

Acts 16

A GROWING MOVEMENT

Persecution, Prison and Purpose

Life Group Leaders should read through this material and choose a few questions to talk over in your group. Your group will not have time to cover all the material. The guide is for personal study and for choosing a few questions that you and your life group would like to discuss.

Read Aloud Acts 16:1-15

Before we break down this section of Scripture, describe what is happening in your own WORDS. (Being able to summarize Scripture is a great way to see if we are comprehending what we have just read.)

Acts 16:1-5

Paul took Silas to visit the churches that he and Barnabas had started. It has been around 18 months since Paul had seen these believers. In the meantime, the church had grown, and there was one particular disciple who had flourished named Timothy.

A As discussed in chapter 15, there was still division at times between the Gentile and Jewish believers. Due to this controversy, Paul and Timothy decided that it was in the best interest of the mission for Timothy to be circumcised.

B In addition to this, Paul also reinforced what the Church had decided regarding the Gentiles. They did not need to follow the law but were to keep a few simple commands in order to preserve their testimony and advance the Gospel.

Timothy was leading by example by taking steps to preserve the unity and not allow for anything to be a stumbling block for the Gospel to be advanced.

? **Question: What is a sacrifice you could make for the Gospel in order to be a more effective witness to those around you?**

Acts 16:6-10

1 We do not know exactly how the Holy Spirit forbid Paul and his missionary team to go to Asia. A few possible options are:

A A prophet spoke to them like in Acts 21:10-16

B An inner conviction and directing of the Holy Spirit

C An illness that caused Paul to stop traveling and change plans. This also happened to him in Galatians 4:12-14. It is also interesting to note that the verbiage of Acts 16:6-10 changes from "they" to "we," meaning Luke joined them. Luke was a doctor. If Paul was sick, this could have been how God was directing them.

2 Often times God closes doors in our lives due to His guidance to something more urgent. What Paul was seeking to do was good: go preach the Gospel in Asia. Yet instead God had a plan for Paul and the missionary team to go to Macedonia. God had to close the door on something good in order to help Paul walk in alignment with God's sovereign will.

It is interesting to note that this was not a common occurrence for Paul. Most of the time he seemed to be traveling to each city as he saw fit. Most likely he made these decisions by prayer and wisdom, but it seems that it was rare for God to speak directly through dreams and visions. We can learn from this: most of our decisions will be made through prayer, wisdom, godly counsel, and the Word. We do not want to overcomplicate the discernment of God's will.



Question: What has been your experience in discerning God's will?

Acts 16:11-16

Paul typically began his ministry at a synagogue, but Philippi did not have a synagogue. If a city did not have a synagogue, then the Jews typically had a place of prayer in which they would gather, oftentimes by a riverside.



During this time of evangelism, the Lord opened the heart of a woman named Lydia. We cannot force people to believe. God is the one who has to work on someone's heart.

God makes spiritual growth happen - 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

The parable of the sower - Mark 4



Lydia was a successful businesswoman. Selling purple goods was at the top of the economic pyramid. As a result upon salvation, she offered her house as a place of hospitality for the missionaries. Later, Lydia would open up her home as the gathering place for the church in Philippi.

Read Aloud Acts 16:16-40

Describe what is happening in your own words.

Acts 16:16-24

The mission of the Gospel is always eventually met with opposition.

A spirit of divination most likely refers to a demonic spirit that had the ability to perform witchcraft, fortunetelling, and provide counterfeit prophecy. There were evil men who used this slave girl for the purpose of selfish gain through the demonic spirit who possessed her.



Paul was able to cast out the demon by the power of God. However, the men who owned the girl were not encouraged by her deliverance but rather enraged that they could no longer use the girl through her demonic work.



These men made up false accusations and stirred up the crowds against the missionary team. In doing so, Paul and the disciples could walk out what was written in Matthew 5:11-13.



Question: Sometimes in return for good we receive evil. Is there a time that you can share when you obeyed God yet received persecution in return? How were you able to remain loving and focused on Christ?

Acts 16:25-34

1 What looked like defeat for the Apostles ended in victory. Paul and Silas were not dismayed at their suffering. Like the Apostles in Acts 5:40-41, through imprisonment, God accomplished more than had they been freed.

- A** The prisoners heard the Apostles' songs of praise
- B** The jailor was saved physically and spiritually
- C** The jailor's whole household came to saving faith and were baptized

2 During a time of persecution, the Apostles were not focused on themselves but were focused on the Gospel. They were joyful and ready to serve God despite their brutal circumstances.

In Philippians 2:14-16, we find that one of the ways that we shine as witnesses in a dark world is by not complaining. Yet how many times do we lose our witness due to a bad attitude of complaining!



Question: Do you find yourself as a joyful person of praise? If so, how? Or do you find yourself as a person who is easily given to negativity and complaining? If so, what can you do differently?

Acts 16:35-40

1 Just because Paul and Silas were joyful does not mean that they were doormats. When given the opportunity, the Apostles fought for their rights that they had as Roman citizens. Their "rights" did not distract them while being persecuted, but when given the opportunity they also spoke up for themselves.

This also could have been done for the protection of the new church that was being formed. Unlawful scourging of a Roman citizen could result in death. This act most likely struck fear in the Philippian government to not target the church in the future.

2 By the time the Apostles had been in Philippi for around 3-5 months, they had started a new church. They are not recorded to have set up eldership yet for this community of believers. Paul left Silas and Timothy in the area for a while, and then they reunited in Acts 18. Later in Acts 19:22, Paul sends Timothy and Erastus to strengthen the churches in Macedonia. Also in the book of Philippians, Paul sends Timothy back to the church.

During this time the Church was growing rapidly, and there were other places that Paul had to go, but he did not neglect the long-term discipleship and health of the Philippian church.



Question: In order to accomplish the mission of God, each member of the church needed to participate. Paul could not be everywhere and do everything that was needed for the Gospel. What is your role in this season to help MBC make disciples and reach the lost?

Weekly Challenge

God's plan can seem overwhelming at times. We can feel confused, or feel as if we cannot quite make out what He wants us to do. In times like this it is important to turn to the Word. As we rely on God's Word and prayer we will receive the guidance we need. If needed, God can supernaturally guide us like He did Paul. Other times He may point us to a simple command in the Word of God like 1st Thessalonians 5:12-22. Take some time this week to meditate on this scripture and allow God's Spirit to clarify His will for you.

Memory Verse

Acts 14:21-23 ESV

²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.