think we should do.
- C. **Slide11c #2** Do not try to make God's will...conform to your preconceptions.
 1. Herbert Hendin said, *"It is **no accident** that at the present time the **dominant trends in psychoanalysis are the rediscovery of narcissism**. The*

society is marked by self interest and ego-centrism that increasingly reduces our relations to the question, 'what am I getting out of it?'"

2. We see similar trends in the church. *God wants me to be happy. If I'm not happy, I'm not in his will. Or, God does not want me to suffer pain. I am in pain. Therefore I am not in God's will.*
 3. **Note:** it's not about **choosing** suffering, it's about **choosing** God's will, even if it means suffering.
 4. We must not make our understanding of God's guidance conditional on our own happiness or sense of completeness.
 5. We don't choose to **preach** or do **plumbing** because it's fun or because we enjoy it, but because it's God's will for our life. Can it be fulfilling and fun and a joy? Of course! But even that is because God has led us to do it.
- D. **Slide11d #3** Do not allow your spiritual focus to be more horizontal than vertical.
1. Their **love** and **loyalty** were *commendable*, they were trying to save a friend's life. But their motives, *though noble*, were **shortsighted**.
 2. These Christians were not seeing God's ultimate purposes. They were looking out for **Paul's** good but not **God's**.
- E. **Slide12a WITHSTANDING PRESSURE**
1. Paul was able to withstand the pressure because he approached life the same way Christ did. **Actually** it was pretty remarkable how parallel it was to Christ going to Jerusalem. *The plots of the Jews, been handed over to the Gentiles, a triple prediction of coming suffering, a trusting surrender to God's will.*
 2. Paul had a long-standing inward constraint to go to Jerusalem *and suffer if need be*. It was a resolve that went all the way back to his conversion. Jesus I told him, *I will show him how much he must suffer for my name* (Acts 9:16).

a) **Ask:** will taking the **smooth path** bring as much *glory to Christ* as taking the **rocky road**?

3. **Slide12b Oswald Chambers** in his famous *bathroom devotional My Utmost For His Highest* said, *God plants His saints in the most useless places. We say, I should be here because I am so useful. Jesus never estimated His life by the standard of greatest use. God puts people where they will glorify Him, and we are not capable of judging where that is.*

F. *Fish at the deepest parts of the ocean floor cope with extreme pressure in a unique way. They don't build thick skins: they remain supple and free. They **compensate** for the outside pressure through **equal and opposite pressure** inside themselves. **Christians**, likewise, don't have to be hard and thick skinned - as long as we appropriate *God's power within* to equal the pressure **without**.*

G. **Slide13 FOUR PRACTICAL REMINDERS** for *seeking God's will*.

1. **Seek good advisers.** Be discerning as you choose those from whom you will except advice.
2. **Spend time with God regularly.**
3. **Realize that God's will may not be what you want.** Many of us are like a little girl who wrote on her thank you note: *Thank you for your present. I have always wanted a pin cushion, but not very much.* This is humorous in children **but** sad in God's children.
4. **If you know what God wants you to do, you must do it.** For most of us, the problem is **not that** of **knowing** God's will **but** of **obeying** it.
 - a) If you know you should *take an ethical stand* with your associates, do it!
 - b) If God wants you to *admit you are wrong*, do it as soon as possible!
 - (1) When God calls you to *give, share your faith, volunteer, or serve a certain people group*, do not settle for merely **knowing** His will - do it, **in His strength** and **for His glory**.

c) **Slide14** The final words of **Richard Baxter** say it all, *Lord, what thou wilt, where thou wilt, and when thou wilt.*

H. Answers aren't always black & white. Determining God's will can be complicated. **But** *through the process*, let Paul's words of commitment to Christ undergird your thinking, *For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.* Then whatever the outcome, you'll have peace.

1. When you can't trace God's hand, trust His heart.

I. **End end:** Think on this: Peter is the only one up in heaven that can say, *WE walked on water. Easy choices don't lead to great stories.*

1. What's going to be your great story?