

The Power of No
God Redirects Paul's Team
The Empowered Church Series - Part 28

Acts 16:6-15
September 9-10, 2023

Introduction

- **Have you ever heard the answer “No” from God?** – you are in good company.
 - **A Brief history of saints & sinners who heard “No”** – too often we read through the Bible without much thought, and **it seems like everyone who asked God something heard a clear answer and direction**. If we thought about it, most of us could answer a lot of what we think we remember them hearing and it was usually good information. So, when we go into our prayer closets and seek the Lord we are shocked to find it silent and then we pray about things, and they don't happen, and we are left wondering if we were heard. Surely, God wouldn't tell us no, right? Wrong.
 - **Cain received a rejection of his offering**¹ – there's no clear stated reason but if we look deeper (verse 7) we see that the problem was not so much WHAT Cain offered but the condition of his heart and the actions of his life outside the offering moment. In other words God tells him that he was doing evil so his offering was rejected. God's point in the rejection was **to steer him into the right pathway both for his blessing and others. God wasn't going to reward evil behavior or enable bad choices.**
 - **Moses' plea to get out of being a deliverer was rejected**² – Moses REALLY didn't want to be God's messenger to Pharaoh and tried multiple times to redirect God and His plans, to no avail. God ultimately got mad and made him do it anyway. Why? Because **God had greater things in store than Moses did for himself. Moses was looking inward at his own needs and not outward to the needs of others.** God had a plan and design that Moses wasn't embracing so his prayers sought to get him in a different alignment.
 - **Joshua & Israel's defeat at Ai**³ – Israel was rejected by God (withholding His blessing) and defeated in battle⁴, right after Jericho, at the city of Ai. Why? Because God was drawing attention to the sinful acts done during their last battle (Achan took devoted things). **God sometimes tells His people no to re-align them with righteousness.**
 - **Saul was shut down by God**⁵ - when Saul repeatedly rejected God's word to Him and violated his covenant more than once, **God shut him down**. He rejected the anointing on him as king and as a consequence withdrew His voice. Remember, this is Old Testament covenant not New, God doesn't do this for disobedience in the

¹ Genesis 4

² Exodus 4

³ Joshua 7

⁴ This actually ended up happening a lot. Israel was promised by God that they would have victory in every battle as long as they remained close to Him and obeyed His commands and kept their part of the covenant. They didn't. Therefore they had a lot of losing fights and had perpetual trouble from their enemies. Joshua 23:5-13; Judges 1:1-2:5

⁵ 1 Sam 28:6, 15-19

same way. God may go quiet as a training or discipline, but not as full rejection of a believer (Child of God).

- **David's prayer to build God a temple was rejected⁶** – David desperately wanted to build a temple for the LORD, but God said no. God said, 'your son can build it for me, but you can't.' Why? God said that it was 'because of all the war that David had done and the blood on his hands.' Now, this can mean that God wanted a man of peace to build His house for some spiritual reason, or it could mean that God was doing something through David that demanded warfare and it wasn't the right season to put up a temple because of the constant warfare and it shouldn't be built until the nation was at peace, which would happen under Solomon. Either way, **David was told no, because there was something bigger going on that he wasn't tracking on. That's usually the case for us.**
- **David's prayer for his baby was rejected⁷** – When David had an affair with Bathsheba and they had a baby, it died. David fasted and prayed for the life of the child and God let the baby die. Why? It was **a consequence for his actions AND a training that would direct David's heart to never do that again.** David was in a place of power and impacted a LOT of people. God couldn't have him remain untrained or rebellious/immature. After repentance and lesson learned, God returned to communication.
- **Elijah's Request to Die was rejected⁸** – Elijah the prophet was so distraught with life and done with everything that he prayed for the Lord to kill him (let him die). God said no, encouraged him, raised him up for a time and then took him home on His terms (albeit miraculously). The point being that **sometimes we ask for things for ourselves based on our mindset and the limited resources we have. God doesn't operate by the same limitations and tells us no because He has more for us than we know.**
- **Jonah's Request to die is denied⁹** – Jonah too was so angry and distraught that he wanted to die and asked God to kill him. God refused because he knew that it was an immature lashing out. **Many times we are clouded in our emotions and pray stupid things and God, as the good father has to sift it for what's best.**
- **Jesus got a NO in the Garden of Gethsemane¹⁰** – Perhaps **the most powerful no in the Bible** is when Jesus asked the Father if there could be another way for Him to redeem mankind other than going to the cross. **There is no indicator that He received any answer, which meant that the last plan is still the plan.** The last plan was to die on the cross for the sins of mankind. Nothing had changed, so there was silence.
- **Paul got a NO about his thorn in the flesh¹¹** - Paul said that God allowed a 'messenger of Satan' that he called his 'thorn in the flesh' to torment him. Paul prayed three times for God to let him out of it, but God said no. Paul knew that **it**

