

# Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ  
Through the Holy Spirit

## Lesson 14

### Day One: New Vision and Doors of Opportunity

Now ready to launch a second missionary journey, this time Paul and Silas reverse the order of the previous trip, coming first to Derbe and Lystra, where they enlist the aid of a young but eager disciple to replace John Mark as Paul's assistant. From there as Paul attempted to travel east in to Asia, God redirected him into Europe where Paul received a vision in the night of a man pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia to help us." His response to that call would allow him to take the light of the gospel to a very diverse set of individuals and circumstances.

It's comforting to know that closed doors are sometimes used by God to direct us just as much as open doors. The apostles themselves were not always clear where and how God wanted to direct them. Disappointment we learn is often followed by uncertainty, causing God's servants to not rely on their instincts but rather on the Holy Spirit to lead the way.

We will see in our chapter this week that not every sinner comes to Christ in the same manner. Timothy responded to the scripture taught by his mother and grandmother, then by the Apostle Paul. Lydia was converted through a conversation at a prayer meeting, and the jailer met Christ through the drama of a prison earthquake. In one moment he wanted to take his life, and in the next he was praising God! They were all very different individuals meeting Christ in different circumstances, yet every one of them transformed by the loving grace of God.

### Read Acts 16:1–40.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord. Write down your first impressions.

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**Memory verse: Phil. 1:6** Write out the verse; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

*Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you,  
will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

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Timothy was the son of a mixed marriage, his father being Greek, and his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois both Jewish. These two women raised him knowing the scriptures and subsequently, Paul reached him with the gospel on his previous journey when Timothy witnessed firsthand Paul's sufferings. Now it was Paul's desire to take the young man with him and, to avoid any opposition from the Jews, he decided that Timothy would become circumcised. This seemed to contradict the decision of the Jerusalem Council; however, we will see it was for good reason. The council's decision meant that it was not necessary to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul's concern over Timothy was not an issue of salvation but rather service. Paul had Timothy circumcised so as not to offend the Jews they would be working alongside.

Paul's decision was controversial but wise, since his work with the Jews would have been made considerably more difficult by ignoring Timothy's situation. This small Jewish community in Lystra would have considered an uncircumcised child of a Jewish mother an apostate [deserter] to the faith. Since Timothy was already a believer, his circumcision had nothing to do with salvation; but Paul wanted to remove the any stigma from this young man as far as the Jewish community in Lystra was concerned.

1. At times it becomes prudent to make the hard call in order *not* to offend other believers. To understand a little more of why Paul made this call, examine the following two passages of scripture and record how/why Paul's mindset influenced his decision. Keep in mind that the integrity of the ministry is the priority for God's servants.

a. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

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b. Romans 14:13–19

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It is no stretch of the imagination to say that Timothy was Paul's favorite companion and co-laborer on his ministry journeys. Paul would later write about him to the Philippian believers: "I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state" (Philippians 2:19). Timothy would go on to become a major player on Paul's missionary team. We will learn more about this on Day Four of our lesson.

## Day Two: The First Convert in Europe is a Woman!

Read Acts 16:11–15 for review.

Paul and his team traveled 150 miles to the port of Philippi, a bustling commercial city known as “Rome away from Rome.” We notice they did not immediately go to minister, but paused to rest, pray, and plan their next step. Then on the Sabbath, they walked a mile out of town to the banks of the Gangites River because they had no Jewish synagogue inside the city. In cases where there were not ten males present to form a synagogue, believers gathered under the sky and near the water where they could be easily found by other Christians. We can’t help but be drawn in by this quiet idyllic scene and how it would naturally lend itself to worship and prayer.

It is now twenty years after Pentecost as we see Paul and his companions hundreds of miles from Antioch, sitting by the river discussing spiritual matters. Luke does not need to mention Paul sharing the gospel—it is understood. It is however, striking that the group discussing scripture with Paul consists entirely of women. To appreciate the scene, we must note that Jewish rabbis believed it was better for the words of the law to be burned rather than delivered to a woman! That belief was no longer Paul’s perspective; he’d been obedient to the Lord, who had now prepared the way.

### Deeper Discoveries ~

Here we have a beautiful moment in a tranquil setting—Creator God at work among His creation in nature and in the human heart—preparing a soul for eternal life with Him. Read verses 11–15 again; don’t take them at face value. Put yourself on the riverbank . . .

Observe: Luke telling us that Paul didn’t rush out into ministry immediately, he rested his body and listened to the Holy Spirit direct him (v. 12).

