

SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST 2026

August 2

Thomas, the Hesitant Believer
Printed Text: John 11:14-16; 14:5~8; 20:24-29, 21:1-2
Devotional Reading: Psalm 91:1-6
Background Scripture: John 11:14-16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29; 21:1-2
Key Text: John 20:27

August 9

Stephen, the Unwavering Martyr
Printed Text: Acts 6:7-10, 7:54-60
Devotional Reading: Luke 23:32-43
Background Scripture: Acts 6-7
Key Text: Acts 6:8

August 16

Saul of Tarsus, the Unlikely Apostle
Printed Text: Acts 22:3-15
Devotional Reading: Psalm 86:1-10
Background Scripture: Acts 7:58-8:3; 9:1-31; 22:3-15
Key Text: Acts 22:14-15

August 23

Timothy, a Leader With a Legacy
Printed Text: 2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16
Devotional Reading: Matthew 12:46-50
Background Scripture: Acts 16:1-3; Philippians 2:19-22;
2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16
Key Text: 2 Timothy 1:5

August 30

Lydia, the Generous Hostess
Printed Text: Acts 16:11-15, 40
Devotional Reading: James 2:14-26
Background Scripture: Acts 16:11-40
Key Text: Acts 16:15

Zoom Sunday School Classes – 2 August 2026, 09:00 AM EST

Meeting ID: 848-9423-0612

Pass Code: 669872

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84894230612?pwd=Zk1ESitzbGZwTlJyV21UZXY5aTVPZz09>

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Background Scripture: John 11:14-16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29; 21:1-2
Key Text: John 20:27

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Seek the LORD - Isaiah 55:6-11
Tuesday: Wait for Christ's Mercy - Jude 20-25
Wednesday: Jesus Is the Way - John 14:1-7
Thursday: Call on the Lord - Psalm 50:7-15
Friday: God is Merciful - Deuteronomy 4:27-31
Saturday: Jesus Appears to the Disciples - John 20:19-23
Sunday: Jesus Appears to Thomas - John 20:24-29

KEEP IN MIND:

"Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'" (John 20:27, NRSV)

Lesson Aim:

KNOW why Jesus is the Word in our lives;
REFLECT on how Jesus gives us direction; and
DECIDE to confidently trust Jesus as "the way, the truth, and the life" for the world.

Background

During His ministry, Jesus repeatedly prepared the disciples for His suffering and death. In John 13, Jesus tells the disciples that one of them would betray Him (v. 21). At the same time, He also informs the disciples that He will soon be leaving them and that they could not follow Him (v. 33). Undoubtedly, these things disturbed the disciples. When Peter asks Jesus where He was going, Jesus responds, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward" (John 13:36). It is not difficult to see why the disciples would have been troubled. They were coming to grips with the fact that the One they had given up everything to follow was now telling them that He was about to leave them to go to a place where they could not follow. It must have seemed as though they were losing the very reason for which they had existed for the past three years.

Lesson Commentary:

The Death of Lazarus (John 11:14-16, NRSV)

¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead.

¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus communicates directly and without metaphor. Previously, He had spoken of Lazarus "falling asleep," a common euphemism for death in both Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. Here, Jesus shifts to a straightforward declaration, emphasizing the importance of clarity in understanding His mission and the events to follow. This moment underscores Jesus' role as a teacher who ensures His disciples grasp the gravity of the situation. It also highlights the necessity of clear communication in matters of faith and doctrine.

Jesus's statement about Lazarus's death is a prelude to demonstrating His authority over life and death, reinforcing His divine nature. Jesus speaks plainly to His disciples, highlighting the need for clear communication in teaching and understanding spiritual truths. The disciples are faced with the reality of death, yet Jesus's forthcoming miracle encourages faith even when circumstances seem hopeless.

The disciples often struggled with fear and misunderstanding, yet moments like this reveal their dedication. Thomas expresses a readiness to face death alongside Jesus, showing a profound, albeit somber, loyalty. This echoes the call to discipleship, where Jesus teaches about taking up one's cross (Matthew 16:24-25). The statement foreshadows the eventual martyrdom many disciples would face and highlights the cost of following Christ. It also connects to the theme of resurrection and life, central to the chapter, as Jesus later raises Lazarus from the dead, pointing to His power over death.

