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SERMON TITLE

WHEN HE SAYS STOP

SERIES

MOVE WITH THE WIND

DATE

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KEY SCRIPTURE

Acts 16:6-10

SYNOPSIS

What if the closed door in front of you is the Holy Spirit doing the leading?

HIGHLIGHTS



☞ MOVE WITH THE WIND

☞ Anybody remember the game **Red Light, Green Light**? Here's how it works: one person stands up front and calls it. Green light — you run. Red light — you freeze. The same person calls both. The voice that tells you to go is the exact same voice that tells you to stop. And, we like the “go” but the “stop” is not so great. The hard part of Red Light, Green Light was never the green. It was the red.

For six weeks now, we've been learning to run on green. *Move with the wind*, we said. Move ☞ when He moves. But this morning I want to talk about the red light, **When He Says Stop**. Because here's the truth: **the voice that says "go" is the same voice that says "stop."** And the day He says stop is *not* the day He left you. It might be the day He's doing the most leading.

So here's the question I want us to think about today: **What do you do when the God who's been saying "go" for six weeks suddenly says — *not there*?**

☞ Acts 16:6-10

*"Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been **kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia**. When they came to the border of Mysia, **they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to**. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."*

Three actions from the wind of the Spirit. **Blocked. Between. Beyond.**

☞ **BLOCKED** Look at verse 6. Paul wants to preach in Asia. Now — quick thing, because we hear 'Asia' and picture the giant continent on the map. That's not it. In Paul's day, 'Asia' was a Roman province — like a state — over on the coast of what we'd now call western Turkey. Asia was packed with cities and people with needs. If Paul had drawn it up on a whiteboard, every one of us would've said it was a good plan. But the Holy Spirit shut the door. Not because Paul sinned or got out of line. He's trying to do the right thing — and the Spirit says no.

So they pivot. Verse 7 — they head for Bithynia. Another good region. Another reasonable plan. And *"the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to."* Door number two. Slammed shut. Here's the apostle Paul — missionary of the year — getting doors shut in his face by the very Spirit who sent him. Two of them. Back to back.

So let's settle something this morning. Sometimes God closes a door and says no. Paul really doesn't get Asia; that door was shut and stayed shut. When God closes something, that thing is off the table — and that's a real no. But we need to understand this: **a no to the thing is not a no to you.**



In Revelation 3, Jesus describes Himself this way: "What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." (**Revelation 3:7**) The hand that opens is the same hand that shuts. He's not less in charge of the shut doors than the open ones. So when He shuts one, He hasn't walked off and left you standing at it — He's turning you toward something. **A closed door is the Spirit steering, not the Spirit leaving.**

Paul's closed door was a province. Mine was a cockpit. I wanted to fly — not casually, I mean I wanted to be a pilot. I started taking flying lessons at sixteen, loved every minute, right up until my instructor moved away and I never finished. Bad timing, I figured. Years later, out of college and into ministry, I started lessons again — and right in the middle of them, Naomi and I got the call to come to Boone. Lessons stopped. Someday, I told myself. Then a few years into being here, I started wondering if aviation might be the next chapter — so, third time, I signed up and started flying again. And that's about when the call came to step in as lead pastor. (You'd think after the second time I'd have taken the hint.)

Three times I reached for that cockpit. Three times the door shut. I even thought I could make aviation a ministry, flying on the mission field. It just seemed like a dream that kept not working out. It took me years to see that it wasn't just bad luck. Every time the flying door closed, it drew me further into this. Into ministry, here, in this room. I kept trying to go up; God kept pointing me here. He wasn't grounding a good dream to be cruel. He was steering. He just had a different way He wanted me to move with the wind.

*And I should add something about me. I'm persistent. (Three rounds of flying lessons — "persistent" is the polite word. Naomi might pick a different one.) And persistence is mostly a good thing. But it's got a shadow side I've had to watch: the same grit that keeps you from quitting can keep you from listening. **Push it far enough and persistence can turn into resistance.** You can spend years insisting on a door God already shut and call it faith the whole time. Sometimes the most faithful thing isn't to try harder. It's to realize He's the one holding it closed — and then go where He's actually pointing.*

BETWEEN Now watch verse 8, because it's the verse we tend to skip. "So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas." That's it. One sentence. But don't skip it — because that one sentence is where a lot of you are living this morning.

Two doors just closed. So what does Paul do? He doesn't sit down and he doesn't quit. He doesn't keep pounding on the Asia door. He keeps walking. Down to Troas — the coast, the edge of the land. Couldn't go any farther without a boat. This was his waiting room.

That's the in-between. The old thing closed and the new thing hasn't opened yet, and you're just... walking. Some of you are in Troas this morning. The job ended. The relationship ended. The plan you built your whole year around died, and the next thing hasn't shown up, and you've been wondering if you missed God somewhere back down the road.



Hear me: Paul didn't miss God. Paul was *led* to Troas. The same Spirit who closed Asia walked  him to the coast. **The no didn't mean stop moving. It meant not there.** They kept obeying in the in-between. They kept walking. They stayed available.

It's like the GPS in your car. You're driving along, sure of your route, and the road's closed — and that calm little voice says, *"recalculating."* It doesn't say *"you blew it, pull over, go home."* It says, give me a second, I've got another way. (*And if you're like me, you argue with it for about three miles before you admit it was right.*) That's verse 8.

In a minute, we'll see that Paul gets a vision, but not in Asia, where he wanted to be. It comes in Troas — the place he ended up *after* the doors closed. God met him in the in-between. **Proverbs 16:9** says, *"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps."* You plan the course. He sets the steps. And sometimes His step is a waiting room on the coast.

