



26 | ACTS 15:36-16:15

THE MACEDONIAN CALL

The greater our weakness, the greater God's work!

Outline

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Call to Worship

Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! ⁶For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, ⁷a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him? ⁸O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you? —Psalm 89:5-8

Songs

Praise the Name
How Sweet and Awesome is the Place
Hear the Call of the Kingdom
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Across the Lands

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

GIVING: You can give over Zelle through your bank with no fees (use secretary@livinghopechurch.net). We also have a collection box on the Welcome Center. Malachi 3, “Test me in this” Proverbs: “**Give of your firstfruits.**” We believe blessing comes by putting God first.

Introduction

Sometimes the best laid plans are not the best plans at all. God has promised to build his church. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Psa 127:1). As believers, we have to be willing to throw out our plans and follow the Lord in obedience. Can we all agree that God’s plans are better than our plans?

Isaiah 55:8-9 | My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God knows better than us. I’m so glad he promises to lead us, because we all have strange ideas of what we want in life.

Do you remember people asking you when you were young: what do you want to be when you grow up? At times I had different answers. I wanted to be a **doctor**, but I found out I’m not smart enough. I wanted to be a **lawyer**, but that too slipped from my imagination. Then when I was a teenager, I saw the movie top gun, and I had the opportunity to go up in a restored World War II fighter plane. We even did a roll, upside down in the sky! I was so pumped. From then on I wanted to be a **pilot**. When I went to enlist, I found out my eyes are terrible, and I could never go into aviation. I got into music, and then I wanted to be in **a rock band**. Then I came to know Christ, and I thought, I’ll be a **Christian musician**. All of that is fine and good, but I’m so glad God is the one who leads us, not our own hearts. Eventually, God led Jill and I to do **church planting missionary work** in Spain. Finally, he called us back here to Chicagoland, where we couldn’t be happier serving him! You never know what God’s plans are for you! God has some things in store for you that you could never dream of or imagine yourself. He’s a much better planner for our lives than we could ever be.

Paul knew God had plans for him too. For the apostle Paul, his home church at Antioch was not a parking lot: it was a launching pad. He could never settle down to a “comfortable ministry” anywhere as long as there were open doors for the preaching of the gospel.¹ The church helped him greatly, and he needed to let them send him off on his second missionary journey.

He first begins by strengthening the brothers in the provinces of Syria and Cilicia. Of course, **God’s plan is to expand the gospel to Europe**. Paul starts in Syria where his home church of Antioch is. Cilicia is where Tarsus is, Paul’s hometown. Now with every gospel expansion there is always testing, trials, and tribulation, and this moment was no different. There are several levels of disagreement and dissention before the great expansion into Europe. The first is between Paul and Peter, over the essence of the gospel, and then between Paul, and Barnabas over the suitability of John Mark. Yet, amidst all

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 465.

the distractions and commotion of dissension, we are going to see how God expands the church planning efforts even through these difficulties.

Key Thought: The greater our weakness is, the greater God's power will be displayed through us! In fact, the greater the obstacle, the greater our God's power is displayed. There is no difficulty too great for God. Nothing is impossible for him.

There are a couple of obstacles that occur during this time. First, Paul gets into it with Peter who almost causes a church split at Antioch (*cf* Gal 2:11-14). Then Paul writes the letter to Galatians, which is quite polemic. This all precedes the Jerusalem council earlier in Acts 15. It looks like things could be on very shaky ground for the second missionary journey, and if you think that, then you don't understand how God loves to display his power in our weakness!

1. A NEW TEAM ASSEMBLED (15:36-41)

Just when it looks like something exciting is about to happen for the kingdom of God, there is a great big problem, and sometimes several. Often when the church is expanding, there is not only persecution, but there can also be infighting in the church. We see that in the highest ranks, first with Peter, and then amidst the great missionary team of Paul and Barnabas.

There were several new elements in this second journey that indicated that God was still at work, despite the seeming obstacles and personal serious public and personal difficulties that arose.

FACTIONS AMONG THE APOSTLES

Before Paul had gone down to Jerusalem to settle the issue of law or grace, he had to first do battle with the apostle Peter himself. Just after this sharp rebuke of Peter, he writes a letter to the Galatian churches and mentions the confrontation in the letter.

