

Sunday School Lesson 11: November 16, From Derbe to Philippi

Text: Acts 16:1–15

Theme: Bible Truth: Paul’s obedience to God and his respect for the elders and apostles gave opportunities for the Gospel to spread to many regions.

Memory Verse: “And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.” (Acts 16:10)

Lesson AIM

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- God Uses Prepared People
- The Spirit Directs Our Steps
- Obedience Opens New Territory
- God Opens Hearts (vv. 13–15)

Background

Prior to Acts 16, Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary journey, faced sharp disagreement over John Mark, and Paul began his second journey with Silas, revisiting churches and strengthening believers. The Jerusalem Council also took place, clarifying that Gentiles were saved by grace, not by keeping the Mosaic Law.

Paul’s First Missionary Journey (Acts 13–14)

- Sent from Antioch: Paul and Barnabas are commissioned by the Holy Spirit.
 - Preached in Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.
 - Faced persecution: Paul was stoned in Lystra but survived. (Acts 14:8-20)
 - Established churches and appointed elders before returning to Antioch.
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The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)

- Issue: Should Gentile converts be required to follow the Mosaic Law, especially circumcision?
 - Resolution: Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ—not by law-keeping.
 - Outcome: A letter was sent to Gentile churches affirming their freedom from the law, with a few guidelines for unity.
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Paul and Barnabas Disagree (Acts 15:36–41)

- Conflict: Paul didn't want to take John Mark, who had abandoned them earlier.
 - Result: Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; Paul chose Silas and revisited churches in Syria and Cilicia.
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This Transitions us to Acts 16

- Paul and Silas begin the second missionary journey, heading north through Asia Minor.
 - They arrive in Derbe and Lystra, where they meet Timothy, setting the stage for Acts 16:1.
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Reflection Question:

1. Have you ever had a plan that changed unexpectedly—but turned out better?
 2. What does it mean to be “led by the Spirit”?
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The Lesson:

I. PAUL RECRUITS TIMOTHY (ACTS 16:1-5)

¹ Paul went first to Derbe and then to Lystra, where there was a young disciple named Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek.

² Timothy was well thought of by the believers^[a] in Lystra and Iconium,

³ so Paul wanted him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek.

⁴ Then they went from town to town, instructing the believers to follow the decisions made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

⁵ So the churches were strengthened in their faith and grew larger every day.

What's Happening here (Acts 16:1-5)

1. Paul Meets Timothy in Lystra

- Paul travels to **Derbe and Lystra**, cities he visited during his first journey.
 - In Lystra, he meets **Timothy**, a young disciple with a **Jewish mother** and a **Greek father**.
 - Timothy is **well respected** by believers in both Lystra and Iconium, showing his spiritual maturity and reputation.
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2. Timothy Is Circumcised

- Paul wants Timothy to join the mission team.
- Although circumcision isn't required for salvation (as clarified in Acts 15), Paul **has Timothy circumcised** to avoid offending Jewish communities they'll minister to.
- This is a strategic move—**not theological compromise**, but cultural sensitivity for the sake of the Gospel.

- As they went through the cities they wanted to be sure the new believers new what decrees were agreed upon by the Jerusalem Council: **Acts 15:28-29.** ²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹ that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual^[a] immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

3. Strengthening the Churches

- Paul, Silas, and Timothy travel from **town to town**, sharing the **Jerusalem Council's decision**: Gentiles are saved by grace, not by law-keeping.
- This message brings **clarity and unity**, especially in mixed Jewish-Gentile congregations.

4. Growth and Encouragement

- As a result of their teaching and encouragement, **churches are strengthened in faith.**
- The Gospel spreads, and **more people come to faith daily.**

II. A DIVINE CHANGE OF PLANS (VS 6-12)

⁶Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time.

⁷Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia,^[b] but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there.

⁸So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas.

⁹That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!”

¹⁰So we^[c] decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there.

¹¹We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis.

¹²From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.

What's Happening here (Acts 16:6-12)

Blocked from Asia

- Paul and Silas travel through Phrygia and Galatia, intending to preach in Asia (likely western Asia Minor, including Ephesus).
- But the Holy Spirit prevents them—not because Asia is unimportant, but because God has another plan.