Ask yourself [To determine a lesson]: Why resting and listening would be invaluable to our spiritual wellbeing and service to God.

Ask yourself: Who was Lydia? What do we know about her? Why had she come that day? What was she looking for? Why had Paul come that day? How does Lydia respond to the words spoken by Paul? In what way had God gone before Paul to prepare new converts for himself? The scene will come alive to you if you’ll let it. As it does you will sense yourself appreciating what you’re reading. Look for a lesson and an application in each verse.

v. 13 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

v. 14 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

v. 15 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

Lydia’s apparent gift of hospitality may have opened a future door for the believers to meet in her home for worship and prayer. She no doubt became a valuable contributor to the ongoing work in Philippi and to the missionary ministry of Paul (Philippians 4:14–19).

## Day Three:

## Songs in the Night

Read Acts 16:16–40 for review.

A demon-possessed slave girl shouting the truth and religious magistrates ordering Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned—the result of Satan’s hindering work. Yet Luke presents us with the beautiful scene of the gospel light brightly shining. With their feet in prison stocks, a beaten and battered Paul and Silas turn their grim prison cell into a chamber of prayer and praise. Not only did they sing, all the prisoners listened to them and then God met them with another miracle!

1. Briefly state what took place next in v. 26?
  - a. What was the initial reaction of the jailor? v. 27
  - b. Paul’s focus was on the jailor rather than escaping; as a result, what did Paul do? v. 28

Astonished that every prisoner was accounted for, the jailor uttered the most important words anyone can ask: “What must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house (v. 32). They had the right answer—faith in Jesus Christ.

2. What action following this amazing moment testified to the transformation of the jailor? Vv. 33–34

Instead of hiding, Paul attempts to gain a formal apology from the authorities by choosing to assert his Roman citizenship against the injustice he and Silas had endured. They had not broken any Roman laws and were innocent of any wrong; there had been no hearing or opportunity to defend themselves. It was critical for the respectability of the believers in the city that the magistrates take responsibility, which they did with great fear and embarrassment. Asked to leave the city, Paul and Silas pay one more visit to encourage the believers.

3. When things were at their worst, Paul and Silas were reduced to using the only weapons at their disposal; and as it turns out, *prayer* and *praise* are enough to usher in a miracle! Personal: Can *you* think of a time when you were at your lowest and all you could do was look up? And in lifting your praise to God, you found Him releasing you not *from* your suffering but *in* it? What did you learn?

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“It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but the skillful singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to ready by. Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of men.” (Charles Haddon Spurgeon)

## Day Four:

## Timothy, Paul's Son in the Faith

Timothy's name is mentioned more often in the salutation of Paul's epistles than any other. With the exception of the Thessalonian letters, his name is accompanied each time by a term of endearment: *our brother* (2 Corinthians, Colossians, Philemon); *bondservant* (Philippians); *a true son in the faith* (1 Timothy); *a beloved son* (2 Timothy). Paul considered himself Timothy's mentor, investing his time and energy in this young man's life because he counted him worthwhile to the ministry. Throughout their relationship, Paul commended the positive aspects of Timothy's character and corrected the negative to help him develop to his full potential.

1. Look carefully at the selected scripture passage in 1 Timothy 4:12–16, with an eye to see what Paul saw in Timothy. Note the instruction or admonition that was deliberately intended to help him heed his ministry.
  - a. Verse 12: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Verse 13: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Verse 14: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Verse 15: \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Verse 16: \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Paul's second letter to Timothy contains the last words he shared with his son in the faith. Put yourself in Timothy's shoes for a moment; what do these verses in 2 Timothy tell you to expect from *your* own experience as a servant of Christ?
  - a. 1:6–7: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. 1:8–9: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. 2:15: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - d. 2:20–21 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Personal: Would you like to be a "Timothy"—to have someone mentor you in your Christian walk? Pray and ask God for a *parent in the faith* who will model for you what it means to follow Christ and be used by Him to serve others. Perhaps speak to your group leader or pastor about some guidance in this area.
  
4. Are you discipling a "Timothy" right now? Does someone look to *you* as their role model? If so, thank God for trusting you with this responsibility. Write their name down, noting the qualities you notice and where they could use a little encouragement. Make an effort in the coming week to reach out with a visit or phone call, or email to bless them.

## Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

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2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

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3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

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4. Personal: Write a note of thanks this week to someone who has been a good Christian example for you. Tell them how much it has meant for you to "see" Jesus in them.

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**Prayer Time:** Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.

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