

**Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work**  
**Sunday Morning Bible Study**  
**Lesson Twelve – Acts 16:6-17:15**  
**Following the Spirit**

God had appointments for Paul with individuals in Macedonia. The first was with Lydia at the river on a Saturday afternoon. The second was with a slave girl who earned money for her owner by telling the future, and third was with a jailor and his family at Philippi. Getting him to those appointments was not easy, but the Holy Spirit got them there. To do this, he closed some doors of opportunity and opened others. Paul overcame human barriers when he took the gospel to these individuals. There now was no difference between Jew and Greek, male and female, slave or free—when it came to the gospel of Christ.

We do not have to beg the Holy Spirit to guide us. But like Paul, we need to seek that guidance as we are faithful to what we already know to be God’s will and as we trust God even when we cannot explain what he is doing.

**OPEN**

- What are your greatest fears about being guided by God?

The most notable feature of Paul’s second missionary expedition, which Luke narrates in these chapters, is that during it the good seed of the gospel was now for the first time planted in European soil. It was from Europe that in due course the gospel fanned out to the great continents of Africa, Asia, North America, Latin America and Oceania and so reached the ends of the earth.

1. *Read Acts 16:6-15.* What specific instructions and direction did Paul and his companions receive from the Holy Spirit?

**The Spirit of Jesus kept them from going to Bithynia so they went to Troas. There, Paul was guided to Macedonia through a vision. On the way, they met Lydia, who became a follower of Jesus.**

2. How do you see the Holy Spirit honor and work through their obedience throughout this passage?

**The reason the Holy Spirit leads Paul and Silas toward Macedonia is because there are divine appointments to be kept. So, as Paul and Silas are obedient, the Spirit uses that obedience to bring out Gospel encounters that ultimately lead to conversions. As we submit to the plan of God, God honors that obedience by using it in His plan.**

3. What principles of guidance do you see in the experience of Paul and his companions?

**Never assume that the plan you have is the only option. God can always give a new plan. Also, don't assume that your understanding of God's plan is without fault. Sometimes we miss it. Next, always be open to the Spirit leading you somewhere you didn't think you would go.**

In *The Acts of the Holy Spirit* A. T. Pierson gave some examples from the history of missions of this same kind of guidance: Livingstone tried to go to China, but God sent him to Africa instead. Before him, Carey planned to go to Polynesia in the South Seas, but God guided him to India. Judson went to India first, but was driven on to Burma. We too in our day, Pierson concludes, "need to trust him for guidance and rejoice equally in his restraints and constraints" ([Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1895], pp. 120-22).

4. When have you experienced guidance in the way that Paul and Silas did?

**I remember when I was in high school and had the opportunity to go to Mexico on a youth mission trip. I had no intentions of going on the trip. In fact I was already registered for a music camp at the UofA. Then, it was as clear as day... I didn't hear an audible voice, but I knew that God was calling me to go to Mexico. I couldn't explain it, but I knew it.**

5. *Read Acts 16:16-40.* What opposition was there to Paul and his message?

**There was spiritual opposition, like the spirit that possessed the young slave girl. There was also physical/earthly opposition, like the owners of the slave girl who opposed Paul because he took away their profit.**

6. What was the motivation behind the owners of the slave girl dragging Paul and Silas to the authorities (vv. 19-21)?

**They "saw that their hope of gain was gone" (v. 19).**

7. Describe Paul and Silas's response to being flogged and thrown into prison (vv. 25-28)?

**They prayed and sang hymns to God. How crazy that after being flogged and thrown into prison they were worshiping the Lord!**

8. Why do you think the jailer asked the question "What must I do to be saved?"

**I think the jailer realized that the presence and power of God was with Paul and Silas. He realized that these men were representatives of God.**

9. How does the response of the jailer (vv. 31-34) compare to Lydia's response to the gospel (vv. 14-15, 40)?

**They are almost identical. Each person believes along with his/her family, and all of them are baptized.**

What does this tell you about the nature of the gospel?

**The Gospel does not distinguish between economic class, race, gender, etc. Though Lydia and the jailer were very different in the eyes of society, they were the same in the eyes of God. They were both sinners who needed the Gospel.**

10. Think of the three individuals (Lydia, a businesswoman; the slave girl and the jail keeper) who probably became Christians and were the core of the new Philippian church. How does this new church demonstrate the unifying power of the gospel?

**It unites people from all walks of life. Even though societal norms wouldn't unite these types of people, the Gospel can.**

11. The book of Acts demonstrates God's desire to reach individuals as well as the world. What would have been the consequence if Paul had not responded to the Macedonia call?

**Well, since Lydia, the slave girl, and the jailer were saved, they must have been among the elect. That means, God would have saved them somehow and eventually. So, if Paul had not went to Macedonia, they would have still been saved, but Paul would have missed out on the blessing of obedience to God's call. Also, the church in Macedonia might not have grown as quickly as it did because of Paul's ministry.**

12. *Read Acts 17:1-15.* What verbs describe Paul’s approach to the Thessalonians and their response (vv. 1-4)?

**Reasoned, explaining, proving, saying, persuaded**

What verbs describe the response of the Bereans to Paul’s teaching (vv. 11-12)?

**Received, examining, believed**

13. Compare and contrast the response of the Thessalonians and the Bereans to the gospel.

**Both groups believed the Gospel. However, Luke notes that the Bereans “were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (17:11).**

**Summary:** It was inevitable in Jewish evangelism that the Old Testament Scriptures should be both the textbook and the court of appeal. What is impressive is that neither speaker nor hearers used Scripture in a superficial way. On the contrary, Paul “argues” out of the Scripture and the Bereans “examined” them to see if his arguments were cogent. And we may be sure that Paul welcomed and encouraged this thoughtful response. He believed in doctrine (his message had theological content), but not in indoctrination (tyrannical instruction demanding uncritical acceptance). Thus Paul’s arguments and his hearers’ studies went hand in hand. I do not doubt that he also bathed both in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit of truth to open his mouth to explain, and his hearers’ minds to grasp, the good news of salvation in Christ.

**APPLY**

- How have you witnessed the power of the gospel to change lives?

How might God be guiding you to serve him?

**PRAY**

- Quietly reflect on how God has led you in the past. Thank him for his faithfulness. Commit your present and future to him now. Talk to him about your fears, desires and commitment to following him.

All material taken from:

John Stott, *Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work*. Downers Grove, IL: IV Press, USA, 1998.