Thomas' statement reflects a willingness to face danger and even death for the sake of being with Jesus. As believers, we are called to have courage in our faith, even when it leads us into difficult or dangerous situations. Thomas' words, though perhaps spoken with a mix of bravery and misunderstanding, remind us of the depth of commitment required in following Christ. True discipleship may involve sacrifice and risk. Thomas is often remembered for his doubt, but here he shows a boldness that is commendable. Doubt can coexist with faith, and God can use our questions to deepen our understanding and commitment. Thomas addresses his fellow disciples, indicating the importance of community in the journey of faith. We are not called to walk alone but to encourage and support one another in our walk with Christ.

1. In what ways does the raising of Lazarus foreshadow Jesus's own resurrection, and how does this connection deepen our understanding of the Easter account?
2. How can we apply the principle of clear communication, as demonstrated by Jesus, in our own spiritual conversations and teachings?

Jesus, the Way to the Father (John 14:5-8, NRSV)

⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

Thomas' statement reflects the disciples' confusion about Jesus' teachings regarding His departure. In the context of John 14, Jesus is speaking about His return to the Father, a concept that was difficult for the disciples to grasp. The Jewish expectation of the Messiah was often a political or earthly kingdom, so the idea of Jesus leaving was perplexing. This moment highlights the disciples' limited understanding, which would later be clarified through the Holy Spirit in John 16:13. As believers, we should not hesitate to seek clarity and ask questions in our faith journey. Like Thomas, we may face moments of doubt or confusion. Trusting in Jesus as the way provides assurance and direction in uncertain times

Jesus declares Himself as the exclusive path to God, emphasizing His role as the mediator between humanity and the Father. In claiming to be the truth, Jesus asserts His identity as the ultimate revelation of God. Jesus, as the Word made flesh (John 1:14), is the full expression of God's truth, contrasting with the deception of the world and the lies of Satan (John 8:44). Jesus as the life signifies His power over death and His role as the source of eternal life. This is consistent with His earlier declarations in John 11:25, where He states, "I am the resurrection and the life." The life Jesus offers is not merely physical but spiritual and eternal, fulfilling the promise of abundant life (John 10:10).

"No one comes to the Father except through Me," underscores the exclusivity of Jesus as the sole means of access to God. It reflects the Jewish understanding of God as the Father of Israel yet expands it to a personal relationship available to all through Christ. This exclusiveness is a central tenet of Christian doctrine, affirming that salvation is found in no one else (Acts 4:12). Jesus emphasizes that He is the only mediator between God and humanity, fulfilling the role of the high priest who intercedes on behalf of the people (Hebrews 4:14-16). This statement challenges any notion of alternative paths to God, reinforcing the necessity of faith in Christ for reconciliation with the Father.

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. To know Jesus is to know God, which calls believers to deepen their relationship with Christ to understand God's nature and will. Jesus asserts the unity between Himself and the Father. This reflects the theological concept of the Trinity, where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct yet one.

Jesus concludes with a profound declaration of His divine identity. By seeing Jesus, the disciples have seen the Father, underscoring the incarnation, God made flesh. It also foreshadows the future vision of God in the New Jerusalem, where His servants will see His face (Revelation 22:4). Jesus embodies the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), making the divine accessible to humanity. In Jewish tradition, God is often seen as transcendent and unknowable, but Jesus reveals that knowing Him is equivalent to knowing the Father. In John 10:30, Jesus says "I and the Father are one," highlighting the divine nature of Christ and His role as the mediator between God and humanity.

1. How does Thomas's question in John 14:5 reflect common struggles in understanding spiritual truths, and how can we address these struggles in our own lives?
2. In what ways does Jesus' declaration in John 14:6 provide a comprehensive answer to Thomas's question, and how can this shape our approach to sharing the Gospel?