⁶ 2 Sam 7; 1 Kings 8 – we see in 1 Kings 5:1-6 the reason (cf. 1 Chron 22:8; 28:3)

⁷ 2 Sam 12:15-23

⁸ 1 Kings 19

⁹ Jonah 4

¹⁰ Matthew 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

was there to keep him from being conceited after all the anointing and miraculous that he was able to experience. In other words God allowed struggle to keep Paul healthy spiritually.

- **Assumed no's in the Bible** – when we see people suffering or lacking for a long time (barren¹², handicapped, etc.) we have to assume that they called out to God a lot (like Abraham) and **God didn't grant them their request AT THAT TIME. God had a different plan for them to walk out and it allowed for their desire to be granted AT A LATER DATE.**¹³ I am not able to chronicle all of these. Some of them would be pure speculation.
- **The Power of a no from God** – In each case of these famous stories of 'no' in the Bible there are indicators of why. Unfortunately in our lives we are the ones living it and we are too close and in the moment to always know why. Usually we can see it either in retrospect or if an outside person calls it out for us. Therefore we are left with a lot of assumed 'no's' and not a lot of answers. But **the key to all of this is realizing that God guides through the no's just as much as through the 'yes'.** Don't we as parents do this same? How much guidance have you taught your children through saying no? Probably more than yes. At least more overtly. It's part of parenting and training. For God to say 'no' to us is to parent us.
- **Letting God say no to us** – **The main purpose in this introductory training is getting our minds and hearts into a place where God can say no to us and we don't react immaturely.** The more we see PURPOSE and VALUE in God's no answers, the more we are going to be able to be realigned more quickly and continue in constant connection with Him.
- **His plans not ours** - **A life of faith isn't a life where we ask God to put His stamp on our plans. It's one where we earnestly want to know His plans.** A true prayer is willing to be redirected for His glory.
- **Bottom line** - **Are we open to hearing 'no' from God? And, when we hear 'no', do we still believe God has our best interests at heart?**

Sometimes we need a NO to get a YES

Lesson

- **Spirit Blocked**
 - **Paul & Company are Guided by the Holy Spirit**
 - **Acts 16:6-8** – *“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.”*
 - **They** – who's on this trip again? At least 3 amazing people: Paul the Apostle; Silas the Prophetic big dog; Timothy the future protégé of Paul.

¹² 1 Samuel 1:5

¹³ Ex. Samson's birth – Judges 13:2-3

- **Where's the region of Phrygia?**¹⁴ – region in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Notably it contains the city of Colossae, where we have the letter to the now famous Colossians church (letter to the Colossians).
- **Where's the region of Galatia?**¹⁵ – It's the majority of the modern nation of Turkey. It's a big area. Notice that when Paul writes a letter to the Galatians he isn't writing to one small church, it's to the collection of churches in the larger region. This is one of the reasons why I believe that God disciplines regions and uses lots of different churches to create the ingredients for what He's making on the big scale.
- **WHY did the Holy Spirit forbid them to go to Asia?** – they wanted to preach there. They wanted to minister there. Why in the world would God not want them to go there? It's an amazing thing they want to do. Because **sometimes the BEST is better than GOOD.**
 - **When God says no to good things** – I have shared a million great ideas with God and He hasn't been impressed yet. So, it's no wonder that I may think that I'm doing something good for Him and the Kingdom, and He overrides it and changes gears on me. **I thought that I would be in music forever** and that would be my ministry vehicle and God pulled the rug out from under me at 21 and I had to start over in another area, ultimately led into the pastorate. Again, it was far better and a better fit for my design, but I didn't know that at the time. I was devastated that God took my dream away. But He replaced it with better.
- **HOW did the Holy Spirit forbid them to go to Asia?**¹⁶ – How in the world did the Holy Spirit block them from going East to Asia? Did He send angelic border patrol? No. It means that **one of two things happened:** 1.) Either the team was seeking His guidance and was able to discern that it wasn't the right thing – by some unknown means; 2.) The Holy Spirit altered the practical logistics, and it became too difficult for them to do it and they ultimately determined that God had put up the roadblock. Both are very common.
 - **Learning to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit** – How do we discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives? It could be through impressions on our heart, thoughts and ideas in our minds, logistical maneuvering by God, the words of guidance from trusted sources, illumination of God's Word, or a host of other ways. The key is that there isn't just one way that God communicates to us. If we are caught up in pursuing Him we start to see His movement and track on Him.