Blocked from Bithynia

- They try to go north into Bithynia, but again, “the Spirit of Jesus” does not allow them.
- This phrase emphasizes that Jesus Himself is actively guiding their steps.

Redirected to Troas

- Instead of forcing their way, they continue through Mysia to Troas, a coastal city.
- Troas becomes the launching point for the Gospel’s first entry into Europe—a pivotal moment in Christian history.

The Macedonian Vision (v. 9)

- Paul receives a nighttime vision of a man from Macedonia pleading, “*Come over to Macedonia and help us!*”
- This is not just a dream—it’s a Spirit-led call to mission, confirming the earlier redirections by the Holy Spirit (vv. 6–8).

Immediate Obedience (v. 10)

- Paul and his companions (now including Timothy and Luke, as indicated by the shift to “we”) respond immediately.
- They conclude that God is calling them to preach the Good News in Macedonia—a clear example of spiritual discernment and readiness.

3. Journey to Europe (vv. 11–12)

- They sail from Troas to Samothrace, then to Neapolis, and finally arrive in Philippi.
- Philippi is described as:
 - A major city in Macedonia
 - A Roman colony, meaning it had special status and Roman influence
- They stay several days, preparing for ministry—this sets the stage for Lydia’s conversion and the founding of the Philippian church.

Reflection Thought:

- God’s call often comes through unexpected means—visions, closed doors, divine nudges.
- Obedience opens new mission fields—Paul’s team enters Europe, a continent that will become central to Christian history.
- *Application:* Sometimes “no” is God’s way of saying “wait” or “go elsewhere.”

III. LYDIA’S HEART IS OPENED (vv. 13–15)

¹³On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there.

¹⁴One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying.

¹⁵She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my home.” And she urged us until we agreed.

What's Happening here (Acts 16:13-15)

1. Seeking a Place of Prayer

- Paul and his team go **outside the city of Philippi** to a **riverbank**, likely because there was no synagogue (which required 10 Jewish men).
 - according to Jewish tradition, a **minyan** (מִנְיָן) is a quorum of **ten Jewish men** required for certain communal religious practices, especially public prayer and Torah reading. If a city didn't have ten Jewish men, it wouldn't have a synagogue, and worshipers would often gather informally—like at a riverbank, as Paul and his companions did in Philippi (Acts 16:13).
 - They find a **group of women gathered for prayer**, showing spiritual hunger and faithfulness.
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2. Lydia: A God-Fearing Businesswoman

- Lydia is from **Thyatira**, a city known for its dyeing industry.
 - She's a **merchant of purple cloth**, which was luxurious and expensive—suggesting she's wealthy and influential.
 - She's described as a **worshiper of God**, meaning she's a Gentile who reveres the God of Israel.
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3. The Lord Opens Her Heart

- As Paul shares the Gospel, **God opens Lydia's heart**—a powerful reminder that conversion is a divine work.
 - She **responds in faith**, and her **whole household is baptized**, showing immediate obedience and influence.
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4. Hospitality and Partnership

- Lydia invites Paul and his team to **stay at her home**, insisting they accept if they believe she's truly a believer.
 - Her home likely becomes the **first meeting place for the Philippian church**—a base for ministry and fellowship.
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✦ **Reflection Thoughts:**

- **God prepares hearts:** Lydia's openness is a divine appointment.
 - **Women in ministry:** Lydia plays a foundational role in the early church.
 - **Faith leads to action:** She responds with baptism and hospitality.
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🧠 **Reflection Questions**

1. What does Lydia's response teach us about listening and acting on God's Word?
2. How can we be more sensitive to the Spirit's leading in our daily lives?
3. What "doors" might God be opening for you to share His love?

Key Take Aways:

👤 **1. God Uses Prepared People (vv. 1–5)**

God often calls those who are already walking in faith and humility.

🗝️ **2. The Spirit Directs Our Steps (vv. 6–10)**

Closed doors are not failures—they're divine redirections.

🚢 **3. Obedience Opens New Territory (vv. 11–12)**

When we follow God's lead, we step into greater impact.

💖 **4. God Opens Hearts (vv. 13–15)**

True conversion is a work of God—and it leads to action.