Jesus Appears to His Disciples (John 20:24-29, NRSV)

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Thomas's demand to physically touch Jesus' wounds indicates a deep need for personal verification. This request highlights the physical reality of Jesus' resurrection body, countering any notion that the resurrection was merely spiritual or metaphorical. The emphasis on touch recalls 1 John 1:1, where the apostle speaks of having heard, seen, and touched the Word of life, affirming the tangible reality of Jesus.

Thomas's declaration of disbelief unless he sees and touches Jesus' wounds highlights the struggle between faith and doubt. This moment sets the stage for Jesus' later appearance to Thomas, where He invites Thomas to touch His wounds, leading to Thomas's profound confession of faith in John 20:28. This interaction illustrates the grace and patience of Jesus in addressing doubt and the transformative power of encountering the risen Christ. Thomas's journey from doubt to belief serves as an encouragement for those who struggle with faith, reminding believers of Jesus' words in

John 20:29, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus' call for Thomas to move from skepticism to faith is a call not just for Thomas but serves as an enduring call to all believers to trust in the risen Christ. This moment is pivotal, as it transforms Thomas' doubt into a profound declaration of faith, seen in his subsequent confession, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). This transformation highlights the theme of faith overcoming doubt, a central message in the Gospel of John.

Doing What You Know (John 21:1-2, NRSV)

¹After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.

²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples.

For the third time in John's Gospel, our Lord appears to His disciples. This time He reveals Himself to seven of His disciples as they are fishing on the Sea of Tiberias—the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1).

The women who went to Jesus' tomb met an angel who told them to go and report to Jesus' disciples that He has risen, and they should meet Him in Galilee (Matthew 28:5). Though they had followed the instructions to go to Galilee, they didn't know what to do next. Waiting for God's next direction is a challenging spiritual discipline for many people; it goes against the natural inclination to make things happen.

Most of these men were fishermen by trade. When Peter informed them that he was going fishing, they knew he was not planning to go out and do a little fly fishing on the Sea of Galilee, hoping to catch a fish or two. They understood that Peter was going back to work as a fisherman. There seemed to be nothing better to do. It was better for them to be doing something productive than nothing at all.

Thoughts To Ponder:

1. How does Thomas' absence from the initial gathering of disciples impact his faith journey, and what does this teach us about the importance of community in our own faith?
2. In what ways can we relate to Thomas' skepticism, and how can we seek a personal encounter with Jesus to strengthen our faith?
3. How do the other disciples' testimonies about Jesus' resurrection serve as a model for sharing our own faith experiences with others?
4. How does Thomas' demand for physical evidence reflect our own struggles with faith in unseen realities?
5. How does the setting of the disciples behind locked doors relate to our own experiences of fear or doubt?

6. What do you do when you are waiting to hear from God? How do you remain patient?

Lesson to Live by:

While faith often requires belief without physical evidence, Jesus graciously provides Thomas with the evidence he needs. God meets us where we are in our faith journey. Jesus' command to "stop doubting and believe" highlights the necessity of faith in the Christian life. Belief is foundational to experiencing the fullness of life in Christ. Doubt is a common human experience, but it should lead us to seek truth and deeper understanding rather than remain in skepticism. Jesus' physical wounds serve as proof of His bodily resurrection, affirming the Christian hope in the resurrection of the body. Thomas's experience reminds us of the importance of community in faith. The disciples' testimony and Jesus' appearance strengthen Thomas's belief, illustrating the role of the church in supporting and nurturing faith.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON: 9 August 2026

Stephen, the unwavering Martyr

Printed Text: Acts 6:7-10, 7:54-60

Devotional Reading: Luke 23:32-43

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BACKGROUND

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Doing What You Know (John 21:1-2, NRSV)

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THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

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2. In what ways can we relate to Thomas' skepticism, and how can we seek a personal encounter with Jesus to strengthen our faith?
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5. How does the setting of the disciples behind locked doors relate to our own experiences of fear or doubt?
6. What do you do when you are waiting to hear from God? How do you remain patient?