¹⁴ "A province of Asia Minor. Paul crossed this province twice in the course of his missionary journeys. The towns of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14), Colosse, Hierapolis, Iconium, and Laodicea were situated in greater Phrygia." Complete Word Study Dictionary, NT. Spiros Zodhiates.

¹⁵ "GALATIA (Γαλατία, *Galatia*). Territorial designation for central [Asia Minor](#) (also known as [Anatolia](#), now modern Turkey). Roman province created by Augustus Caesar in 25 BC. Galatia covered a large territory that included ethnic Galatia as well as parts of [Phrygia](#), [Pisidia](#), [Lyconia](#), and other regions in southern [Asia Minor](#)." Lexham Bible Dictionary.

¹⁶ Paul's missionary journeys display an extraordinary combination of strategic planning and keen sensitiveness to the guidance of the Spirit of God, however that guidance was conveyed—by prophetic utterance, inward prompting, or the overruling of external circumstances...it perhaps took the form of a prophetic utterance in the church at Lystra." NICNT

- **Where is Mysia?**¹⁷ – Northwest Asia Minor (Turkey)
- **Where is Bithynia?**¹⁸ – another Northwest Asia minor region.
- **What is the ‘spirit of Jesus’?**¹⁹ – it’s tempting to make too much of this (the author shifting from Holy Spirit to ‘spirit of Jesus’), but I don’t think it’s an accident. I think that it’s purposeful. Perhaps the best way to understand this is that somehow they engaged with the 2nd member of the Trinity and He did some revealing. Normally it’s the Holy Spirit that was the primary Godhead Person that was guiding them, but perhaps they were in a prayer time and Jesus Himself delivered a prophetic message. It’s possible that the Word was illuminated (logos). Or a couple other things. **The main point is that the members of the Godhead have rather unique roles (although they overlap a ton) and so when their role is being used, the credit/attention/focus goes to that member.**
 - **HOW did the spirit of Jesus not allow them?** – Again, we don’t know. There is no indicator or clear answer. This always reminds me that it’s much more messy in real life than it seems in writing.
 - **Ended up down at Troas** – notice the seemingly haphazard way that they were guided. Nothing told them to go to Troas. It was just the next logical option. **They just kept going and God directed their steps along the way. Too often we sit on our couches and expect all the answers before we get up to do the work of God.** Usually He wants to steer a moving river instead of trying to drive a dead pond.
 - **Where’s Troas?**²⁰ – it’s a beach. A major ancient port city. I’ve been there. I have sand from that beach in my office. It was originally made famous by Alexander the Great.

¹⁷ “Mysia’s boundaries extended northward to the Sea of Marmara (called the Propontis in ancient times), eastward to [Bithynia](#) and [Phrygia](#), southward to Lydia, and westward to the Hellespont and the Aegean Sea. Its main cities—[Pergamum](#), [Assos](#), [Troas](#), and [Adramyttium](#)—are mentioned in the New Testament. In 133 BC it was acquired by the Romans and subsequently became part of the Roman province of Asia.” Lexham Bible Dictionary.