Galatians 2:11-14 | But when Cephas [*Peter*] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Peter had been eating together with the Gentiles, not observing Jewish food laws, and incorporating himself into the church of many nations at Antioch. What a joy to see the gospel on display! But once certain professing Christian Pharisees came from Jerusalem, Peter (here called Cephas) started showing preference to the Pharisee Christians and even influenced Barnabas. Paul told Peter that this was blatant **hypocrisy**. Peter had sinned publicly, and so Paul gave him public rebuke. The beauty of godly leadership is that there is humility. **Peter most certainly demonstrated godly repentance**, for when the issue came up later at the Jerusalem council, the apostle who was first to stand at Pentecost, was the **first to stand and speak a witness to grace alone at the**

Jerusalem council. Praise God that even factions in humble, godly leadership can be handled with humility, grace, and repentance.

FRICTION ON THE TEAM

What we read about to begin Paul's second missionary journey is a massive, impactful disagreement. It all began when Paul suggested to Barnabas that they revisit the churches in Galatia "to see how they are" (15:36). Some time had passed; "after some days" in verse 36 may suggest that the winter of A.D. 48 had given way to the spring of A.D. 49, and travel was once again feasible.² Paul had likely written the letter to the Galatians even before the Jerusalem council. So he wants to go back to the churches of Galatia (Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) on a second missionary journey and encourage them. It's likely that with communication limited, Paul was wondering how his letter had been received by the churches of Galatia.

Acts 15:36-39 | And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."³⁷ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

Paul and Barnabas agreed on the importance of the trip, but they could not agree on the composition of the "team." Here were two dedicated men who had just helped bring unity to the church, and yet they could not settle their own disagreements! Disturbing and painful as these conflicts are, they are often found in church history; and yet God is able to overrule them and accomplish his purposes.

FRIENDSHIP ON THE TEAM

Paul and Barnabas wanted this second missionary journey to take place, but they chose different teams. Barnabas took Mark back to Cyprus. And Paul chose another team member: Silas.

Acts 15:40 | But Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

At times, God may allow the breakup of a ministry team or even a congregation in order to multiply the manpower going forward. Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus, and church history tells us they continued the work there. Barnabas would be soon martyred in Cyprus around A.D. 60. John Mark would go on to be a vital help encouragement both to Paul and especially Peter. John Mark is the author of the second gospel that bears his name. His main source was the apostle Peter.

So John Mark is not lost by Paul as much as he is gained by Barnabas. Paul chooses Silas to create a new missionary team for his second missionary journey, beginning in Galatia and trekking forward into the expanse of Europe.

² Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 436.

Paul's new partner, Silas, had been one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church. **"Silas" is probably a Greek version of the name Saul.** He was coauthor with Paul of the Thessalonian epistles, and he was the secretary for Peter's first epistle (1 Pet 5:12).³ He was in every respect a suitable man for missionary work. As a **prophet** (15:32), he was adept at proclaiming and teaching the word. As a **Jew**, he had entrance into the synagogues. As a **Roman citizen** (16:37), he enjoyed the same protection and benefits as did Paul. And his status as a **respected leader of both the Jerusalem and the Antioch churches** uniquely prepared him for the **multicultural ministry** that they were about to embark on. ⁴

EXPANSION THROUGH THE TEAM

You would think with all the disagreement and dissension that the gospel would be hindered, but that did not happen in the least. Paul went with Silas and ventured out on his second missionary journey.

Acts 15:41 | And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

God changes his workmen, but his work goes right on. Now there were *two* missionary teams instead of one! If God had to depend on perfect people to accomplish his work, he would never ever get anything done. Our limitations and imperfections are good reasons for us to depend on the grace of God, for our sufficiency is from him alone (2 Cor 3:5).⁵

Little do they know that a great companion to Paul is about to be added to the missionary team. Let me introduce Paul's son in the faith: Timothy!

2. A NEW WORKER ADDED (16:1-5)

At Lystra, the missionaries are joined by a certain disciple named Timothy. This is going to change the entire trajectory of Paul's missionary labors. He says to the Philippians that Timothy is indispensable to his ministry.