LESSON TO LIVE BY:

While faith often requires belief without physical evidence, Jesus graciously provides Thomas with the evidence he needs. God meets us where we are in our faith journey. Jesus' command to "stop doubting and believe" highlights the necessity of faith in the Christian life. Belief is foundational to experiencing the fullness of life in Christ. Doubt is a common human experience, but it should lead us to seek truth and deeper understanding rather than remain in skepticism. Jesus' physical wounds serve as proof of His bodily resurrection, affirming the Christian hope in the resurrection of the body. Thomas's experience reminds us of the importance of community in faith. The disciples' testimony and Jesus' appearance strengthen Thomas's belief, illustrating the role of the church in supporting and nurturing faith.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON: 9 August 2026

Stephen, the unwavering Martyr
Printed Text: Acts 6:7-10, 7:54-60
Devotional Reading: Luke 23:32-43
Background Scripture: Acts 6-7
Key Text: Acts 6:8

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Stephen, the unwavering Martyr
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Devotional Reading: Luke 23:32-43
Background Scripture: Acts 6-7
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Daily Bible Readings

Monday: A Great Multitude - Revelation 7:9-10, 13-17
Tuesday: The Word of Their Testimony - Revelation 12:7-11
Wednesday: Stephen's Arrest - Acts 6:7-14
Thursday: Delivered from Death - Psalm 116:1-9
Friday: Precious Deaths - Psalm 116:10-19
Saturday: Stephen's Bold Message - Acts 7:1, 44-53
Sunday: Stephen's Martyrdom - Acts 7:54-60

KEEP IN MIND:

"Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people."
(Acts 6:8, NRSV)

AIM FOR CHANGE:

INVESTIGATE the cause of the Hellenists' complaint regarding the neglect of their widows;

REFLECT on the rationale and motive used by the Twelve to have the community of

disciples address the issue; and
DEVELOP tools for defusing potentially divisive conflict within the church.

BACKGROUND:

During this time, the church had experienced a growth spurt. The Jerusalem Church had a mixture of Christians from different countries, of different classes, and converts from other religions.

Jesus knew that the Gospel of the Kingdom would be preached to all nations for a witness. He knew that truth, armed with the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit, would prevail in the battle with evil and that the bloodstained banner would one day wave triumphantly over His followers.

As Christ's earthly ministry drew to a close, He knew He would soon leave His disciples to carry on the work without His personal supervision. He sought to encourage them and to prepare them for the future. He did not deceive them with false hopes. He knew He was about to be separated from them, to leave them as sheep among wolves. He knew they would suffer persecution, be cast out of the synagogues, and be thrown into prison for witnessing about Him as the Messiah. In speaking of their future, Jesus said some of them would be killed. He knew that in their coming trials they would remember His words and be strengthened to believe in Him as the Redeemer.

LESSON COMMENTARY:

The Challenge of False Accusations (Acts 6:7-10, NRSV)

⁷The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

⁸Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

⁹Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen.

¹⁰But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.

Once again, even after the appointment of the seven, the arguing commenced. A group of men consisting of Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and men from Cilicia and Asia began arguing with Stephen. Rumor or gossip had it that Stephen was saying things that were disrespectful toward Moses and God. What probably started as an inquiry into the gossip escalated into a more heated argument. Rumors have a habit of causing problems such as this.

Have you ever played the gossip game? You whisper something in a person's ear and that person whispers into the next person's ear and around the room it goes. By the time it gets to the last person, what was originally said has changed into something completely different. In a game the results can be funny, but in real life the results of rumors or gossip can cause great harm. Person by person, the truth is stretched and twisted in its retelling until it's as far from the truth as you can get. Unfortunately, the results can ruin a person's formerly unblemished character.

The men causing all the rumors didn't have a leg to stand on against Stephen's impeccable Christian character and Spirit-led life, so they took it a step further. Stephen's accusers stirred up people against him and had him brought before the council of Jewish elders. In addition, they convinced witnesses to pervert the truth of Stephen's doctrines so that he could be falsely accused of blasphemy. The accusers said that they heard Stephen say Jesus of Nazareth would destroy them and change their practices.

