

Explore the Bible: October 6

Every Opportunity • Acts 16:11-40

By Becky Brown



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After spending time in Asia Minor, the Lord made plain through a vision that they must next travel to Macedonia. Their first stop is the Roman colony of Philippi. They spent a few days there apparently looking for opportunities to encounter people who needed to meet Jesus. Paul's ministry strategy involved gathering with any local Jews for Sabbath worship in the synagogue. There must have been no synagogue there. Acts 16:13 tells us they went out of the city gates on Sabbath to the riverside. They were looking for a place to spend time in prayer.

Beside the river, a group of women had gathered. A lady was there from the city of Thyatira in Asia Minor. She was described as a "worshipper of God" and a seller of purple fabrics by trade. Purple dye was an expensive product. Lydia

was listening as Paul began to speak to them.

Acts 16:14 describes a beautiful moment in the life of Lydia. As she was present and listening attentively, "...the Lord Himself opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." The Greek word "opened" is so revealing as to what occurs at salvation. This word conveys opening what has been closed because of a lack of understanding. It is listening and receiving with intent to obey and follow.

As Paul talked, God was speaking to the heart and mind of Lydia. She began to understand and to receive the message of the gospel as Paul shared the truth. Her heart made a response to this message. Lydia and those in her household became believers in Jesus and were baptized. She immediately invited Paul and Silas and Timothy to become guests in her home during their time in Philippi. God was already at work drawing people to Himself before Paul's team arrived.

Acts 16:16 reveals that the team continued ministering at this place of prayer by the riverside. My trip to trace the journeys of Paul in November 2002 brought me to Philippi. Our tour group sat beside a stream called "Lydia's Brook" and read Acts 16 together. Then we spent a long while sharing our personal testimonies of salvation with each other.

A slave girl in Philippi had a spirit of divination for telling the future. She was being used by masters who would profit from her practice of fortune-telling. She would follow Paul's team, disrupting the work they were doing. Paul recognized the girl was possessed by an evil spirit. In the name of Jesus, Paul healed her by casting out the evil spirit. She was immediately free. However, her masters were now "robbed" of their profits received at her expense. They made sure that the authorities threw Paul and Silas into prison based on false charges. They were beaten severely with rods. They were assigned a personal jailer who placed their feet in stocks. He was to guard them at the peril of his own life if

they escaped.

At midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing to God. All the prisoners were listening. Suddenly, an earthquake occurred. The prison doors were opened. The stocks on their feet were also released. Their jailer feared his magistrate-assigned special prisoners had escaped. He knew his life would be required for theirs, so he drew his sword to kill himself.

Paul's voice interrupted this attempted suicide. The jailer saw something different in their demeanor. Their response to suffering captured his attention. The Holy Spirit spoke to his heart. Before morning, the jailer and his entire family believed and were baptized. He tended to their external wounds while the Lord tended to the internal brokenness in his household! Paul and Silas returned to the home of Lydia and encouraged those gathered there.

Paul grabbed every opportunity to touch lives in the name of Jesus. Paul's letter to the Philippians displays deep love between them. Every personal encounter is an opportunity for a gospel conversation.

Brown leads LittleBrownLight Ministries.