

Lydia: Called to Serve

Bible Background • ACTS 16:11-15, 40; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-30 | Printed Text •
ACTS 16:11-15, 40; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-30 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 33:1-12

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONSIDER how Lydia used her gifts and her place in society to support Paul's ministry, REPENT of the times we have looked down on others who have not had the same opportunities or advantages, and SERVE others joyfully through whatever means are at our disposal.

In Focus

William lounged on the couch by the window in the Saturday afternoon sun. His wife Betty was off at her book club across town, and he had the house to himself. So quiet, he thought happily. But as he listened more to the ticking of the clock in the kitchen, he grew restless.

They had lived in this house for over thirty years, long enough to have three kids and see them off to homes of their own. William and Betty were certainly enjoying the time to themselves, but now their empty nest just didn't feel right to him. He almost missed the little feet traipsing loudly upstairs or the chatting teens in the TV room. Dinners at the kitchen table were definitely less lively without the kids and their fiancés. It seemed to William like a waste of space. He wasn't ready to move to a smaller apartment; he wanted the guest rooms. He wanted to be hospitable. Over dinner, William talked with Betty about the feeling.

"You're right, dear," Betty said. "Things are so different now without the kids. In fact, I was just thinking on my drive over there, how far away my book club is. It used to make sense when Billy's baseball practice was out that way, but that was years ago."

"I was thinking," William said. "How about we tell the church office that we're offering to host something here. Could be a new book club, maybe a small group ..."

How can you show God's love to others through hospitality?

"And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us" (Acts 16:15, KJV).

KJV

Acts 16:11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

1 Corinthians 1:26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

NLT

Acts 16:11 We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis.

12 From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.

13 On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there.

14 One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying.

15 She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed.

40 When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town.

1 Corinthians 1:26 Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.

27 Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.

28 God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.

29 As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

30 God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.

People, Places, and Times

Purple Cloth. The ancient Mediterranean peoples used a dye from a certain kind of sea snail found in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. This dye was very expensive because of its rarity and the labor intensity of extracting it. Clothing made from this dye was equally expensive and reserved for notable members of society. The color is now called Tyrean purple, after Tyre, the Phoenician city that perhaps discovered the dye.

Philippi. A predominantly Roman city at this time, Philippi was eight miles inland from Neapolis, which was a seaport in northern Macedonia. The city is named for Alexander the Great's father, Philip II of Macedon. The city Philippi was located near two rivers and connected with coastal cities by several good roads; therefore, trade was enjoyed and was financially lucrative. Philippi lay along the Egnatian Way, the major east-west Roman road connecting lands in Greece and Turkey.

Background

After Paul and Barnabas' successful journey planting many churches in Syria and surrounding provinces, a new journey to plant churches was planned—this time throughout the Roman province of Asia. Paul and Silas set out from Antioch and were joined by Timothy while visiting a previously established church in Lystra. Soon after, the Holy Spirit deflected the group's plans to go into Asia and guided the men instead of to Macedonia. At this point, Luke (the writer of Acts) joined the team too, and they set sail from the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea.

After meeting Lydia, the team stays in Philippi preaching. They cast a demon out of a slave girl and her masters provoked an uproar that ended with Paul and Silas in jail. When an earthquake opened the chains of every cell in the prison and the jailer was about to kill himself, Paul and Silas led the man to Christ instead.

Paul and Silas benefited from the hospitality of wealthy converts, but Paul also knew that most Christians did not have much worldly wealth or status to boast of. He wrote to the Corinthian church to show how God uses that fact to His advantage so Christians should feel no shame in their lowly status.

Compare and contrast the conversion of Lydia and the jailer. Describe other biblical and present-day examples of how God works.

At-A-Glance

1. The Ministry at Philippi
(Acts 16:11-13)
2. The Conversion of Lydia
(vv. 14-15, 40)
3. The Wisdom of the Cross
(1 Corinthians 1:26-28)
4. The Benefits of the Cross (vv. 29-30)

In Depth

1. The Ministry at Philippi (Acts 16:11-13) It took two to five days for Paul and his team to travel from Troas to Macedonia. The first colony they visited in Macedonia was Philippi. On the Sabbath, Paul and the others traveling with him made their way through the city gate and to the water's edge. They had discovered that there was no synagogue in Philippi, indicating that there were not ten Jewish men in the community, as this is the number of men required to hold a Sabbath service. Those who sought to worship God, then, were mostly women and did so down by the riverside, where women often gathered to draw water, do laundry, and enjoy female companionship.

Paul and his friends began to preach Christ to these women. Paul had learned that God did not show favoritism and the women who had converted to Christ had become a major source for the spread of Christianity in other places where he had preached.

Where have you seen women take the initiative to start a gathering when men could not or did not do so?

