



Explosive Impact • Living a Life on Mission • Acts 16-17 • 11/04/2018

Main Point

Whether at home, work, school, or around the world, God has called every believer to be on mission.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do you find it easier to discuss spiritual things with people you know or with strangers? Why do you think this is?

Of the resources we have—time, talent, and treasure—which do you most often employ for sharing the gospel? Which do you least often employ? Why do you gravitate toward one over the others?

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

According to Acts 13–15, Paul’s first missionary journey had been a success. Many people received Christ’s gift of salvation, and churches started in several places throughout the area where he and Barnabas traveled. In Acts 16, he and Barnabas had parted ways, and he was soon joined by Silas and Timothy.

| Have A volunteer read Acts 16:1-15.

What do we learn about Timothy in 16:1-2? Why do these characteristics make him the perfect missionary companion for Paul?

Timothy was a second-generation Christian—his mother was a believer but his father was a Gentile. This made Timothy not only a seasoned believer, but also someone who had a connection to both the Jewish and Gentile people they would come in contact with. Timothy was also spoken highly of by fellow Christians.

How do you think Paul might have felt after twice being prevented from carrying out his intentions (vv. 6-7)?

Have you ever been frustrated by the Holy Spirit's leading because it seemed to contradict your plans?

Twice the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from taking the gospel to the regions of western Asia and along the Black Sea. Instead, He led Paul to the town of Troas. Paul knew God had some purpose for bringing him to Troas, but he had no idea what it was. Then, in the middle of the night Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man calling for him to come help them. From that vision Paul was directed to a new ministry in Macedonia (16:6-10).

What does Paul and his companions' response to the Macedonian man's request indicate about their basic ministry purpose?

Paul and his fellow missionaries' quick response to the Holy Spirit's leading reveals they felt compelled to share the gospel wherever and whenever God called them to do so. The vision occurred one night; they departed the next day and traveled to Philippi. Paul was able to locate a place of prayer beside a river outside the city gate where a group of women met on the Sabbath. One of them was named Lydia.

What qualities and characteristics do you notice about Lydia? What does verse 14 reveal about our role in sharing the gospel with others? How does this truth impact your feelings about evangelism?

Why do you think Lydia invited Paul and the missionaries to stay at her home? How might she have felt if they had refused her offer?

The wording of verse 14 is important for our understanding of Christian witnessing. We are not responsible for the faith of others. We are responsible only for giving a faithful witness to the gospel. Lydia's hospitality was proof of her new faith. She opened her home and shared everything she had in the spirit of the earliest church (Acts 4:32). Her home became the gathering place for Christians (16:40).

| Have a volunteer read Acts 16:25-40.

If you had been the jailer, how would you have reacted after the earthquake? What indications of the jailer's fear do you see? Why did the jailer's mood change after Paul's statement in verse 28?

What did Paul understand the jailer to mean by his question in verse 30? What are evidences that the jailer's faith in the Lord was genuine?

The earthquake probably aroused the jailer from sleep. Looking around, he assumed every prisoner had escaped because all the prison doors stood open. Responsible for what happened, he knew he had no other choice but to take his own life. Otherwise, he would be executed. That's when Paul and Silas came to the jailer's rescue. They convinced him none of the prisoners had escaped, and they shared Christ with him.

When you face the “midnight,” or the overwhelming times of your life, how do you generally respond? How can Paul and Silas’ example change your perspective?

Paul and Silas were open to God's use of their difficult circumstances to bring about good. Instead of letting fear hush their testimony of Jesus, they turned their prison cell into a worship center. Luke said they sang hymns, or songs of praise directed to God.

How does the manner in which we respond to crises give opportunities for Christian witness? How does the manner in which we respond to crises sometimes negate a Christian witness?

| Have another volunteer read Acts 17:16-34.

Why was Paul's heart disturbed by the cultural climate of Athens (v. 16)?

Athens was full of idols and the people were completely given over to idol worship. More than 30,000 statues were erected to gods. Luke wrote that Paul's "spirit was troubled," which denotes fury and sadness, a deep grief over the idolatry. The pagan idol worship offended his moral conscience.

Why might Paul have gone to both the synagogue and the marketplace to share the gospel? What is the benefit of meeting people where they are (“in the marketplace”) for the sake of evangelism?

What truths did Paul communicate about the character of God (vv. 24-31)? What pattern did Paul set for us as we share the gospel?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Why do opportunities to share the gospel sometimes go unrecognized? Why are opportunities sometimes rejected?

How are you going to be more aware of these opportunities?

Who is one person God may be calling you to reach out to this week?

Pray

Pray that you will take advantage of opportunities to witness to the people God places in their lives.

Commentary

| Acts 16

16:1–5 Revisiting his former mission field, Paul met Timothy at Lystra. He is described as a “disciple,” which indicates that he was probably a convert from Paul’s earlier work there. Paul wanted to take him on the mission. Timothy had a Jewish mother, which made him legally a Jew, but he had not been circumcised. Paul had him circumcised so as to give no offense in the synagogues where he witnessed. He shared the Jerusalem letter with all the churches of his first missionary journey.

16:6–10 Paul’s group left the area of Paul’s first mission and started north (through central Turkey). Paul would have turned west into the province of Asia over to the coast where the populous city of Ephesus was located. The Spirit prevented this. So Paul continued north, this time headed for the province of Bithynia with its towns along the coast of the Black Sea. Again, Paul was prevented by the Spirit (v. 7). He finally ended up on the Aegean coast at Troas, and there he discovered where he was being led.

