WEEK SIX: COMMITTED TO COMMUNITY

The Story of Lydia and Women in Philippi in Acts 16:6-40

Day One

Anticipate: “to look forward to” or “expect”

Our oldest daughter lived and worked as a teacher in Sophia, Bulgaria, for two years in the 1990s. It was a difficult season for the Baptist churches in this Eastern European country following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These committed communities of faith helped to feed the hungry during the harsh first winter of Tina’s stay. People often had to choose between heat and food. We prayed for God to protect our daughter and for the Lord to provide everything she needed. That first year, Tina moved apartments and her new landlady, Petia, was a strong believer and a wonderful encourager. Her home became Tina’s home away from home. For Tina, Petia was the “woman of peace” Jesus spoke of as He sent out the disciples in Matthew 10:11-13. In Petia and the fellowship in Sophia, we discovered God’s church, the “worthy” household of faith, alive and well in hard places.

The next summer Ken and I took our two other daughters to visit Tina. We wanted to meet her friends and encourage her in the ministry there. After a week in Sophia, our family crossed the border into Greece and headed south toward the Mediterranean coast for a little vacation. On the way, we stopped to explore the ruins of the ancient Roman city of Philippi, where Paul — on his second mission journey — planted the first church on the European continent. Standing on the hill overlooking the river, I thought of the story we’ll read this week from Acts 16. I could imagine Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy arriving with anticipation in this new harvest field. I also pictured a devoted mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, waiting back home and praying for their boy, Timothy, and Paul’s team. Timothy’s mother and grandmother likely were devoted to prayer, asking for doors of access to open for the Word (Colossians 4:2-4). As a mother who had just spent the winter praying for my daughter, I felt a real kinship with Eunice and Lois. The partnership in planting churches between the missionary “senders” and the “sent” missionaries is as necessary today as it was in the first century.

Paul’s second mission needed prayer! The team had gotten off to a rough start as they traveled through what is modern Turkey on their way to plant

Key verse:

I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

—Philippians 1:3-5

“When you enter any town or village, find out who is worthy, and stay there until you leave. Greet a household when you enter it, and if the household is worthy, let your peace be on it. But if it is unworthy, let your peace return to you.”

—Matthew 10:11-13
churches in Asia. Paul’s progress stopped abruptly when the Spirit closed the door to Asia twice. We aren’t given a glimpse into the circumstances of the delay and eventual detour, but as Paul waited for clear guidance, he got an invitation through a dream of a man in Macedonia asking for their help. The team abruptly changed direction and headed northwest toward Macedonia on the European continent. Paul’s team arrived in the leading Roman city in the region — Philippi. For the first time in history, the Gospel was being taken to the unreached peoples in Europe.

Have you ever planned what you thought was God’s work, only to have the door close on your dream? What was your response? Paul demonstrates perseverance and patience as he remains flexible in the face of disappointments and delays.

Now the team faced the question of how to start planting a church! Paul’s strategy was simple: Pray, proclaim and wait for God’s power! Prayer is the starting point for all ministry. As you look for this pattern in the story this week, note that the mission team started their work by looking for a place of prayer. Instead of finding the man in Paul’s dream, the missionaries found women praying near the river! Paul’s temptation as a former Pharisee might have been to ignore these women and refuse to discuss spiritual things with them, but being sensitive to the divine appointment, the team sat down and proclaimed Christ. What a miracle! Lydia, who was a businesswoman and immigrant, became the first known Gentile follower of Jesus in Europe. And guess where she was from — Asia!

Lydia became the team’s person of peace (Matthew 10:11-13) and welcomed the team into her home with gracious hospitality. This house church grew and became a joy-filled fellowship supporting Paul’s commitment to plant communities of faith among all peoples. This week you will read and study this exciting story of Jesus building His church with a diverse and unlikely group.

By prayer and the power of Jesus’ name, a fortune-telling slave girl was miraculously delivered from evil and the men using her to make a profit were enraged. (Human exploitation was as insidious in the first century as it is today!) This girl, now freed from Satan’s chains, needed a “family of faith” to nurture and disciple her. The house church meeting in Lydia’s home was that family. Two women so different in economic and social standing were thrust into the fledgling church in Philippi. Soon they were joined in this new church by a Roman jailer, his wife and their extended family; a prison
prayer and praise service had resulted in revival after an earthquake rattled the jail where Paul and Silas had been thrown after healing and delivering the slave girl. Suffering and persecution are common for those sharing the Gospel where it has never been preached.