Philippians 2:20, 22 | I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare... 22 But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

A MULTICULTURAL MAN

Paul goes back to Derbe and all the way back to Lystra (sixty miles west of Derbe). It's an important visit, because it is in Lystra that Paul is introduced to Timothy. Just as **Silas had replaced Barnabas**, so **Timothy replaced John Mark**. Timothy was to play a key role in Paul's life, eventually becoming his right-hand man (1 Cor 4:17; 1 Thess 3:2; Phil 2:19). Timothy was also Paul's "true child in the faith" (1 Tim 1:2; cf 1 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 1:2).⁶

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 466.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 82–83.

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 466.

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 83.

Acts 16:1 | Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.

Like Paul and even Stephen before him, Timothy was a multi-cultural man. As a Hellenized Jew, he knew the worldly culture of Rome as well as the more separated culture of Israel. He would have spoken Hebrew as well as Greek, and probably Latin as well. Because of the conquests of Alexander the Great almost 400 years earlier, the language of the diverse peoples had a unifying language (koine Greek). Knowing Hebrew, Timothy would know the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the Greek translation, called the Septuagint.

A MAGNANIMOUS MAN

Timothy wasn't the strongest in his physical stature. He had a weak stomach, and at times could struggle with introversion and timidity. Yet he was well spoken of by his brothers and sisters in the churches.

Acts 16:2 | He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.

Timothy and his mother had been converted when Paul and Barnabas pioneered the work in the area. During the time that Paul had been away, young Timothy had made considerable progress. Indeed, he was considered a promising young man by the other believers.⁷

A MISSIONS-MINDED MAN

To have had a member of his entourage be of Jewish lineage and yet uncircumcised would have hampered his effectiveness among the Jews. It was at the very least a matter of missionary strategy to circumcise Timothy.

Acts 16:3 | 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 a Greek.

Many scholars have argued that Paul would never have asked Timothy to be circumcised, since he objected so strenuously to that rite in Galatians (*cf* 6:12ff; 5:11). That, however, is to overlook the fact that Galatians was written to Gentiles and Timothy was considered a Jew. There was no question of circumcising Gentiles. The Jerusalem Conference agreed on that. Gentiles would not be required to become Jews in order to be Christians. The converse was also true: Jews would not be required to abandon their Jewishness in order to become Christians.⁸

Paul's strategy as a Jew was to begin with evangelizing the Jewish synagogues. He expresses this to the Corinthians.

⁷ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 16:1b.

⁸ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 342–343.

1 Corinthians 9:20 | To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.

Circumcision, though not at all required for salvation, was an effective expression of Jewishness that would have endeared Timothy to the synagogue ministry.

A MATURE MAN

Timothy had grown up in Lystra. He likely saw Paul get executed by stoning and put to death. He likely saw Paul's lifeless body dragged out of the city. Yet, Timothy doesn't give up, even though he might be prone to that in his personality. He wasn't the biggest kid on the football team if you know what I mean. But his faith was a thousand times bigger than his gifts or abilities. He was like Captain America before he became Captain America. So, Timothy accompanied Paul back to the places where there was so much persecution.

Acts 16:4-5 | As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Paul and Silas and Timothy began with the churches of Galatia that they had reached on Paul's first missionary journey. There was much suffering and persecution from these cities, but this is what Jesus had promised.

John 15:18 | If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

Maturity and selflessness go hand-and-hand. Mature people don't make excuses. They don't cop out because it's hard. They do the hard thing. Their heart's desire is not ease and comfort, but whatever it takes to honor the Lord and expand his kingdom.

3. A NEW VISION RECEIVED (16:6-10)

Every congregation has a beginning. The church at Jerusalem began on Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the apostles (Acts 2). The church in Samaria began with Philip's preaching the word (Acts 8). The church at Philippi began with Paul hearing the Macedonian call (16:9). Paul and his team of missionaries were going to circle Asia and head back East, but the Holy Spirit forbid them to preach in Asia (south) and Bithynia (north). The Spirit gave Paul a vision of a man saying, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (16:9).