In a vision at Troas, a Macedonian man begged him to come minister in Macedonia. Macedonia was not far geographically, a couple of days by sea. Ethnically, it was a different world—the land of Alexander the Great, the Greek world. Here for the first time Luke used the first person plural. His “we” perhaps indicates that he first joined Paul at Troas.

16:11–15 Philippi evidently did not have a Jewish community large enough to support a synagogue. But, there was a Jewish place of prayer outside the city, mainly attended by women. On the Sabbath, Paul joined them there for worship. One of them, Lydia, was a Gentile God-fearer, like Cornelius. She was a woman of some means. Having believed and been baptized, she invited Paul and his entourage to her home. Subsequently, the Christians of Philippi held their house church at Lydia’s.

16:16–24 As Paul witnessed in Philippi, he was pestered by a servant girl who was possessed by a spirit with predictive powers. The spirit incessantly proclaimed Paul’s relationship to God and the saving power of his message. Annoyed by the demon and feeling compassion for the girl, who was being exploited by her owners, Paul exorcised the spirit. Having lost a source of income, the owners hauled Paul before the town magistrates. Their charges against him were false but carried enough conviction with the authorities to have Paul and Silas flogged and thrown into jail.

16:25–34 Like the apostles before them (5:17–21), Paul and Silas were miraculously delivered from their confinement, by an earthquake in the night. Also, like the apostles, they did not flee, but remained at the

scene to bear witness. The jailer expected to lose his life for loss of the prisoners. Instead, he gained life, true life in Christ through the witness of Paul and Silas. They witnessed to all his household. All were baptized. Joy filled their home.

16:35–40 The next day, Realizing that Paul and Silas had committed no real offense, the town magistrates sent orders to the jailer to release them. Paul would not go. He divulged his Roman citizenship and noted that he and Silas had been scourged without a hearing, which was strictly forbidden for Roman citizens. He demanded that the magistrates come with a personal apology and escort them out. Paul realized this was an important precedent. Preaching the gospel was not an offense. He had broken no laws. He wanted the record set straight—not just in Philippi but wherever he witnessed.

| Acts 17

17:1–9 Leaving Philippi, Paul’s group traveled to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia, which like Philippi was located on the main east-west Roman highway. For the first three weeks there Paul preached in the synagogue. He had to leave the synagogue but evidently spent more time in the city, supporting himself with his tent-making trade (1 Thess. 2:9). Eventually his Jewish opponents stirred up a mob from the marketplace rabble who stormed the house where he had been staying. They falsely accused Paul of sedition against Caesar. Jason, the owner of the house, was evidently a Christian. He was made to pay security to guarantee that Paul would no longer remain in Thessalonica.

17:10–15 Paul and Silas went on to Berea, a sizable Macedonian town about fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica. Luke described the Berean Jews as “more noble” than those of Thessalonica. They studied their Old Testament with Paul to see if it pointed to Christ. Unfortunately, once again Paul’s visit was cut short when the Thessalonian Jews came to Berea and turned the crowds against him.

17:16–21 By Paul’s day, Athens had lost its political and economic power. It was still the intellectual and cultural center for all of Greece. The remnants of its former grandeur were everywhere, particularly its many statues. Paul was offended by the idols of the Greek gods which were to be seen on all sides. They would soon become the subject matter for his sermon. He witnessed to the Jews on the Sabbath in the synagogue, but every day he engaged the Greek philosophers in the marketplace, particularly the Epicureans and the Stoics, the two leading Athenian schools of thought.

Paul’s message was strange to them. They thought he was proclaiming new gods—Jesus and the “goddess Resurrection.” They called him a “babbling” (literally, a “seed-picker,” someone pecking after any new idea). In reality, Luke said, they were the seed-pickers, always looking for the latest. They led Paul to the Areopagus. This could either refer to the venerable Athenian court of that name or to the hill at the foot of the Acropolis where the court had formerly met. The hill had become the Athenian equivalent of Hyde Park. It probably is there that they led Paul.

17:22–31 Paul’s speech on the Areopagus is a masterpiece of missionary preaching. Paul sought to establish as much rapport with the Greek philosophers as possible without compromising the gospel. He began with an attention getter, pointing to an idol he had seen in the marketplace as “the unknown god.” The Greeks had perhaps erected it in case they might have left a god out whom they would not want to offend. In any event, the God they did not know was the only real God, and Paul now proceeded to present Him. He pictured Him as the God who made all things, the providential God who sets all boundaries of time and space. The philosophers could easily follow this, particularly the Stoics. They would especially agree that “we are his offspring,” where Paul actually quoted a Stoic poet.

But in verse 29 Paul began to attack the Greek culture more directly. If we are born in God’s image, he said, then we are wrong when we make idols. Idolatry gets things backward; it makes God into man’s image. God will no longer tolerate such ignorance, Paul continued. He is coming to judge us for our ignorance and idolatry, to judge us by a person whom He raised from the dead (vv. 31–32). Paul lost most of his Athenian intellectuals right there. The idea of a man rising from the dead was sheer folly to their thinking.

17:32–34 There were three responses to Paul’s address. Many mocked him. Others wanted to hear him further. A few believed: the sermon was not a failure. Paul knew that one could go only so far in accommodating the gospel. One cannot avoid the very center of the gospel, the folly of the cross.

Reading Assignment for next week

Acts 23:1-33