These women — a single businesswoman, an abused slave girl and a patriarchal wife — helped to establish a joy-filled church. Paul praised God for their “partnership in the gospel from the first day” (Philippians 1:3-5). The church is Christ’s bride, being prepared for her Bridegroom, the King of kings. Are you committed to the “household of faith” like Lydia? She offered her home, her time and her resources to build God’s kingdom. Do your priorities show a similar commitment to community?

1. As you read this week’s Bible story today, do the following:
   • Ask the Lord to help you understand the big picture of His plan to build His church.
   • Look for both the obstacles and the open doors that Paul’s mission team faced.

Acts 16:6-40
(The subheadings of the story are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.)

Evangelization of Europe

6 They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia and were prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, bypassing Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 During the night a vision appeared to Paul: a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, “Cross over to Macedonia and help us!” 10 After he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to evangelize them.

Lydia’s Conversion

11 Then, setting sail from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, a Roman colony, which is a leading city of that district of Macedonia. We stayed in that city for a number of days. 13 On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we thought there was a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there. 14 A woman named
Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was spoken by Paul. After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

Paul and Silas in Prison

Once, as we were on our way to prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit of prediction and made a large profit for her owners by fortune-telling. As she followed Paul and us she cried out, “These men are the slaves of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.” And she did this for many days.

But Paul was greatly aggravated, and turning to the spirit, said, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out right away.

When her owners saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And bringing them before the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are seriously disturbing our city. They are Jews, and are promoting customs that are not legal for us as Romans to adopt or practice.”

Then the mob joined in the attack against them, and the chief magistrates stripped off their clothes and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had inflicted many blows on them, they threw them in jail, ordering the jailer to keep them securely guarded.

A Midnight Deliverance

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains came loose. When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped.

But Paul called out in a loud voice, “Don’t harm yourself, because all of us are here!”
Then the jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he escorted them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the message of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. He brought them up into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had believed God with his entire household.

An Official Apology

When daylight came, the chief magistrates sent the police to say, “Release those men!”

The jailer reported these words to Paul: “The magistrates have sent orders for you to be released. So come out now and go in peace.”

But Paul said to them, “They beat us in public without a trial, although we are Roman citizens, and threw us in jail. And now are they going to smuggle us out secretly? Certainly not! On the contrary, let them come themselves and escort us out!”

Then the police reported these words to the magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them, and escorting them out, they urged them to leave town. After leaving the jail, they came to Lydia’s house where they saw and encouraged the brothers, and departed.

2. As Paul’s team encountered both obstacles and open doors, what did God use to direct them?

3. Even as you’re reading this sentence right now, many fellow Christians are serving God at “the ends of the earth.” Pray that they will have clear guidance to follow God’s plan. Ask God to show you how you can be committed to His community of faith, both in your community and extending all the way to the ends of the earth.
Day Two

Prepare: “things done to make ready”

As you think and meditate on the story, you participate in the Spirit’s work of teaching and applying the Word.

1. Read the entire Bible story again today and track Paul’s team as they move at the Spirit’s command. Look at the map included on Page 7 of this week’s study or at the map in your Bible of Paul’s second missionary journey. Find Phrygia and Galatia on the map.

2. Why did Paul’s team go to Troas? Find Troas on the map.

3. Describe the dream/vision Paul experienced.

4. Trace Paul’s journey on your map by connecting the cities mentioned in the first section of the story (Evangelization of Europe).

5. Think of a time you sensed God closing a door of ministry. What was your response?

6. How do you respond when you are forced to wait? Read Psalm 37:7a.

7. As you close your study time, pray and ask the Lord to help you listen quietly to what the Spirit is saying through the Acts 16 story. Ask, expecting the Father to speak to you in His Word. Pray for those ministering in hard places to persevere as they seek God’s guidance about where to serve and share.
WEEK SIX: COMMMITTED TO COMMUNITY

PAUL'S SECOND JOURNEY
Acts 15:36-18:22

SCALE OF MILES

0  50  100  150  200  250
Day Three

Prepare: “things done to make ready”

As you think and meditate on the story, you participate in the Spirit’s work of teaching and applying the Word.