1. What are the negative results of discrimination?
2. What is the importance of strong Christian character?
3. Why do people tell lies about their fellow man?

The Death of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60, NRSV)

⁵⁴When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen.

⁵⁵But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

⁵⁶"Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

⁵⁷But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him.

⁵⁸Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

⁶⁰Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Stephen's accusers and the religious leaders were so outraged by this truth that they could not stand it. "When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him" (Acts 7:54). In contrast to his accusers, who were driven wild by their passions, Stephen continued to look to God: "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (v. 55). These words are almost identical to the words Jesus had spoken to these men just a few years earlier: "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). When they heard this, they knew the issue was not Stephen but Jesus.

They had brought Stephen to trial and he condemned them with the very Scriptures they professed to believe. Like the men of the synagogue, they could not argue with his testimony. Consequently, these enraged Jews cried out at the top of their voices and put their hands up to their ears in a vain attempt to drown out Stephen. When confronted with the truth of Christ, one must either submit or resist. The Jewish leaders and Stephen's accusers decided to resist. Like their forefathers, instead of heeding the words of God's prophet, they would kill him. The respectable Sanhedrin turned into an unruly mob, rushed at Stephen, and dragged him outside the city gates. They threw him down into a pit and stoned him.

The reference to the "witness" (Acts 7:58) suggests that the stoning was carried out as a legal execution. The penalty for blasphemy was stoning (Leviticus 24:16). According to Jewish law, the witnesses would have to throw the first stones (Deuteronomy 17:7). Acts 7:58 says that these men took off their outer cloaks and laid them at the feet of a young Jewish Pharisee named Saul.

After the witnesses had thrown the first stones, the rest of the congregation picked up stones and hurled them at Stephen. If someone had a good aim and managed to hit Stephen in the head early on, he would lose consciousness and would not have to endure the prolonged agony. If not, his death would be long, slow, and very painful.

As the malicious and unforgiving crowd threw their stones down on Stephen, he first cried out in prayer for God to receive his spirit. Then, he dropped to his knees and uttered his final words, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, died at the hands of the same people who had delivered Jesus to be crucified, and he died with a similar prayer on his lips.

Scripture (NKJV, KJV, NIV, ESV) says that Stephen "fell asleep" (Acts 7:60; also see John 11:11). Because physical death is temporary for the believer, death is referred to as "sleep." The body sleeps, but the spirit goes to be with the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

God never wastes the blood of His saints. The persecution that began with Stephen's murder forced many in the Church to flee Jerusalem and take the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the world. And a young man named Saul, who gave his approval to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), was so moved by Stephen's death that he never forgot it. Although Saul would become the greatest persecutor of the early Church, Stephen's death would always remain in his mind. There is little doubt that the Holy Spirit used Stephen's message and glorious death to prepare Saul for his meeting with the risen Lord on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). Saul, later called Paul, would become the single greatest evangelist the world has ever known.

Stories of martyrdom are continually written today with tales of others who are called to lay down their lives for Jesus' sake. Are you prepared to stand up for your faith, regardless of the consequences as demonstrated by Stephen in today's lesson?

DISCUSS THE MEANING

1. How does Stephen's example challenge you to speak truth in your own life, even when it might lead to conflict or persecution?
2. What are some practical steps we can take to ensure that we are not just hearers of the Word, but doers as well?
3. How can Stephen's example of courage in persecution inspire you to share your faith more boldly?
4. How does Stephen's vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God encourage you in your current circumstances?
5. In what ways can you maintain a heavenly perspective in your daily life, similar to Stephen's vision?

LESSONS TO LIVE BY:

In today's fast-paced society, people are always searching for new ways to handle the stress in their lives. Bookstores are filled with books on the subject, popular psychologists offer endless advice and still we are searching for the one method that really works. Even in the secular world, most experts agree that the key to handling the everyday stresses of life is inner peace. Although they might be on the right track, inner peace does not come from daily meditation or yoga. The search for a solution continues.