¹⁸ “...highly civilized province of Bithynia in northwest Asia Minor, with its Greek cities (of which Nicomedia and Nicaea were the most important) and Jewish settlements...It was united under one governor with the western part of the former kingdom of Pontus. For Jewish settlements in Bithynia cf. Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 281. Bithynia was evangelized before long; cf. 1 Pet. 1:1 and Pliny, *Epistle* 10.96 (his letter to the Emperor Trajan on the growth of Christianity in the province).” NICNT

“The presence of Christian communities is further demonstrated by the correspondence between [Pliny the Younger](#) and the Emperor Trajan (see [Letters, Book 10](#)). Pliny was governor of Bithynia-Pontus during the early second century AD, and he wrote to Trajan regarding the unrest throughout the region. One of the questions he asked was what to do with Christians who were meeting in the province (see [Letters, 10.96](#)). This correspondence not only reveals Roman attitudes toward Christians, but also the activities of Christian groups from an outsider’s perspective.” Lexham Bible Dictionary

¹⁹ “In saying that this second prohibition was imposed by “the Spirit of Jesus,” does Luke suggest some significance in the change of terminology? It was the same Spirit who forbade them to “speak the word in Asia,” but the fact that on this occasion he is called “the Spirit of Jesus” may indicate that his guidance was now given through a prophecy uttered expressly in the name of Jesus. Paul and Silas were both prophets, and available for use by the Spirit or by the exalted Lord for the declaration of his will.” NICNT

²⁰ “Troas—Alexandria Troas (to give it its full name)—was founded at the end of the fourth century B.C. and remained a free city until Augustus gave it the status of a Roman colony. It was a regular port of call for vessels journeying between proconsular Asia and Macedonia (cf. 20:5) and was an important center in the Roman system of communications. Traces of its harbor and other buildings may still be seen at Dalyan.” NICNT
“Troas, a city of Lesser Mysia in the northeastern part of Asia Minor on the seacoast, six miles south of the entrance to the Homeric Troy. Alexandria Troas, as its name implies, owed its origin to Alexander the Great. He chose the site with his usual tasteful discernment, but did not live to cover it with buildings. It had an excellent port and for many centuries was the key port of commerce between Asia and Europe. Paul visited Troas twice, perhaps three times. The first visit was on his second missionary journey. It was from Troas that he sailed to carry the gospel into Europe after the vision of the man of Macedonia occurred (Act. 16:8–11). On his return journey he stopped at Troas for eight days and restored Eutychus to life (Act. 20:5–10). On one visit, he left his cloak and some books there (2 Tim. 4:13).” Word Study Dictionary.

- **The British are Coming! Wait...**
 - **Paul Receives the Macedonian Vision & Call**
 - **Acts 16:9-12** – *“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”*¹⁰ *And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*¹¹ *So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis,¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.”*
 - **What’s a vision?**²¹ – a vision is best described as a dream when you are awake. You see things, but you aren’t asleep. Usually this happens when someone is in a prayer time, perhaps with their eyes closed, and they have a deep experience with God and the Holy Spirit places images, sometimes moving pictures like a movie in their mind or sight. It was relatively common for the Old Testament and New Testament saints. Not many people talk about visions today because most people don’t recognize them or seek them.
 - **Where is Macedonia?**²² – made famous by the combo of King Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great. It was a key region in Northern Greece (originally it was Turkish). It held the cities of Thessalonica (it’s capital), Philippi, and Berea, all key locations in the New Testament.
 - **What was the Macedonian message?** – we desperately need you to come and help us!
 - **Paul knew it was a God vision** – how did he know that? It says that they CONCLUDED that. What does this mean? It means that at the end of all the mess of trying to sort it out they knew in their hearts that God was directing them.
 - **Hearing the voice of God** – we must always remember that external audible voices from God are very, very rare. Usually He communicates through our internal mind, heart, spirit. It’s more images, thoughts, ideas, than it is booming voices from heaven that scare the heck out of you.
 - **From THEY to WE**²³ – Luke joined the team here. He is no longer talking about what they did and now it’s a we/us.

²¹ “**3705. ὄραμα** *hórāma*; gen. *horámatos*, neut. noun from *horáō* (3708), to see, behold. A sight, spectacle, that which is seen (Matt. 17:9; Acts 7:31; Sept.: Ex. 3:3; Deut. 28:34). Used of a supernatural appearance, a vision (Acts 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9, 10; 18:9; Sept.: Gen. 15:1; 46:2; Dan. 8:1).” Complete Word Study Dictionary

²² “Macedonia, which became the dominant power in the Greek world and Western Asia under Philip II and Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C., had been a Roman province since 146 B.C.” NICNT

