Forty Days of Focus
Discerning God's Will for Grace Bible Church
Message #5 – Circumstances, 1 Corinthians 16:1-9 (2/5/2012 AM)

1. God Works Providentially through Circumstances
Both Taught and Illustrated In Scripture
The entire doctrine of the sovereignty of God supports this truth.

- **All things remain under God's rule and nothing happens which He either directly causes or permits**

Ephesians 1:11, Isaiah 46:9-10, and Acts 15:18
God is never surprised or confused. God is always in charge. The promise of Romans 8:28-29 is anchored to the sovereignty of God.

- **God's sovereignty does not deny human free will and responsibility**

God's granting a certain amount of freedom to mankind has not introduced the element of uncertainty into the universe. God's infinite power and knowledge cause both realities to be true. Peter's message to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost illustrates this, Acts 2:23-24. Also Peter's prayer after being called before the Jewish Sanhedrin illustrates this clearly, Acts 4:27-28. Those people were responsible for the personal choices they made while at the same time fulfilling God's perfect plan. God has an "eternal purpose" which He is accomplishing through Jesus Christ, Ephesians 3:11.
God Permits Temporary Evil and Suffering to Accomplish Eternal Good

2. Paul's Example of Divine Direction
Insight into Paul's Ministry Heart
The opening verses of this chapter at first glance appear to be merely historical. The immediate context is "the collection for the saints" that Paul has been spearheading. Paul told the Corinthians that he planned to visit them, (3) "And when I come," on the way to Jerusalem. Verses 5-9 do not contain any direct exhortation or instruction. Paul does model for us some practical ministry lessons and principles.

- **Paul had a vision for the future** (5)

A quick look at the map gives us some perspective on the situation. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus where he has now been for three years, Acts 19. Paul most likely gave the letter to Timothy (10) and had originally planned to follow him to Corinth on his way to Macedonia. Now his plans have changed and he is going to Macedonia first. Paul was actually criticized for being fickle by some of those at Corinth. Paul did change his plans, but he had a plan to change. He was never content to rest upon what had been accomplished. He was ever looking to evangelize the lost and edify the saved.
The Work of Ministry Requires Planning and Strategy

- **Paul was sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit** (6-7)

Paul sensed that the Corinthians needed more than just a quick passing visit from Paul "now on the way." So his hope was "to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits." Paul's planning remained flexible to the Lord's leading. To be flexible is not a sign of confusion, but humility. This is true in life as well as in ministry, James 4:13-15. Instead you ought to say,
'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that'." James is talking
about a person whose planning originates with his or her self. This is the height of arrogance and foolishness. Life is brief and unpredictable.
Planning without Praying Is Presuming upon God

- **Paul's planning was realistic** (8)

Note the outline of Paul's plan.
--Stay in Ephesus well into spring
--Travel through Macedonia during the summer (5)
--Stay in Corinth for the winter (6)
--Travel to Jerusalem the next spring (Acts 21)
God expects us to use our common sense and intelligence.

J.I. Packer, "the fundamental mode whereby our rational Creator guides His rational creatures is by rational understanding and application of His written Word."
Paul says that we are "bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart," Ephesians 6:6. We did a study on having a heart for God last year. We learned that the heart is the center of thinking and reason as well as emotions and will. We saw in this series two weeks ago that
we are to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind," Romans 12:2. Some "Christians" border on occultism in their understanding of God's working in their lives.
Separating the Rational from the Spiritual Is Being Mystical

- **Paul was directed through circumstances** (9)

Paul understood both the stewardship of time and opportunity. The literal translation is a door "standing open."
--God both opens and closes doors to direct us into His will.
This had been Paul's experience on his Second Missionary Journey as well, Acts 16:6-10. The time was not ripe for Paul to minister in Asia. Paul had appointments to keep in Philippi, Acts 16:11-40. There was a lady named Lydia leading an outdoor Bible study group. There also was a jailor and his family there that Paul needed to meet. God wanted Paul to eventually go on to Athens and witness for Christ in the center of that world's intellectual community. There was a church in the city of Corinth that needed to be started. Paul made a brief stop in Ephesus on his way back to
Palestine. Returning to our text (9) "For a great and effective door
has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." God had now brought Paul back to Ephesus on this 3rd journey. The result after two years is recorded in Acts 19:10, "so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."
Open Doors Faithfully Entered Increase Adversaries
but Bear Much Fruit