

ACTS 15:36-16:12

# GOD | AT | WORK

Disciples of Jesus still have disagreements with each other. Sometimes they even struggle to find the Lord's direction for their lives. Despite these desperate moments, how can believers know God is at work among them? Today we find out.

2 weeks ago we saw how the New Covenant message is that:

## **JESUS + NOTHING = EVERYTHING**

The Jewish followers of Jesus realized that Gentiles didn't have to become good Jews to follow Jesus - they just needed to turn from their sin and TRUST HIM! They even called the Gentiles "brothers and sisters" - family (Acts 15:23)!

Today we see **God at Work**, fulfilling what Jesus had said would happen many years before.

**John 10:16** (NET) <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that do not come from this sheepfold. I must bring them too, and they will listen to my voice, so that **there will be one flock and one shepherd.**

Jews & Gentiles as ONE FAMILY with ONE SHEPHERD! Oh how beautiful it is when God's children act like they love each other!

Paul & Barnabas were family in the Lord, having served together on their 1st missionary journey that likely lasted at least 1 year. And now they were ready to go again, to impact both Jews & Gentiles!

**Acts 15:36** (NET) <sup>36</sup> After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they are doing."

Paul's goal:

**Colossians 1:28-29** (NET) <sup>28</sup> We proclaim him [Jesus] by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may **present every person mature in Christ.** <sup>29</sup> Toward this goal I also labor, struggling according to his power that powerfully works in me.

## **Evidence of GOD AT WORK: Developing Mature Disciples of Jesus.**

Is this true in YOUR life? Is your goal bigger than raising kind kids, making money, comfortable living, or having a dream job? Or is it that YOU desire to become a mature disciple of Jesus, developing mature disciples of Jesus?

## **When Disciples Disagree**

**Acts 15:37-39a** (NET) <sup>37</sup> Barnabas wanted to bring John called Mark along with them too, <sup>38</sup> but Paul insisted that they should not take along this one who had left them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. <sup>39</sup> They had a **sharp disagreement**, so that **they parted company.**

Luke could easily have chosen to leave out this **sharp disagreement**. Yet, Luke, led by the Spirit, left this team conflict here on purpose. The Scriptures tell us the TRUTH; the good, the bad, &

the ugly. **The Scripture is often DESCRIPTIVE rather than PRESCRIPTIVE. Sometimes it tells us what others DID DO, rather than what we SHOULD Do.**

For example: the Old Testament tells us of Israel sacrificing to false gods, David's affair with Bathsheba & murder of her husband. The list could go on and on. These stories are DESCRIPTIVE examples - what they DID DO, not what we SHOULD DO.

**The Scriptures show us bad examples to shun, and point out good examples to follow.**

In this passage we see ministry partners in such **sharp disagreement** that **they parted company**. WHY? In Acts 13:13 John Mark left them during the first mission. Barnabas wanted to give his cousin (Col. 4:10) a second chance, but Paul didn't want to waste time on the young guy who had so frustrated him.

And here we see Joseph called **Barnabas** - the encourager, do what he does - pick up a broken brother who others don't believe in, and pour into his life.

**Acts 15:39b-41** (NET) **Barnabas took along Mark** and sailed away to Cyprus,<sup>40</sup> but **Paul chose Silas** and set out, commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers and sisters.<sup>41</sup> He passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Note that Paul later does find **John Mark** helpful in ministry.



**2 Timothy 4:11** (NET) Only Luke is with me. Get **Mark** and **bring him with you**, because **he is a great help to me in ministry.**

Paul and Barnabas served together as ministry partners after this incident (1 Cor 9:6; Col 4:10; Gal 2:1, 9).

☀ **Kent Hughes:** "There were now two missionary teams instead of one."<sup>1</sup>

## QUESTIONS

- Have you, like Paul, been quick to ditch other brothers/sisters who disappointed you?
- Or have you, like Barnabas, given a second chance to those who are less mature than you?
- Isn't it time to mend the fences with fellow believers and recognize the growth & usefulness in both of your lives?

**Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus, Paul chose Silas.** Silas appears to be a Roman citizen (16:37), which will be of great help to their future mission deeper into the Roman Empire.

<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 204.