We should remember, however, that the only way we can gain inner peace and handle stress successfully is by living a Spirit-led life in Christ. Other things may work for a while, but they are doomed to fail. Because people bring their stresses with them to the worship services, believers have to be mindful of others' pain and reach out and touch them. We have to look past their faults and see their needs. We should not be so quick to gossip and talk about someone because they are withdrawn or isolating themselves from the church community. Instead, try to be an encourager in Christ.

The apostles chose seven men to handle the daily food distribution. Today's churches also delegate responsibilities. Many churches ask for volunteers to help in different areas. Consider the gifts God has given you and what fruit of the Spirit He has given you. The question you need to ask yourself is, "Is there an area in your church where you can volunteer to serve?"

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON: 16 August 2026

Saul of Tarsus, the Unlikely Apostle

Printed Text: Acts 22:3-15

Devotional Reading: Psalm 86:1-10

Background Scripture: Acts 7:58-8:3; 9:1-31; 22:3-15

Key Text: Acts 22:14-15

Zoom Sunday School Classes – 16 August, 09:00 AM EST

Meeting ID: 848-9423-0612

Pass Code: 669872

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84894230612?pwd=Zk1ESitzbGZwTlJyV21UZXY5aTVPZz09>

Saul of Tarsus, the Unlikely Apostle

Printed Text: Acts 22:3-15

Devotional Reading: Psalm 86:1-10

Background Scripture: Acts 7:58-8:3; 9:1-31; 22:3-15

Key Text: Acts 22:14-15

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: No Fear of God - Psalm 36:1-9

Tuesday: Called By God's Grace - Galatians 1: 13-24

Wednesday: No Confidence in Flesh - Philippians 3:3-9

Thursday: A Stiff-Necked People - Exodus 34:5-9 2

Friday: A New Creation in Christ – 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Saturday: Rejoice in God's Forgiveness - Psalm 32

Sunday: God's Chosen Witness - Acts 22:3-15

AIM FOR CHANGE:

RETELL Paul's encounter with Jesus and call as Jesus' witness.

COMPARE the motivations for Paul zeal before and after encountering Jesus.

RECOUNT what persona; weaknesses God has used for good.

KEEP IN MIND:

"Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard.'" (Acts 22:14-15, NRSV)

BACKGROUND:

He identified himself to Lysias as a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city. As a Jew, he had every right to have been where he was in the temple. Withholding for the moment the fact of his Roman citizenship, Paul declared himself to be a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia. Tarsus, as Paul notes, was a cultural center

with a university rivaling those of Athens and Alexandria. Being a citizen of Tarsus explained the apostle's knowledge of Greek.

Having identified himself to Lysias, Paul courageously requested permission to speak to the people. Although battered, bruised, and in chains, the apostle did not think of his own safety and comfort. Instead, his passionate desire to see his countrymen saved (Rom. 10:1) drove him to seize the opportunity to recount his conversion to the crowd.

Hoping to calm the explosive situation and discover what had triggered it, Lysias consented. When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand to quiet down and let him speak (cf. Acts 12:17; 13:16; 19:33). A great hush came over the unruly crowd, and then Paul spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect (Aramaic).

Paul's apology, or speech in defense of himself, is biographical. He defended both his motives (he was not anti-Jewish) and his actions (he acted only in submission to God). It was a strange place for Paul to preach, standing on the steps, surrounded by Roman soldiers, before the mob who sought his death.

LESSON COMMENTARY:

Paul's Account of His Conversion (Acts 22:3-5, NRSV)

³"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today.

⁴I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison,

⁵as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

Paul begins by affirming his Jewish identity, which is significant in establishing his credibility and authority among his Jewish audience. This declaration connects him to the covenant people of God, tracing back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It also aligns him with the rich heritage and traditions of the Jewish faith, which are foundational to understanding the fulfillment of the law and the prophets in Jesus Christ.

