

WHEN DOING GOD'S WORK IS INTERRUPTED

Leader pages on pp. 152-155

THE POINT:
GOD MAY INTERRUPT US
TO MOVE OUR MINISTRY
IN A NEW DIRECTION.

ACTS 16:4-15

MEMORY VERSE

⁴ As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for the people to observe.

⁵ **So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.**

⁶ They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia; they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

⁷ When they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

⁸ Passing by Mysia they went down to Troas.

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!"

¹⁰ After he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis,

¹² and from there to Philippi, a Roman colony and a leading city of the district of Macedonia. We stayed in that city for several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there.

¹⁴ A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying.

¹⁵ After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

KEYWORDS

Decisions (v. 4)—Not optional suggestions from the Jerusalem council but decisions that carried the authority of the apostles and elders from the Jerusalem church.

Paul had a vision (v. 9)—The Greek word means "that which is seen" and refers to a revelation of some sort.

A place of prayer (v. 13)—Paul's custom was to first preach at the city's Jewish synagogue on the first Sabbath after arriving in the city.

Thyatira (v. 14)—An important economic center in Asia Minor in the Lycus River Valley. Later, it contained one of the seven churches located in Asia Minor in the book of Revelation.

HOW SHOULD BELIEVERS HANDLE DIVINE INTERRUPTIONS?

On May 21, 2020, twin brothers Zak and Max Prizant took their first step in their journey across America on foot. They started on San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. They finished on the Brooklyn Bridge on New Year's Eve, completing their 3000-mile journey and raising \$15,000 for Covid relief.

Now, repeat that journey 2.5 more times. That's how far Paul and his companions traveled (over 10,000 miles) as pioneer missionaries. They faced many life-threatening hazards, and unlike the Prizants, they endured physical attacks and prison time to spread the gospel and start churches.

Of all the experiences they had, something unusual happened during the second missionary journey. God paused their plans, rerouting their mission efforts. Let's take a road trip with Paul and lessons in listening to God.

Be Open to New Directions

// Acts 16:4-5

Approximately five years had passed since Paul and Barnabas completed the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). Now, Paul was anxious to get going again. He partnered with Silas this time, adding Timothy (16:1-3) and later, Luke (notice the

shift from "they" in v. 8 to "we" in vv. 10-40). What they found was incredibly exciting.

In every town, they met believers and churches that God had created through the gospel work of Paul and company years prior. Every salvation story was God's affirmation of their sacrifice and faithfulness.

Think of Paul's deep gratitude to God when he met Timothy and his family in Lystra.

- Three years before, Paul preached the gospel there and they tried to murder him (Acts 14:19-20). Whatever interest in the gospel existed in Lystra would have been violently put down.
- Returning to Lystra on this second mission trip, Paul discovered that the gospel seed sown in hard soil had not only taken root but had brought generational fruit. Here was a grandmother, mother, and son who had become believers (2 Tim. 1:5).
- Paul was so impressed with Timothy that he invited him to join the team, launching a mentoring partnership that would continue for the next seventeen years.



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- Timothy became Paul's trusted companion and representative who developed into an able pastor and leader. His ministry and work made a gospel impact for decades past Paul's life.

To be a part of God's work is humbling and amazing. Timothy's conversion story was repeated many times over. Churches were growing. The gospel was advancing. And these men were a part of it all. Paul walked into every town, synagogue, and gospel opportunity consciously surrendered to the Spirit's leading and power (1 Cor. 2:3-4). He encouraged us to do the same.

"The truth is that God can do anything He pleases through an ordinary person who is fully dedicated to Him," wrote Henry Blackaby.²⁹ God can use you in His work, as well. As you serve others in His name, He will work through you to accomplish His will. There's nothing better.

WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN SOMEONE'S OBEDIENCE TO GOD BEAR FRUIT IN ANOTHER PERSON'S LIFE?

Follow the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

// Acts 16:6-10

After strengthening the churches that had been planted across Galatia and Phrygia (southern Turkey), Paul and his companions experienced something unusual: they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to share the gospel in Asia. Earlier in Acts, Peter and John were told by the Jewish religious leaders to stop teaching and preaching about Jesus.

So they called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John answered them, "Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18-20). But Paul's experience in Acts 16 was different. It was God saying "no." "They had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak a word in Asia" (v. 6). We're not told how they reacted to this, but we can think of a few questions they might have.

- "Jesus, didn't You tell us to make disciples in all the nations?"
- "Don't You want to reach multiple cultures who will then take the gospel with them when they return home?"
- "Why are You preventing us from saying anything about You in this region?"