1. Read the entire story again today. Focus your study on the section titled “Lydia’s Conversion” (Acts 16:11-15).

2. After making plans to fulfill the call Paul received in his dream, the team set out on a sea voyage taking them from Asia to Europe. Trace their travels on the map included in the study or in your Bible. What do you learn about their destination?

3. What do you learn about Philippi from the text?

4. Where did the team go on the Sabbath? Why did they go there?

5. Who was gathered by the river? Why do you think they were there?

6. How did the team use this opportunity to share? Does it surprise you that they shared with these women?
7. What do you learn about Lydia in Acts 16:14?

Ancient Thyatira was a city in Asia; it was located in a region called Lydia (Yes, the same name as the Lydia we’ve read about this week!) — in what is modern-day Turkey. Thyatira was known for its textile industry. Wool merchants, dyers and linen workers produced purple fabrics prized by the wealthy. The colorfast purple dye was obtained from murex shells. Lydia was an immigrant in Europe, a successful businesswoman who imported this expensive fabric from her hometown in Asia. Her name may have been derived from the region of Lydia as well.¹

8. How did Lydia become a “believer in the Lord”? What role did the Lord play in her salvation?

9. Read Matthew 28:18-20. How is Lydia’s story a fulfillment of Jesus’ Great Commission?

10. How did Lydia demonstrate her new faith? What did she offer to the Lord and the mission team?

11. Close your study today by praying for women and men of peace like Lydia among all peoples.

Day Four

Prepare: “things done to make ready”

As you think and meditate on the story, you participate in the Spirit’s work of teaching and applying the Word.

1. Read the story again today. Focus on Paul’s encounter with the slave girl and its result (Acts 16:16-24).

2. Where were Paul and Silas going in verse 16?

3. Describe the girl they encountered. What was unusual about her?

4. What was she crying out? Who is speaking through the girl? Read James 2:19. What do the demons believe?

5. How and why did Paul respond to her? What did he say? Whose authority delivered the girl?

6. Why were her “owners” upset? What were their charges against Paul and Silas?
7. How did Paul and Silas suffer? Write down the words indicating what was done to Paul and Silas. What is the impact of these words on you?


8. Where were they placed? What do you think an “inner prison” would be like?


9. As you reflect on today’s study, think about the pattern of prayer, proclamation and power. How were these exemplified in this part of our Scripture story?


10. Do you believe God can deliver anyone? Would you have seen the girl in today’s story as one beyond help?


11. Close your time with prayer for women and children who are exploited today to make money for their “owners.” Experts estimate over 300,000 children are trafficked in the United States each year. Pray for workers who serve and minister among the abused. Ask the Lord to deliver these children and women who are precious in His sight.
Day Five

Prepare: “things done to make ready”

As you think and meditate on the story, you participate in the Spirit’s work of teaching and applying the Word.

1. Read the entire story again today. Focus your attention on the last two sections when Paul and Silas experience God’s power and a midnight deliverance (Acts 16:25-40).

2. What were Paul and Silas doing in prison? Read Matthew 5:11-12. How were Paul and Silas fulfilling Jesus’ words?

3. It is possible they were singing Psalms and praise from Scripture. Here is one example of what they might have been singing.

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!
For His mercy endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
And gathered out of the lands,
From the east and from the west,
From the north and from the south.

—Psalm 107:1-3, NKJV

Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death,
Bound in affliction and irons—
Because they rebelled against the words of God,
And despised the counsel of the Most High,
Therefore He brought down their heart with labor,
They fell down, and there was none to help.
Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
And He saved them out of their distresses.
He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
And broke their chains in pieces.
Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness,
And for His wonderful works to the children of men!
For He has broken the gates of bronze,
And cut the bars of iron in two.

—Psalm 107:10-16, NKJV

“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

—Matthew 5:11-12
4. Do you have difficulty praising God in all circumstances? How did God demonstrate His power as Paul and Silas praised God in their pain and difficulty?

5. In your own words, describe how the prisoners responded to Paul and Silas and to God showing His power.

Now describe the jailer’s response.

6. How did the jailer and his family respond to Paul’s proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 16:31-34)?