Gamaliel was a highly respected Pharisee and a leading authority in the Sanhedrin, known for his wisdom and moderate views. Being educated by Gamaliel indicates that Paul received a rigorous and esteemed education in Jewish law and theology. This training would have equipped Paul with a thorough understanding of the Scriptures and the ability to engage in theological debate, which he later used in his ministry.

Paul emphasizes his adherence to the Jewish law, underscoring his commitment to the traditions and commandments handed down through generations. This strict conformity highlights his initial zeal for the law, which he later reinterprets in light of Christ's fulfillment of the law. It also serves to show his transformation from a legalistic understanding to one centered on grace through faith in Jesus.

Paul acknowledges his former zeal, which mirrors the fervor of his audience. This zeal led him to persecute the early Christians, believing he was defending the purity of the Jewish faith. By drawing this parallel, Paul seeks to connect with his audience's passion while illustrating the transformative power of encountering Christ. His statement serves as a bridge to share his testimony of conversion and the true understanding of zeal for God through Jesus.

Paul's thorough training in the law underlines the value of sound teaching and discipleship. As believers, we should pursue deep understanding of Scripture and seek mentors who can guide us in our faith.

Despite his background, Paul's encounter with Christ transformed his life. This reminds us that no matter our past, God can use us for His purposes when we surrender to Him.

Paul, formerly known as Saul, is recounting his past actions against the early Christian movement, referred to as "the Way." This term reflects the early Christians' belief in Jesus as the way to salvation, echoing Jesus' own words in John 14:6. Paul's persecution "even to the death" indicates his involvement in severe actions against Christians, including the approval of Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7:58-8:1). This highlights the intensity of his opposition before his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19).

Paul's persecution of both men and women highlights the indiscriminate nature of early Christian persecution, and the equal value and roles of men and women in the church. Paul's account is a profound example of forgiveness and redemption, encouraging believers to seek and extend forgiveness.

1. How does Paul's background as a Jew from Tarsus influence his approach to ministry and his interactions with both Jews and Gentiles?
2. In what ways can we ensure that our zeal for God is aligned with His truth, as Paul learned to do after his conversion?
3. How can we apply the principle of seeking sound teaching and mentorship in our own spiritual growth, as Paul did under Gamaliel?

Paul's Conversion (Acts 22:6-11, NRSV)

⁶"While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me.

⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

⁸I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' Then he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.'

⁹Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

¹⁰I asked, 'What am I to do, Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.'

¹¹Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

The light enveloping Paul suggests a total and overwhelming divine presence. This experience is reminiscent of other biblical theophanies, where God's presence is accompanied by light or fire, such as Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4) and the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-18). The all-encompassing nature of the light signifies a transformative encounter, marking the beginning of Paul's conversion and mission as an apostle.

God can intervene in our lives in unexpected ways, often when we are on a path contrary to His will. We should remain open to His guidance and correction. Just as Paul's life was radically changed, our encounters with Christ should lead to transformation. We should seek to live out the new identity we have in Him. Sharing personal experiences of God's work in our lives can be a powerful witness to others. Like Paul, we should be ready to testify about how Christ has changed us.

Saul's mission is divinely orchestrated, with specific tasks prepared for him. The use of "appointed" suggests divine purpose, aligning with Ephesians 2:10, which speaks of believers being created for good works prepared in advance. It also foreshadows Saul's future role as the Apostle Paul, a chosen instrument to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). This divine appointment emphasizes God's sovereignty and the unfolding of His redemptive plan through chosen individuals.

God provides specific guidance for our lives. Just as Paul was instructed to go to Damascus, we should seek and be open to God's direction in our own lives. Immediate obedience is crucial. Paul did not hesitate to follow the Lord's instructions, demonstrating the importance of responding promptly to God's call. A genuine encounter with Christ leads to transformation. Paul's life was radically changed, showing that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. God has a specific purpose for each believer. Like Paul, we are appointed to fulfill a unique role in God's plan, and we should seek to understand and pursue it. Paul was told to go without knowing all the details. This teaches us to trust God even when the full picture is not clear, relying on His wisdom and timing.