Later, God would open the door for the gospel to go into Asia, which include the city of Ephesus. Paul would spend three years there (Acts 20:31), establishing such a strong work "that all the



DIGGING DEEPER THE DAY OF PENTECOST

The day of Pentecost marked a transformative moment in Christian history, as the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to preach the gospel in many languages, reaching people from diverse nations (Acts 2:1-12). This moment ignited a movement where new believers became native disciples, sharing Christ within their own cultures. Paul's encounter in Philippi is an example of this gospel spread through Lydia, a successful businesswoman from Asia. She became the first recorded convert in Europe. This was totally opposite of what was commonly acceptable in Jewish culture, but what God used to fulfill His plans for all nations to know of Him. Pentecost and Lydia's story demonstrate how God uses cultural diversity to advance His kingdom. Indigenous disciples bring unique perspectives and influence to their communities, showing that the gospel transcends cultural boundaries. Though Paul could have delivered the gospel to Asia, what are some reasons it was more effective for Lydia to do so?

How might God be calling you to share your faith or support others in spreading the gospel?

residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). Timothy would eventually pastor the Ephesian church (Tim. 1:3). But at this point, the Holy Spirit stopped them in their tracks. We can only speculate about how He guided them to this conclusion, but we know this: His "no" was clear.

Next Paul and his companions headed to the northernmost province of Bithynia. The team made it to Mysia and "tried to go into Bithynia . . . but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (v. 7). Again, we know that God would reach the people of Bithynia later (2 Cor. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:1), but Jesus had other priorities for them at this time. He redirected Paul through the Holy Spirit's leading. So, they went due west to the port city of Troas on the Aegean Sea.

During the night, Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man on his feet, pleading with Paul. "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!" (v. 9). Now we know why the Holy Spirit had shut down Paul's plans. Jesus wanted missionaries in Macedonia. The next morning, Paul told the team what happened and immediate preparations were made to cross the Aegean Sea and get going with the gospel (v. 10).

HOW CAN WE PERSEVERE WHEN THERE ARE ROADBLOCKS TO SHARING THE GOSPEL?

Aren't you grateful for the Holy Spirit's guidance? Jesus works through the Holy Spirit to reveal just enough of His plan to get us to take the next step with Him. He closes and open doors to guide us to where He wants to work. We don't always understand these changes. We may not like what is happening. But His "no" is always given to get us to His "yes." And isn't that where we want to be?

God Opens New Avenues for Ministry //

Acts 16:11-15

Luke joined the team in Troas, so four missionaries set sail for Neapolis, 150 miles away by sea.³⁰ With good winds, they arrived in two days, with an overnight stop in Samothrace. They then make the ten-mile walk inland to one of Macedonia's primary cities, Philippi. A few facts about Philippi give us perspective.



- The east-west route connecting Rome with Macedonia's eastern provinces ran directly through Philippi, pouring trade and culture into the city.
- Philippi was a Roman colony, which means the emperor had ordered Roman citizens to live there, with the promise that they would be free of tribute and taxes. This made Philippi a "Rome away from Rome"³¹ and a desirable destination whose wealth "outstripped other cities in this district of Macedonia."³²
- Luke loved Philippi. He spent more ink on what God did there than any other location in Acts. He remained in the city when the mission team moved on (Acts 17:1). Some scholars believe Philippi was Luke's hometown.

Keeping to their strategy, Paul and his companions would have wanted to begin at the synagogue, but there wasn't one. Since it was on the Sabbath day, it was likely that Jewish people were in this group. We are also introduced to Lydia who was identified as a "God fearer." This suggests that she was a Gentile who had recognized in Judaism something wise and deep. She possibly had come to believe in the God revealed in the Old Testament.

So, at this place of prayer, a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles gathered, which included women. When Paul and his friends arrived, they spoke with the women who had gathered.

This was not a familiar script for Paul and his team, but they had learned to trust God's unusual ways.

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They sat down (a typical posture for a rabbi) and talked about Jesus with these women. We discover that Lydia was a businesswoman from Thyatira in Asia. Isn't that interesting? God had forbidden any word to be spoken in Asia, but He conveniently brought this woman from Asia to Philippi at just the right time.

Lydia specialized in fine linen treated with a rare purple dye extracted from mollusks found in the Mediterranean Sea. Purple clothing became a sign of rank and status and was worn only by the wealthy (Luke 16:19) and the royal.³³ While Lydia the God-fearer was listening to Paul speak about Christ, "The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying" (v. 14). Her joy in Jesus was contagious. Likely, she told her household what had happened, and they also received Christ. They were all baptized, declaring their faith.

Paul had no idea what God was doing when He interrupted his ministry plans. He just wanted to reach a great city with the gospel. But God wanted to give him something greater. Because he obeyed God, we have had the gospel for more than two thousand years.

WHEN HAS GOD OPENED A DOOR FOR YOU TO MINISTER IN AN UNEXPECTED WAY?

DID YOU KNOW?

This session highlights how God's interruptions can redirect ministry for His greater purpose. Paul and his companions intended to preach in Asia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them, guiding them instead to Macedonia through a vision. This redirection led to Lydia's conversion in Philippi, a pivotal moment in spreading the gospel to Europe. This passage reminds us that God is dynamic, constantly working in ways we may not expect. Flexibility in ministry means surrendering our plans and trusting God's guidance, even when it disrupts our expectations. Trusting the Planner requires faith that His perspective is greater than ours and that His redirection is always purposeful. Are you open to trusting Him fully, even if it means stepping into the unknown? Take a moment to consider how you can align yourself with where God is working.