A FORBIDDEN DIRECTION

After visiting the churches he had founded, Paul tried to enter new territory for the Lord by traveling east into Asia Minor and Bithynia, **but the Lord closed the door.**⁹

Acts 16:6-7 | And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷And when they

⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 467.

had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit at this time to go to Bithynia, further north in Asia (now Turkey), but this doesn't mean the Spirit doesn't want these people to be saved. Peter later writes his first epistle "to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet 1:1). Since Peter names **Silas and John Mark in his letter to Bithynia**, et al (1 Pet 5:12-13), it seems they all may have been involved in planting and discipling those churches. Many churches are planted and flourish in this region, but Paul was forbidden to go there. God had others go there and do the work. The Spirit forbid Paul to go into northern Asia because at this time he wanted him to go to Europe and plant the first European church in the city of Philippi, there in Macedonia.

To hear that the Spirit is closing a door on ministry must have been discouraging to the apostle Paul. It is, however, comforting to know that even apostles are not always clear on God's direction for ministry. **We all have to rely on our walk with the Holy Spirit as he opens doors.**

A CLEAR VISION

As a result of the closed doors to northern Asia, they head to western Asia, over to **the port of Troas on the Aegean Sea**. They knew God would eventually reveal where he wanted them to go if they kept moving. At last, in dramatic fashion, he did so through a vision of a man from Macedonia in Europe.¹⁰

Acts 16:8-9 | So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Who is this "man of Macedonia"? Some have speculated that it might very well be Luke the physician, since he says, "Come over to... help us." In the next verse (16:10), Luke, the author of Acts, incorporates himself into the story. Though we don't know the identity of this man, it seems that there is a Gentile Christian working in Macedonia that gives an invitation through a vision to Paul and his team. The physician Luke joins the team at Troas. They immediately seek to make their journey into the Roman Province of Macedonia (which is today is Europe).

AN IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE

After Paul received the vision, he must have shared it with his traveling companions, for the result was they all immediately got ready and crossed over the sea to Macedonia. It was the official opening of Europe to Christianity, and with it the gospel began the long westward march that eventually brought it to us.¹¹

Acts 16:10 | And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

¹⁰ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 86.

¹¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 275.

In obedience Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke went straight through Asia to Macedonia (modern day Greece, Macedonia, and Bulgaria). It seems the Lord wanted the gospel to impact Philippi, an important port city. For the first time the gospel would be preached in Europe. Paul would share a special friendship with the Christians at Philippi. That friendship started in a strange way, which is described in the 16th chapter of Acts. Paul and his companions were on a missionary journey. Paul had his idea to go to Asia, but the Holy Spirit had other plans, so Paul and his companions caught the next ship to Macedonia, and proceeded to Philippi, its leading city.

What about you? Are you open to God changing your plans? This happens a lot in the Christian life. Are you walking with God in such a way that he is leading you? The Christian should strive for nothing less than God's perfect peace in his leading. That comes from a constant diet of the word while being led by the Holy Spirit.

4. A NEW CHURCH FOUNDED (16:11-15)

The Holy Spirit assembled the team even in the midst of dissention and disagreement. They have plans to go to Asia, but the Holy Spirit directs them to Europe. They have to throw their plans out the window, and they obey the Spirit and get on a boat for Greece.

THE PLACE OF THE NEW CHURCH

None of the team know exactly where they are going in Greece, but they end up in a major port city of Philippi.

Acts 16:11-12 | So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis,¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.

Philippi, named after Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, had become a Roman colony and was a bustling center of military activity, the leading city of eastern Macedonia. It was self-governing city, a "little Rome."¹² The total population of Philippi at the time of Paul's visit was nearly 10,000 with slaves making up about 20% of the population.¹³

Philippi became established because it was considered a port city, right off the Aegean Sea. It also was supplied with gold mines nearby. Most importantly, as a port city, people could be evangelized here and then like seeds, go to their own cities far away and bring the gospel they learned in Philippi. It's a wonderful strategy.

THE PEOPLE OF THE NEW CHURCH

Now we come to the direct providence of God where we learn we can trust God to introduce us to the people he is drawing to himself. It is here we first learn of the great Gentile fashionista businesswoman named Lydia. Lydia is from Thyatira, but she has a vacation home in Philippi. She's having a Bible study, minding her own business, when she runs into the apostle Paul.

