

## **September 11: The Macedonian Call (Acts 16:1-13)**

**Describe a time in which you struggled to find God's will in your life. How does this story of Paul help you view your own struggles in finding God's will?**

Personal Reflection.

Early in this chapter, we see Paul and his companions struggling to determine God's plan for their missionary work. Twice they plan, they pack up, and they travel to different locations, but God put barriers in their path. These were men trying to do the will of God for His glory, but here they are being told "I have a different plan for you." If such a Godly man seeking the glory of the Father can spend time trying to decipher God's will for his missionary work, why should we be puzzled when we, too, need to spend some time deciphering where God would use us?

We can learn from Paul's persistence, though. When we was not sure where God would use him, he kept moving forward until God made it clear to him. We should not be stagnant when listening for God - he often answers us when we continue to press onward.

Although God prevents Paul from entering Asia at this time, God had plans for Paul and Asia later. Whatever the reason, God held Paul back from Asia at the moment, knowing that later he would be needed there in a great way (Acts 19:10). Perhaps God has similar words for you when you try to work through his will - "yes, but not now."

**Do you see yourself as someone planted here by God, or as someone who just happens to be here? In what ways have you seen God's hand at work in placing you in this city?**

Personal Reflection.

**Philippi is a town with so few Jewish people there was no synagogue to be found. Have you ever felt like God has called you to be a light surrounded by darkness?**

Personal Reflection.

**Who has God placed in your life that needs the gospel? What are some steps you can take this month to share the gospel with them?**

Personal Reflection.

Everyone has a first step towards Christ, but their conversion story may look different than yours. Some people will be willing to come to church with you on Sunday, if asked. Others may feel that it's too uncomfortable, but they'd be willing to come eat dinner with your friends at your next Grace Community meeting. Some will not do either until you've explained why the gospel of Jesus Christ is so important in your life, and why you care that they know Jesus for themselves. Think through the people you mentioned and which step they may be willing to take. Whether you invite them to an event or have a conversation over coffee, we are always praying for your boldness. God will use you in Orlando, if you step out in faith.

**Spend some time in your Grace Community praying for these people and the city of Orlando.**

## **September 18: Changed by Truth (Acts 16:14-15)**

**Why do you think God put Lydia in her profession before Paul shared the gospel with her? Do you think God is using you in a similar fashion?**

Lydia is a seller of purple cloth - likely a wealthy woman of influence. She would have had access to resources other people would not, like a house big enough to accommodate four missionaries traveling through her town. Equally as important, she would have had access to the most powerful men in the town, and therefore the ability to share the gospel with even more influential people in the area. God placed her in a unique position to reach unique people far from God. Through Lydia, God can reach more people in the city. It's no accident that she was in this position when Paul was sent to her.

**What does it mean for the Lord to "open" Lydia's heart?**

Before knowing Christ as our savior, we are dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). The bible doesn't address it as though we are sick and need a simple cure, but rather that we need supernatural intervention (John 6:44). We need someone to step in and bring us back to life (Romans 8:11). That is what God does here. He does as he promised - he replaces her heart of stone with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

**Paul is a bold man who often would preach in front of men who sought to cause him harm. Do you think he presented the gospel the same way with these women by the river? What can we learn from this?**

Though we are always to be bold in our sharing of the gospel, we may need to preach the gospel differently to people. Contextualization of the gospel is appropriate and helpful to those who don't know Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 Paul explains his approach in sharing the good news of Christ with people.

"Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

Since Lydia was a worshiper of God already, it's safe to assume that his presentation would have been a little different than if she wasn't already. We, too, should approach our conversations about Christ in ways the listener will be more likely to understand.

**Lydia was a religious person before meeting Paul, but not a believer in Jesus. We all know people who are morally good, but not believers. Who are the Lydias in your life that need you to share the gospel with them?**

Personal Reflection.

**What gifts or circumstances has God placed in your life that could be used to spread the gospel in Orlando?**

Personal Reflection.

## September 25: Changed by Power (Acts 16:16-21)

**Have you ever experienced something miraculous? Something that made God's existence clear to you?**

Personal Reflection.

**Why was Paul greatly annoyed with the demon possessed girl? Wasn't she helping to advertise his ministry?**

Though the demon is proclaiming the truth about who Paul is and why he was there, the message is displayed with mockery. If anything, this demon possessed girl was distracting him and his companions as they attempted to bring the gospel to the town of Philippi, and probably distracting those who were listening to the message. Paul does not need a demon to proclaim the truth about himself or Christ - he has all the words he already needs.

There are also some scholars who claim the girl's words were actually confusing the message Paul was preaching. Some would translate the phrase to say "who are telling you A way to be saved" instead of the way.

**The slave girl's life was radically changed through the power of Christ. She was set free from something that held her captive. How have you seen your life changed after you were confronted by the gospel?**

Personal Reflection

**How does the slave girl's encounter with the gospel compare and contrast with Lydia's experience?**

On the surface, these two encounters are very different. In one, we have Lydia, a wealthy woman of influence who was living a morally upright life but didn't know Jesus. Through the equivalent of a bible study with Paul, she came to know Jesus as her Lord and savior. In the other story, we have a slave girl who is possessed by a demon. Poor, broken, abused, and bound by socioeconomic positioning, she was freed of her demon through miraculous actions and not through "bible study." But in some ways, these stories are very similar.

Through the words of Paul, God showed his power in both stories. In Lydia, God displayed His power by opening her heart to the words Paul was preaching. The is just as supernatural an event as casting out a demon. The slave girl was also saved by the authority of Christ through Paul's command. Both stories display that it is God who is working in us (Lydia and the slave girl) and through us (Paul and companions). God initiates the change - not us.

**After casting out a demon in public, how does the town respond? Is this how you would expect them to react?**

Because the slaveholders see that they have lost their ability to make money on the girl as a fortune teller, they take Paul and Silas to the magistrates on trumped up charges and have them thrown in jail. The power of God was displayed right in front of them, but instead of repenting and believing in God, they became angry that money was taken away. Obviously God had not supernaturally changed their hearts.

## **October 2: Changed by Suffering (Acts 16:22-40)**

**Paul and Silas are beaten, thrown into the worst parts of the jail, and put in stocks at the ankles. How do they respond?**

Instead of crying out to the jailer for help or fearing what would come next, Paul and Silas begin singing hymns and praying to God. They respond with complete trust and faith in the goodness of the Lord. They know that God has not forgotten them. He hasn't lost them along the way and now cannot find them - God knows exactly where they are at, and Paul and Silas praise His name in song. Their joy in the Lord ran so deep in them that even when their lives were on the line, they still were filled with joy.

**Share a story about a time when you saw a Christian suffer in a way that displayed their trust in God?**

Personal Reflection.

**As the jailer encountered men who were changed by the gospel, he knew there must be something to their faith. Would you say your life reflects the faith you claim? What would need to change in you for that to be the case?**

Personal Reflection.

**Paul and Silas could have easily escaped, but at the cost of the jailer's life. In what way is God asking you to withhold escaping your 'jail' for the sake of another?**

Personal Reflection.

**In week one you prayed for people placed in your life that need the gospel. How have you been challenged over the rest of this series to share the gospel with them?**

Personal Reflection.