**Acts 16:1-3** (NET) <sup>1</sup> He also came to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple named **Timothy** was there, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but whose father was a Greek.<sup>2</sup> The brothers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.<sup>3</sup> Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

Lystra is where Paul was enabled to heal the lame man; where he and Barnabas were called Hermes & Zeus, and where the mob thought they had stoned Paul to death. And now Paul has come back to find a young man he would call “my genuine child in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2).

While Timothy’s mother was a **Jewish woman who was a believer** - that is - a follower of Jesus, Timothy’s **father was a Greek**, and likely not a follower of Jesus. Evidently, many of the Jews in that region knew of Timothy and also **knew that his father was Greek**. Jews typically didn’t have a favorable view of intermarriage with Gentiles.

If Timothy was going to have any influence sharing the New Covenant promises of Jesus with Jews still living under the Old Covenant, then Timothy would need to become a good Jew. After all, it was Paul’s practice to follow Jewish customs and submit to Jewish law to reach Jewish people (1 Cor 9:20).

And so, following Paul’s example, Timothy was **circumcised**. Why go through all this hassle?

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That WAS and IS the goal of the Christian life!

**Acts 16:4-5** (NET) <sup>4</sup> As they went through the towns, they passed on the decrees that had been decided on by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the Gentile believers to obey. <sup>5</sup> So the **churches were being strengthened in the faith** and were **increasing in number every day**.

**Group Question: “How should a church’s spiritual growth lead to numerical growth?”**

**Acts 16:6-8** (NET) <sup>6</sup> They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been **prevented by the Holy Spirit** from speaking the message in the province of Asia.<sup>7</sup> When they came to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but **the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this**,<sup>8</sup> so they passed through Mysia and went down to Troas.



Did you get that? **Jesus did not allow** Paul to go where he had planned. Evidently God had not given Paul all the specifics on where to go & who to see. The journey was an adventure and Paul had a plan based on his limited knowledge. At first he dreamed of **speaking the message in the province of Asia**. Door closed. Okay...let’s go to **Bithynia...NOPE**.

**“God was steering, but He wasn’t steering a parked car. He rarely does.”**

**Note:** God won’t give us all the specifics either. Be faithful to do what He has created you to do.

- Be a godly man/woman. Lead your family to follow Jesus.
- Grow as a disciple who disciples others. You don’t know WHO to disciple yet? That’s okay! Just start the journey! Sign up to serve this church as we help disciple children, teens, & adults!

- You ask God for opportunities to share the Gospel. Don't wait for God to give you the schedule time, place, & person. Just GO!!!

Paul wasn't in neutral. And AS HE WAS GOING, God gave him direction.

**Acts 16:9-12** (NET) <sup>9</sup> A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" <sup>10</sup> After Paul saw the vision, we attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, **concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.** <sup>11</sup> We put out to sea from Troas and sailed a straight course to Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis,<sup>12</sup> and from there to **Philippi**, which is a leading city of that district of Macedonia, a Roman colony. We stayed in this city for some days.



**Philippi** was an ancient town that Philip II of Macedon re-named after himself (in 356 B.C.). It was the place of a decisive battle of the second Roman civil war in 42 B.C.<sup>2</sup> In Paul's day it was a **Roman Colony**.

☀ **G. Campbell Morgan** wrote:

*How little the world knows of the Divine movements. Rome had small idea that day, that the van of the army [the foremost division of an advancing military force] of its ultimate Conqueror had taken possession of one of its frontal defences. On the day when Paul hurried from Neapolis, over the eight miles up to Philippi—and came into the city and made arrangements for his own lodging... the flag was planted in a frontier colony of Rome, which eventually was to make necessary the lowering of her flag, and the change of the world's history.<sup>3</sup>*

You can read the rest of the story on your own in Acts 16.

Again, WHY all this travel & struggle for Paul, Silas, & Timothy?

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## **FEET2FAITH**

**Christian Relationship to Restore or Pray for?** Have you grown? Maybe he/she has too!

**Evidence that you are becoming a mature disciple?** Reading Scripture? Walking in obedience? In a same sex Christian friendship that challenges you to grow? Ask a godly man/woman for help! OR prayerfully seek someone to disciple!

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, 211.

<sup>3</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1924), p. 249.