¹² John Pollock. *The Apostle: The Life of Paul* (John Pollock Series) (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 123.

¹³ Eduard Verhoef, *Philippi: How Christianity Began in Europe: The Epistle to the Philippians and the Excavations at Philippi* (New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 9, 12.

Acts 16:13-14a | And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

Lydia is a rich woman with at least two homes. It's probably July or August of A.D. 49. She's studying the Bible on the shores of the Aegean Sea. Her house and position in life demonstrate that she is extremely wealthy for a woman of her day. She has a booming business in selling purple fabric for clothing. A "seller of purple" (16:14) meant Lydia sold purple clothes or cloth. At the time, such clothes were so expensive they were only worn by royalty and the rich.

Thyatira and Philippi are cities with booming economies. Lydia then is basically a Greek fashionista, CEO, on top of the fashion empire. Today we might say she has a house in Chicago and in Paris. She's a serious mover in her world. **Isn't it wonderful that God can humble someone like Lydia?** She's what the Bible calls a **"God-fearer."** Here's what that means. She's rejected paganism and polytheism. She does not believe that there are dozens of gods: god of the wind, the rain, the purple cloth; god of the sea, god of the fashion world. She's come to believe there is only one God ruling the universe. So a God-fearer is that she is a monotheist. She's in the synagogue. She's listening to the teaching of the Jews. She's trying to live a moral life. I want you to see how God goes after her. She is an intellect. She is a seeker. She understands the law, if she knows the Torah. She knows she needs forgiveness. She knows she needs a blood sacrifice. She needs atonement. She needs to be justified before God. But she's confused. Enter Paul.

Acts 16:14b | The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

Paul enters into what is basically a women's Bible study and pauses Nancy Leigh DeMoss app and begins to teach them. Paul basically connects the dots for them. God opens her eyes. Lydia is a thinker. She's an intellect. She's a God fearer. She is listening to the word of God, and she experiences the wisdom of God when God opens her eyes. After her conversion, she "constrained" the missionaries to use this house as a base of operations, so it must have been much larger than needed. Later, we find out that her home in Philippi became the place where the new church met (16:40).

How and why did Lydia come to faith in Christ? "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." The Spirit alone draws people to God and opens their eyes so they can see. God opened the eyes of Lydia. God can do this. I want you to hear the testimony of a guy named Becket Cook.¹⁴ He was a gay fashion designer in Hollywood.

He's out at a coffee shop in Hollywood, and he looks over and sees a group of young people talking about the Lord with Bibles open on the table. They are talking about Jesus, and finally he turns around and says, "Are you guys Christians?" And they said yes, and they then explained to him the gospel. Now remember this is a guy who's designed sets for Oprah and Katy Perry, and Paris Hilton. So, he asks this group of young Christians,

¹⁴ Becket Cook from Nathaniel Banister, "Being Gay Was No Longer Who I Was': The Supernatural Moment This Hollywood Designer Met Jesus Christ," CBN News, February 18, 2022, <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2022/february/being-gay-was-no-longer-who-i-was-the-supernatural-moment-this-hollywood-designer-met-jesus-christ>.

“What does your church in Hollywood believe about homosexuality?” And they said, “Well, you know, we believe it's a sin.” So, this gay fashion designer really appreciated how frank and honest they were. They leave him by inviting him to church that Sunday. Sunday comes around, and he knows he needs to go this **Bible preaching church in Hollywood**, where he'd been invited. Listen to his testimony once he arrived.

The pastor comes out and he starts preaching on Romans chapter 7, and something strange started happening. Everything he was saying, every word he was saying, every sentence he was saying started to resonate this truth in my mind, in my heart, and I didn't know why. I was on the edge of my seat, literally on the edge of my seat. It was the first time I had really heard the gospel and understood it. And before he left, he invited people to get prayed with on the side of the church.¹⁵

He goes forward for prayer, and the prayer is so loving and clear. Listen how he explains his conversion during the prayer time.