2. The Conversion of Lydia (vv. 14-15, 40) Lydia's heart is already open to receive God's Word, so when Paul begins to speak, she listens and accepts the truth of the things he has to say. Lydia became the first convert in Europe. Then after accepting Christ for herself and being baptized, she was blessed to see her entire household baptized into the Christian community of believers. The joy she experienced in Christ must have been tremendous, for after her conversion she invited Paul and his companions to stay in her home as her guests and refused to let them say no. Paul and the other missionaries traveling with him stayed with Lydia until their ministry in the city had concluded. Her home became the first church at Philippi. Paul later referred to the Philippian church as his "joy and crown" (Philippians 4:1). Lydia became one of Paul's financial supporters and was a loyal helper in his ministry. Lydia even fearlessly opened her house to Paul and Silas after they were released from prison. She did not let the fear of associating with people accused of rabble-raising keep her from supporting God's workers.

What effort have you made to lead your family and close friends to Christ?

3. The Wisdom of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:26-28) As we have seen in this past month of lessons, God does not hesitate to call people to spread the Word even though society has overlooked them. Lydia was rich, but most converts were poor or working class. Paul tells these converts that formal education, political power, and economic status are not what put you ahead in the kingdom of God.

Instead, God specifically chooses those the world counts as low to show His glory. The Lord ordained twelve social outcasts to be His disciples, to learn from Him, and be empowered with the Holy Spirit. They, in turn, were responsible for sharing the message of the Cross worldwide. Perceived as a powerless baby born in a manger, Jesus escaped the murderous rampage of a king. A despised Cross and physical death, instead of ending Jesus' existence, demonstrated His wisdom and power over sin and the grave itself.

How has God used the weaknesses in your life to show His glory?

4. The Benefits of the Cross (vv. 29-30) When we look back and remember how the Lord has brought us, sheer necessity compels us to sing, "If it had not been for the Lord on my side, where would I be?" Those who know we would be nothing without God have reason to rejoice and brag. True wisdom is knowing that our rejoicing and bragging is in what God has done for us through Christ Jesus.

God chooses the lowly, and completed the entire work of salvation by Himself, so that no one has anything to boast about to God (v. 29). The marvel is that God makes Jesus everything—and then includes us! He makes Christ all the deep, lasting, spiritual things we could boast about: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (v. 30). But he doesn't keep them to Himself. He shares them with us. God specifically gives these gifts to the lowly so that the world can see how far a person is lifted solely by the power of Christ.

How have you expressed your gratitude for all God has done for you?

Search the Scriptures

1. Who was baptized along with Lydia (Acts 16:15)?
2. What aspects of the world does God confound, shame, and bring to nothing? (1 Corinthians 1:27)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why did God lead Paul to Macedonia to the women at the river, but forbid him to go to other places?
2. Why is it significant that Lydia already worshiped God?
3. Christians are not saved because we are wise, strong, or wealthy. In fact, Scripture reminds us of how little merit we have on our own. However, Scripture also reminds us of our unity with Christ, who is everything glorious. In light of these two opposite self-images, how should Christians understand themselves and present themselves to the world?

Liberating Lesson

Missionaries who travel to Africa report that the nature of hospitality is such that within the community whenever anyone needs food or shelter, the members of the church rise up and take them into their own homes until they can correct whatever problem might have caused their circumstance. Such hospitality is not uncommon across the world. What do you think would happen in America if Christians practiced that type of hospitality?

Application for Activation

Through Lydia's successful trade of purple, God equipped her to perform the task of hospitality. When Paul's team came, Lydia faithfully jumped at the chance to make use of the skills and means that God had given her. Take time this week to examine how God has equipped you and presented you with the opportunity to make use of your gifts. Find a way to take that opportunity this week and just like Lydia, don't take no for an answer!

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do?

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned?

Say It Correctly

Troas. **TROE**-as.

Samothrace. **SAH**-moe-thray-ss.

Neapolis. nee-**AH**-poe-liss.

Thyatira. thigh-ah-**TIE**-rah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Don't Complain but Serve One Another
(1 Peter 4:7–11)

TUESDAY

Everyday Expressions of Hospitality
(Romans 12:9–19)

WEDNESDAY

Hospitality Practiced in Jail and Home
(Acts 16:35–40)

THURSDAY

Hospitality Practiced by
Widow and Bishop
(1 Timothy 5:9–10, 3:2)

FRIDAY

Christ, God's Power and Wisdom
(1 Corinthians 1:8–25)

SATURDAY

Know Jesus Christ Crucified
(1 Corinthians 2:1–5)

SUNDAY

Lydia, Model of Hospitality Practice
(Acts 16:11–15, 40;
1 Corinthians 1:26–30)