“Macedonia, meaning extended land. A noted country and kingdom lying north of Greece in ancient times. Today, however, it is the northern part of Greece, having been captured from the Turks who had occupied it previously. The kingdom was founded about 814 B.C. and became famous as the third great world kingdom associated with King Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great (Dan. 8:5–8, 21). Its capital was Thessalonica, where the proconsul resided. It was important in NT history because of the labors of the Apostles. Paul was called there by the vision of the “man of Macedonia” and made a most successful missionary tour (Acts 16:9, 11; 17:1–12). He visited it once again (Act. 20:1–6), and probably for the third time (cf. Phil. 2:24; 1 Tim. 1:3). Philippi was in Macedonia. Paul’s epistles to the Thessalonians and the Philippians show that the Macedonian Christians exhibited many excellent traits. These details of Paul’s work can be studied in connection with the cities of Macedonia visited by him: Neapolis, Philippi, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Berea.” Complete Word Study Dictionary.

²³ “If the narrator was Luke the physician of Col. 4:14, we may wonder if he was practising his profession in Troas at the time, or waiting to be signed on as a ship’s doctor; but we have no means of knowing.” NICNT

- **On the Ship again, I just can't wait to get on the ship again...** - they sail out from the Troas port (lots of travel by water in those days) and end up sailing eventually to Philippi.²⁴
 - **Where's Samothrace?**²⁵ – a really tall and famously religious island.
 - **Where's Neapolis?**²⁶ – the port of Philippi (10 miles inland)
 - **Where's Philippi?**²⁷ – it says right in the passage that it's the leading city of the district of Macedonia, in other words their capital city. It also says that it's a Roman colony (of which there were a TON during this time). Which indicates certain rules and culture. The biggest deal is that for the first time Christianity has come officially to **EUROPE!** Truly this is a significant moment. Most of us in America have lineage that comes from Europe. That would never be the case if it wasn't for this moment. God took a very, very Jewish movement and made it international and it hit the West instead of just staying only in the East.
 - **We stayed there a long time** – Paul is setting up camp at this city as an initial homebase, now that he's in Europe (likely for the first time).
- **Leading Lady**
 - **First Convert in Europe (Lydia)**
 - **Acts 16:13-15** – *“And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.”*
 - **What's the Sabbath day?** – the Jewish 7th day of the week (weekend²⁸) that is Friday evening to Saturday evening. It's the holy day of the week for Jews. They aren't to work, but spend time in community, resting up, and keeping their eyes

²⁴ “The wind was favorable for the voyage across the North Aegean, and they finished it in two days. (The reverse journey from Philippi to Troas, recorded in 20:6, took five days.)” NICNT

²⁵ “a mountainous island rising to 5,000 feet, which forms a conspicuous landmark. In religious history the chief importance of Samothrace lies in its being the seat of a widely patronized mystery cult, the worship of the Cabiri, which had been practised there from time immemorial.” NICNT

²⁶ “on the mainland. Neapolis, the modern Kavalla, was the port of Philippi, which lay some ten miles inland. At Neapolis the great Egnatian Way, a Roman road linking the Adriatic with the Aegean, reached its eastern terminus. Luke likes to note the ports of arrival and departure, and in the “we” sections he is specially careful to note the daily progress made during voyages.” NICNT

²⁷ “This city received its name from Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, who seized the gold mines in the vicinity and fortified what had formerly been the Thasian settlement of Crenides. With the rest of Macedonia, Philippi passed under Roman control at the end of the Third Macedonian War in 168 B.C. At that time Macedonia was divided into four administrative districts or republics. Later, in 146 B.C., it was reduced to provincial status. Near Philippi was fought the battle in 42 B.C. which resulted in the victory of Mark Antony and Octavian (the future Emperor Augustus) over Brutus and Cassius, assassins of Julius Caesar. After the battle, the victors settled a number of their veterans at Philippi and made the city a Roman colony; Octavian settled further colonists there after his victory over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 B.C. Luke describes Philippi as a city of the first district of Macedonia—that is, the first of the four districts into which the former kingdom was divided by the Romans. While he refers to several other cities which are known to have been Roman colonies at the time, Philippi is the only one which he expressly calls a Roman colony. The details of its administration given in the ensuing narrative are those which were specially characteristic of such a colony. A Roman colony used Roman law, and its constitution was modeled on the municipal constitution of Rome.” NICNT

²⁸ Our Sunday is not the end of the week, but the beginning of the Jewish week. That's why it the New Testament talks about them getting together for church on the ‘first day of the week’, which meant AFTER sabbath, or Sunday for us.

on God. It was a mandate for Jews since way back in the early days of Judaism. Everyone followed it. Actually today in the modern nation of Israel, everything shuts down for sabbath STILL!