7. What was the result of Paul and Silas’ imprisonment? How did God give them justice as Roman citizens?

8. Where did they go after their release? Timothy and Luke would have been at Lydia’s house during the time of Paul’s and Silas’ imprisonment. What do you think the church in Lydia’s home would have been doing during these days?

“I am not praying that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one.” —Jesus’ prayer in John 17:15

9. As you finish your study today, spend some time praying for your brothers and sisters around the world who are in prison for their faith in Jesus Christ. Ask God to strengthen and empower them to praise the Lord in all circumstances.
Day Six

Celebrate: “to commemorate an event, to publish abroad, to make famous”

Let the story live through you.

Today’s study can be done with a group or alone.

1. Read the entire Bible story again today with your group. (Read it aloud or ask each woman to read each section silently.) As you read, share highlights of what God has taught you from each section of the Scripture.

2. How did the Philippian church participate in the Gospel from the first day?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. What did you learn this week about the power of prayer to open doors for the Word of God?

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4. How did proclamation contribute to the advancing and planting of the church?

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________________________________________________________________________

5. How was God’s power demonstrated in Philippi?

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________________________________________________________________________
6. Watch this week’s videos from the *Glorify* DVD and answer the following questions as a group.

**Hawa and Fanta video**

- In Philippi, Paul and his team seemed to have one God-appointed conversation after another. In the same way, Shannon Lewter says that she has seen God working in her relationship with Hawa in unmistakable ways. When have you seen God working clearly in your life, doing things that you couldn’t credit to your own strength or wisdom? If you don’t see God working like that through you now, what changes might you need to make in your life?

- Like the slave girl in this week’s Bible story, Hawa’s life has little significance when judged by her culture. Hawa, though, has found great significance in telling other people about Jesus (just as the slave girl likely found significance in following Jesus). Where have you found significance through Christ in your own life, even when our culture might not see your life as anything special?

**Babs Dial Story video**

- Babs Dial and her teammates have experienced safe travels and people who welcomed them. Paul and his team, on the other hand, often were neither safe nor welcomed. How do you still see God’s hand in Paul and his teammates’ ministry? When have you personally seen God working through seemingly negative circumstances?
Babs says: “I am probably the most unlikely person for God to call, but in reading Scripture, He called some really unlikely people to do some really big jobs … If He’s gonna call you to something, He’s gonna equip you for it.” Throughout Glorify, we’ve studied several unlikely women God has used. Which of these women stands out the most to you? Why?

A question for both videos

Both Beulah Baptist Church and Babs Dial have a desire to take the Gospel to and see churches planted among the least reached. Has your church adopted an unreached people group for which to pray? Prayer opens doors for the Gospel. Will you and your group commit to pray for an unreached people group? (For more information, read “How to understand the term ‘people group’” and “How your church can adopt a people group” on the Glorify CD.)

7. As you complete this last week of Glorify today, spend time praying for the other women in your group. Ask God to use each of you to glorify Him — to make Him known in your own community and around the world.
Some final verses to meditate on as you end the *Glorify* study … and continue giving God glory!

Lord, there is no one like You among the gods, and there are no works like Yours.

All the nations You have made will come and bow down before You, Lord, and will honor Your name.

For You are great and perform wonders; You alone are God.

Teach me Your way, LORD, and I will live by Your truth. Give me an undivided mind to fear Your name.

I will praise You with all my heart, Lord my God, and will honor Your name forever.

For Your faithful love for me is great, and You deliver my life from the depths of Sheol.

—Psalm 86:8-13

After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were robed in white with palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!

All the angels stood around the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures, and they fell facedown before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.

—Revelation 7:9-12
Postscript from Paula Hemphill

My deepest appreciation goes to the Kingdom Women Media Team for their professional and creative investment in this resource.

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It is our corporate prayer that the articles and Bible study will stimulate women to “love and good deeds” as we grow to maturity in Christ.

As our team has finished this study, we have been aware of the struggles each of us faces as mothers, daughters, wives and just as women. In the midst of family difficulties, personal health challenges, loss and change, we have chosen to glorify the Lord together. It is our desire to honor Jesus Christ in our words and deeds, to see His church planted among all peoples and to worship Him forever — together! Will you join us as we partner with workers called to give their lives to take God’s Word to all peoples? Will you pray? Will you give? Will you go? Will you send others? Will you commit your life to glorify God?

For His glory,
Paula Hemphill