One more thing, and it's easy to miss. Up until now, Luke's been writing *"they."* They traveled, they tried, they passed by. But in verse 10 — suddenly it's *"we."* Right here, in Troas, in the detour, Luke joins the team. The closed door in Asia handed Paul a friend he never would've met on the road he wanted to take. Sometimes the people you would have driven right past on your own route are the exact ones God has waiting for you on the detour.

So, they were blocked, but kept moving, remaining available during the in-between. And then...

 **BEYOND** Verse 9. *"During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'"* Come over. Over the water. Macedonia isn't down the road from Troas — it's across the Aegean Sea, a boat ride to a whole different landmass. Remember, Troas was the edge of the land; Paul had walked as far as the road would take him. And now God says: get in the boat. There's a continent over there that's never heard.

So look at what just happened. Paul kept trying to work the near side of the water. God sent him across it. The closed doors didn't *shrink* his mission — they *aimed* it. The open door was bigger than the one he'd been pounding on. **Ephesians 3:20** says, *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."* Immeasurably more. Paul asked to keep preaching in a province on this side of the sea. God had a whole continent waiting on the other side. The shut doors behind him were the only road to the open water in front of him.

And catch how verse 10 says it: *"concluding that God had called us."* Concluding. They had to put it together. It wasn't a billboard. It was a closed door, plus a closed door, plus a dream in the night — and they read it. Same thing we said at Antioch a few weeks back: you read the wind by what it's doing. Sometimes you can't read the no until you see the yes. Hindsight is how a lot of us finally read the wind. I didn't see God's call clearly until after I surrendered to pastoring.



Now, this is interesting. Paul saw a *man* in that vision — "a man of Macedonia," verse 9. So picture him stepping off the boat, scanning the dock for the guy from his dream. And that's not who he finds. A few days later it's the Sabbath, and they wander out to a riverside looking for a place to pray, and they find a group of *women*. And the Lord opens the heart of one of them. **Acts 16:14** - "*One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*" The first person to come to Christ on the whole continent of Europe wasn't the man in the vision. It was Lydia.

Catch what God did there. He gave Paul just enough to get him in the boat — a face, a place, a need. He didn't hand him the whole plan. The vision got Paul moving; it never showed him Lydia. God leads in stages. He shows you the next step, not the whole staircase. He'll give you enough light to get across the water, and the rest you find out when you get there. Paul didn't need the whole plan. He needed the next step. *That* he had.

And don't miss where Lydia's from — Thyatira. That's a city back in the province of Asia. The exact region the Spirit had just shut the door on. So God closes Asia, ships Paul clear across the sea to Europe — and the first heart He opens over there belongs to a woman from Asia. He was never saying no to Asia. He was getting there a different way.

Now — let me show you something, on the weekend this nation turns two hundred and fifty. 🗨️ [SLIDE: *map1 followed by map2 automatically*] That boat to Macedonia? That's the first time the gospel ever crossed into Europe. Trace the road from that one closed door. Macedonia, then Greece, then Rome, then all of Europe — and centuries later it gets on a ship across an ocean to a brand-new country that turned two-hundred-and-fifty-years old yesterday — and it keeps going, west, until it comes down a county road to a church on Hancock Drive in Boone, Iowa. (*Right here. This room.*)

🗨️ Do you understand what that means? **We are somebody's "beyond."** The reason there is a gospel here at all this morning is that two thousand years ago the Spirit looked at Paul and said, "*not Asia.*" Your frustrating closed door might be the open door for somebody four thousand miles and hundreds of years away. So this morning, on this weekend, I'm grateful the wind carried the good news far enough to reach us at all.

There's another closed door that started all of this. The night before the cross, Jesus knelt down in a garden and prayed, "*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.*" (**Matthew 26:39**) If there's another way — open it. And the door stayed shut. The answer was "no. Not this way."

Mull that over for a second. The Son of God asked for a different route, and heaven said no. The closed door at Gethsemane became the open tomb on Sunday morning. What looked like the



end of everything turned out to be the *salvation* of everything. The most painful "no" ever prayed became the "yes" that saved the world.

And the "no" that broke Paul's plans is the "yes" that built ours. So when the door in front of you won't open, you're in good company. Others have been at a closed door too.

So here's the whole thing in your hands. **Blocked** — the closed door might be the Spirit steering, not the Spirit leaving. **Between** — He'll meet you in the waiting room, not back where you wanted to stay. **Beyond** — what He's opening is bigger than what you asked for. **That door you keep knocking on that won't open — what if it's not God walking away? What if it's God turning the wheel?**

☞ For six weeks we've said the same four words: *they moved when He moved*. This morning, here's the rest of it. *They also stopped when He stopped*. And *they turned when He turned*. That's what it means to move with the wind — not just go when it blows, but stop when it stops, and trust it when it turns.

We're going to sing in just a minute. And before we do, I want to name two of you. Some of you are standing at a closed door right now, and you've been treating it like proof that God left. And some of you are in Troas — the in-between, walking, wondering if you missed Him. While we sing, I want you to say something like this: *Okay. If You closed it, I trust You. Steer.*

SONG — Way Maker

You're free to go in a minute. But before you do let me pray a few words, and you just make them yours.

Lord, You closed a door. I don't understand it. But I believe You're steering, not leaving. I'm done pounding on the door to Asia. Meet me in Troas. And whatever the "beyond" is that I can't see yet — I trust it's bigger than what I asked for. I'll move with the wind. Even when it says not there.

Closing prayer *Father, thank You for the doors You've opened, and thank You for the doors You've closed. There's a gospel in Boone this morning because of a closed door 2,000 years ago. Remind us that the voice that says "go" is the same voice that says "stop," and You only stop us to steer us. We'll move when You move. We'll stop when You stop. In Jesus' name — amen.*