- **The riverside outside the gate** – where is this? Why go there? It's the local river outside the city (the city would have been built near a river for water source and possibly, if it was big enough, travel). They would go there because they were **looking for gatherings of people and water sources tend to gather people**.
- **Why suppose that a place of prayer would be there?** – This is a better question. Why would they assume a religious gathering at the river on the sabbath day? Shouldn't everyone be in synagogue or at home? The fact that no men are mentioned is key. It means that there is **not likely a synagogue in the city** because it requires at least 10 men to start one and if there are 10 Jewish men, then there HAS TO BE A synagogue. To not have one means there was a very small Jewish community. Therefore God-fearers or Jews would huddle together and do their own connection and prayer times as if there was a synagogue.
- **A women's group was there**²⁹ – there is no mention of men in this group, or it would have been highlighted. In that culture, although it was more Roman and progressive than Jewish culture, men and women didn't do a lot of connection outside the house. They still kind of stayed apart for the most part unless they had a necessary reason to do so. So, for Paul to respect them enough to address them and come up to them means that **he was not bound by the Jewish cultural demands and put the ministry first and broke unnecessary taboos for Christ**. Interestingly the women's group was confident enough to bring in the new traveling crew. They don't seem hesitant. They seem rather tough.
- **Why was Paul & Company okay with ministering to women only?** – This is highly unusual in a Jewish or ancient world context. Why would they be comfortable doing that? Aren't there taboos of genders mixing together even for the sake of ministry? There were until **Jesus changed all that and set a new way into motion**. Paul knew that Jesus brought in **Mary** of Bethany as a formal disciple. He knew that Jesus met with the **woman at the well** alone and she became the primary evangelist for that area. He knew that the risen Lord chose not just **Mary Magdalene**, but whole group of ladies to be the first to see the risen Messiah. He knew that Jesus embraced women into His ministry and **spoke of them very highly** despite the rabbinic culture of His day. **All of that led Paul to be very pro-women in ministry.**

²⁹ "At Philippi, then, they spent several days. When Paul visited a new city, it was his practice, as we have seen, to attend the local Jewish synagogue on the first sabbath after his arrival and seek an opportunity to make his message known there. At Philippi, however, there does not appear to have been a regular synagogue. That can only mean that there were very few resident Jews; had there been ten Jewish men, they would have sufficed to constitute a synagogue. No number of women could compensate for the absence of even one man necessary to make up the quorum of ten. There was, however, a place outside the city where a number of women—either of Jewish birth or Gentiles who worshiped the God of Israel—met to go through the appointed Jewish service of prayer for the sabbath day, even if they could not constitute a valid synagogue congregation. Paul and his companions found this place, by the bank of the river Gangites, and sat down with the women and told them the story of Jesus." NICNT

- **Meet Lydia** – the first convert in all of Europe to Christianity (at least recorded) is a WOMAN.³⁰ That is highly significant. Just like Jesus selecting a woman to be the first to see the risen Lord was unique and powerful. So, what do we know about her?
 - **From the city of Thyatira**³¹ – where is this? It’s western Turkey, and a key commercial city that made goods that were desired around the world.
 - **A seller of purple goods**³² – what does this mean and why do we care? It meant expensive. To make purple die was very difficult and it required a very specific product: a purple mussel found off the shores of Mediterranean ocean. Usually red or purple were seen as rich or royal colors, so those garments were more expensive. In other words she worked with high end clothing and fashion.
 - **A worshiper of God**³³ – what does this mean? To what extent? Usually this means a Gentile who has turned their heart to the one true God, likely a convert to Judaism, but has not fulfilled all the requirements to be considered fully Jewish.
 - **What it means that God chose Lydia and what it means for women in ministry** – **It doesn’t just mean that God CAN use women it means that He WANTS to use women in ministry.** He could orchestrate all of this a totally different way, and this is how He chose to do it and we need to be open to that way. It’s not an accident. It means that God wants women at the forefront standing with the men in the advancement and battle for God’s kingdom that the gates of hell may not prevail. They are gifted, called, and assigned to leadership in the kingdom. Jesus is our head, it’s all fair game with humans.
 - **The Lord opened her heart to hear** – no one can get saved if God doesn’t open their heart. No matter of brilliant ministry will make a difference. That is why prayer and partnering with God is the only way that successful evangelism can happen.
 - **She got baptized** – what is this and why did she do it? Why do we do it? **[complete]**