Suddenly, the Holy Spirit just floods me, and God revealed himself to me in that moment. And he's like, “You're now adopted into my kingdom. Welcome.” And I was like, “Whoa!” I just like started bawling, hysterically balling. And in that moment, I knew in the core of my being that being gay was no longer who I was. And I didn't care because I had just met Jesus Christ. I now no longer live for a happiness from the world. It's a joy that comes from Christ. With God, I feel this unconditional love from him that will never leave. He'll never leave or forsake me. I'm happy to leave that dead man and dead life behind because Jesus Christ is worth it.¹⁶

This is the kind of movement in people's lives we ought to expect as the Spirit moves. This is not just for the time of the book of Acts. This is for now. It's not just for Hollywood types, but for us. We are all testimonies to the Becket Cooks and the Lydias and the Philippian jailers. We all need the eyes of our heart opened by the Holy Spirit.

THE PROFESSION OF THE NEW CHURCH

There is no church, no elders, no new members' class. It's just Paul and his companions. Lydia comes to true faith in the Lord, and the fruit of her new life is immediately obvious. She wants to be baptized!

Acts 16:15 | And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

Lydia and her whole household chose to follow the Lord in believers' baptism. She also started the church of Philippi in her living room. Lydia's reputation changed with her baptism. She wasn't just the fashionista of Philippi. Now her main identity could not be the style maven of Macedonia. Now she is first and foremost a follower of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATIONS

Application Questions

1. Are you in a place of joyful obedience in your life?

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

2. Are you ready to throw out your best laid plans?
3. Are you ready to launch out into a new ministry?

1. Are you in a place of joyful obedience in your life? Are you fulfilling your spiritual calling? Are you fanning into flame the spiritual gifts that God has given you? You don't have to be an evangelist missionary to be used of God. Remember those young people in the coffee shop who pointed Becket Cook to Christ. How many people are like that all around you? Are you in a place of joyful obedience in your life? Because if you are the Lydias and the Becketts of this world will be led to you by the Holy Spirit.

2. Are you ready to throw out your best laid plans? Plan A, B, C, and D didn't work. Are you ready to scrap your plans and come to a place of total surrender to God? Sometimes the greatest obstacles to God's will in our life is our own plans. We were saved by the Spirit of God. Do you think we can be perfected now by the flesh? Stop trying to live the Christian life in your own power. Find rest and surrender in Christ. Stop trying to change your marriage and start serving your spouse. Stop complaining about your job and start serving the lost at your workplace. Stop looking at the greener grass in everyone else's life, and water your own grass.

3. Are you ready to launch out into a new ministry? Spring is coming. So many opportunities are going to be opening up here at Living Hope. We are planning on evangelism teams once the weather gets nicer. It may include door to door evangelism and street preaching. It will also include a lot of praying for the lost. We want to reach them at the murder mill abortion centers. We have plans to go into the city of Chicago, and partner with a church there, sharing the gospel on the street corners. We want to reach people wherever they are: in the streets and in their own homes. Are you ready? You don't have to preach. You can sing and bring people around to hear good gospel singing. You can pray. Every one of us can go to these places as a team and pray. We are all qualified for that. But are you willing to get uncomfortable and launch out into new evangelistic ministry?

Conclusion

Whatever your plans are, you need to submit them to God. You need to surrender your life and your plans to Jesus Christ. All your best programs and ideas cannot draw people to Christ. But we need to be in a place where God can use us, stirring up the flames of our lives in service to Christ.

There is a common saying, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans!" Years ago, I met a young **former Muslim man named Ahmed**. My friend had introduced us. I told them, "Don't trust him just because he says he's a Christian. Muslims are allowed to lie. He probably wants to blow our church up!" How little faith I had. I had never ever thought about ministry to Muslim peoples. Most that I knew who wanted to reach Muslims sold all they had and started a business of sorts to be among them and reach them. Little did I know that God was going to open up an entirely new ministry of church planting, and this young man, Dr. Ahmed, would be like an Arabian Saul of Tarsus. Now there are seven church plants among Arabic speaking peoples that our church supports!

You never know what God is going to do. **There are so many Lydias and Ahmeds out there that he wants to send you way.** The best thing you can do is be tender to the voice of the Holy Spirit and be ready to throw out any of your best plans for the plans of the God who is building his church.