Biblical Truth: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

How might God be redirecting your plans or ministry efforts today?

LIVE IT

This week and the weeks to come, how can you be open to God's redirection?

Consider the impact of Paul's obedience to God's leadership in his life. What you do for Christ matters; singing, praying, teaching, caring, loving your neighbor as yourself, sharing the gospel—all these will bear fruit that remains. "What we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted."³⁴

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- **Seek God's will.** Set aside time this week for a spiritual life check-up. Ask God to reveal His will in specific areas of your life. Pray for an opportunity to get involved in ministry service. Read and meditate on Proverbs 3:5-6 for direction.
- **Stay spiritually attuned.** Always pay attention to the possibility of a gospel opportunity. Take time to review key Bible passages to use to share the gospel. Be deliberately surrendered to the Spirit's leading and power (1 Cor. 2:3-4).
- **Tell others about Jesus.** Read Romans 10:14-15. Lydia heard the gospel from Paul and God opened her heart to believe. Who can you tell about Jesus this week?

DAILY READINGS

1. MOLD ME // ACTS 16:4-5

Paul, the seasoned apostle, and Timothy, his young protégé, illustrate a beautiful relationship on mentorship, partnering in effectively spreading the gospel. They were empowered by their faith to establish Christian churches and assist them in strengthening their faith. There are always opponents, but they did not allow these interruptions by the doubters to dissuade them. Paul, Timothy, and the elders' testimonies led many to embrace Christ. Verse 5 tells us that "the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." Like Paul, we are called to walk alongside new disciples like Timothy and build the church. Today, with purpose, look at the young people we can disciple in our congregations and our communities and become mentors.

Lord, mold me into a mentor who reflects Your image. Amen.

2. GET READY FOR A DETOUR // ACTS 16:6-10

What do you do when the Holy Spirit commands you to stop? Let us ponder that thought for a minute. In Acts 16:6-10, Paul and his companions were on their way to spread the gospel throughout Asia, but the Holy Spirit said, "Stop! Do Not Enter!" Paul understood the Holy Spirit's urgings and walked away from that area. Then, the Holy Spirit sent him a vision of a man in Macedonia pleading for his help. He knew this was a new assignment and trusted the Holy Spirit to change directions. We experience unexpected changes in life, whether it is a job offer out of town or a detour on the road. Remember, if God is leading us, we should go.

Father, lead me in Your direction. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

3. OPEN TO THE SPIRIT // ACTS 16:11-15

The poem by Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken," illustrates the anguish of decision-making. It implies that each path is unknown. Isn't it good to know we do not have to make decisions all by ourselves? The Holy Spirit was sent to guide us, just like it guides Paul and his missionary team throughout Philippi.

Despite being redirected, Paul remains devoted, and God continues to work through him. In Philippi, he encounters Lydia, a businesswoman who sells purple fabric. Upon hearing Paul, Lydia fully converts to Christianity. She became the first recorded European Gentile to convert to Christianity. Let us stay open to the Holy Spirit's directions so we can share the message of the Living God.

God, help us spread Your word to those around us. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

4. EMBRACE THE INTERRUPTIONS // PSALM 37:23-24

Each day, we are interrupted by something or someone: spouses, children, coworkers, emails, phone calls, traffic, contractors, and even God. To us, these interruptions are an inconvenience. However, God is in the midst, guiding and redirecting us for the sake of the gospel. Whether called to journey to a new land like Abraham or find prison our home, like Joseph, God's plan will always succeed. As Psalm 37:23-24 reminds us, "A person's steps are established by the LORD, and he takes pleasure in his way. Though he falls, he will not be overwhelmed because the LORD supports him with his hand." God is a faithful protector to all who believe and trust Him.

Lord, help me to embrace the interruptions as You direct my life. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

5. LISTENING TO HIS VOICE // JOHN 10:27

John 10:27 says, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me." Are we listening to hear God's voice? In the Bible, we see God interrupting his servants to fulfill his plans. Moses was interrupted by God to lead a nation, Jesus was interrupted by the crowds to save a young girl's life, and Paul was interrupted by the Holy Spirit to reroute his path to a different land. These interruptions became a fulfillment of God's plan. So, what does this tell us? Interruptions are a part of life, and we are still called to do the work of ministry. Therefore, be attentive to God's voice and trust interruptions are for a greater purpose.

Father, In every interruption, let me hear Your voice. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

Week 12 – The New Creation and Eternal Hope

Scripture Readings: Revelation 21–22; Romans 8:18–25; 2 Peter 3:8–13

The Bible ends where it began—God dwelling with His people. But this time it is not a garden but a city: the New Jerusalem. There will be no more death, sorrow, or pain. God will wipe away every tear, and His people will reign with Him forever. This is the hope we cling to: creation renewed, sin defeated, and eternal fellowship with God. The story of Scripture ends in victory and joy, reminding us that our present sufferings are not the end of the story.

JESUS TOLD HIM, "I AM THE
WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE
LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE
FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME.

John 14:6