³⁰ “As Paul and his friends spoke, Lydia believed what they said and acknowledged Jesus as Lord. She thus became Paul’s first convert in Europe.” NICNT

³¹ “**THYATIRA** (Θυάτειρα, *Thyateira*). A city in western Asia Minor; its church was one of the recipients of the letters in Revelation ([Acts 16:14](#); [Rev 2:18–29](#)). Thyatira was also a significant center for wool trade, which sheds light on the Lydia’s trade involving purple dye in [Acts 16:14–15](#).” Logos Factbook.

³² The people of that area were famed for their skill in the manufacture of purple dye, extracted from the juice of the madder root. This was still in use there for the dyeing of carpets at the end of the nineteenth century, before it was superseded by chemical dyes.³⁹ Lydia had evidently come to Philippi as a trader in that dye. There is inscriptional evidence for the existence of a guild of purple merchants in Philippi. But she had possibly learned to worship the true God in her native Thyatira; there was probably a Jewish community there.” NICNT

“**4209. πορφύρα porphúra**; gen. *porphúras*, fem. noun. The purple mussel, a type of shellfish found on the coasts of the Mediterranean yielding a reddish–purple dye of great value in biblical times. In the NT, used to refer to something dyed with purple, such as clothes or robes of purple worn by persons of rank and wealth (Luke 16:19; Rev. 17:4 [TR]; 18:12; Sept.: Ex. 25:4; 26:1, 31). Used specifically to denote a purple robe put upon Christ as a mock emblem of royalty (Mark 15:17, 20). In Matt. 27:28 the same is called *chlamús kokkinē* (*chlamús* [5511], robe; *kokkinē* [2847], red), a crimson robe.” Word Study Dictionary

³³ “Lydia is also a pious woman (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν, *sebomenē ton theon*). This phrase often describes former polytheists who become worshipers of the God of Israel, adopt monotheism, and attend the synagogue but do not keep the entire law...” Darrell Bock, Baker Bible Commentary

- **Her whole household got baptized** – what does this mean? Servants didn't make their own life decisions. They were in contract or owned, so as long as that was the case all major decisions of their life was made by their master/boss. This included how the household was going to be run via culture. If the master went to a religion, that's how all things were going to go. **Does this mean that all of her household immediately had a personal relationship with the Lord? Not at all. It means that her home had a new Christian culture that they would need to understand and abide by regardless if it made sense to them yet.**
- **What does it mean that she has a household?**³⁴ – it means she is wealthy and has servants. She appears to be a single woman that is very wealthy. The Lord was saving her first in a very **strategic** fashion.
 - **Open to more than earthly success** - Lydia had her act together and was successful,³⁵ but she was open for the more that God wanted for her. **Are we open, or has our success deadened us to more?** Her wealth didn't stop her from God, and she ended up using it for God. Her call was disruptive to her and should be.
 - **Successful people need Jesus too** - Are there people in our lives who we assume are not interested in Jesus because they appear to have their acts together?
- **A generous & relatively shocking offer** – she said, 'if you have found me to be faithful in the Lord, then come and stay at my home.' She just met them but knew that they were the good guys with the good news. She knew she had the space and means to extend hospitality. **She was overjoyed at what the Lord had done for her and she wanted to give back out of her resources.**
- **She prevailed upon us** – what does this mean? It means they were hesitant and didn't want to impose but she won that argument.

Conclusion

- **How God opens hearts to hear** – is God speaking to you today? How would you know? What do you do if He is? **[complete]**
- **Prayer for us to HEAR Him more.**

³⁴ "which would include her servants and other dependents as well as her family." NICNT

³⁵ "Women in Macedonia were noted for their independence; moreover, under Roman law (which governed life in the colony) freeborn women with three children and freedwomen with four children were at this time granted a number of privileges, including the right to undertake legal transactions on their own initiative." NICNT