1. How does Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus challenge our understanding of conversion and transformation?
2. In what ways does Jesus' question, "Why do you persecute Me?" reveal His

relationship with the church and His followers?

3. How can we apply the concept of divine intervention in our own lives, especially when facing challenges or opposition?

Paul Directed to Preach to the Gentiles (Acts 22:12-15, NRSV)

¹²"A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there,

¹³came to me; and standing beside me, he said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight!' In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him.

¹⁴Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice;

¹⁵for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard.

Saul's calling was not of his own choosing but was a sovereign act of God. This mirrors the calling of prophets in the Old Testament, such as Jeremiah, who was appointed by God before birth (Jeremiah 1:5).

Knowing God's will is central to the life of a believer. For Saul, this meant understanding the gospel and his role in spreading it. This aligns with the broader biblical theme that God reveals His will to those He calls, as seen in Romans 12:2, where believers are encouraged to discern God's will.

Saul's vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus was a pivotal moment, confirming Jesus' resurrection and divine nature. This encounter is a type of theophany, similar to Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush (Exodus 3).

The role of a witness in biblical terms is to testify to the truth, often in the face of opposition. This aligns with Jesus' instructions in Acts 1:8, where He tells His disciples they will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The concept of being a witness is central to the mission of the early church and reflects the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20.

The inclusivity of "everyone" underscores the universal scope of the Gospel message. This reflects the breaking down of barriers between Jews and Gentiles, a theme prevalent in the New Testament (Galatians 3:28). It also aligns with the prophecy in Isaiah 49:6, where the servant of the Lord is identified as a light for the nations. The early church, as seen in Acts, was marked by its outreach beyond Jewish communities, fulfilling the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his seed (Genesis 12:3).

Paul's personal experience and testimony of his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6) is a pivotal moment that transformed him from a persecutor of Christians to a proponent of the faith. The emphasis on "seen and heard" highlights the importance of firsthand experience in the apostolic witness. This personal

testimony is crucial for the authenticity and authority of the message being proclaimed.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

1. In what ways can authority be misused in religious contexts today, and how can we ensure it aligns with God's will?
2. How does Paul's transformation encourage you in your own spiritual journey, especially if you have a past you are not proud of?
3. In what ways can we identify and address spiritual blindness in our own lives?
4. How can we support and guide others who are experiencing a "blinding" moment in their spiritual journey?
5. How does Paul's transformation from persecutor to apostle inspire you in your own faith journey?

LESSONS TO LIVE BY

Every believer is called to be a witness of Christ, sharing what they have seen and heard in their own lives. Like Paul, our personal experiences with Christ can be a compelling testimony to others, demonstrating the transformative power of the Gospel. Paul's immediate response to God's call serves as a model for us to follow God's direction without hesitation. The message of Christ is for everyone, regardless of background or past actions, as demonstrated by Paul's mission to all people. Paul's boldness in sharing his testimony, even in hostile environments, encourages us to stand firm in our faith.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON: 23 August 2026

Timothy, a Leader with a Legacy
Printed Text: 2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16
Devotional Reading: Matthew 12:46-50
Background Scripture: Acts 16:1-3; Philippians 2:19-22;
2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16
Key Text: 2 Timothy 1:5

Zoom Sunday School Classes – 23 August 2026, 09:00 AM EST

Meeting ID: 848-9423-0612

Pass Code: 669872

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84894230612?pwd=Zk1ESitzbGZwTlJyV21UZXY5aTVPZz09>

Timothy, a Leader With a Legacy
Printed Text: 2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16

Devotional Reading: Matthew 12:46-50
Background Scripture: Acts 16:1-3; Philippians 2:19-22;
2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16
Key Text: 2 Timothy 1:5

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: A Protege with Promise - Acts 16:1-5
Tuesday: Receive Instruction - Proverbs 1:1-9
Wednesday: Learn from Your Parents - Proverbs 23:22-25
Thursday: A Worthy and Trusted Minister - Philippians 2: 19-24
Friday: Teach Your Children God's Ways - Deuteronomy 4:9-13
Saturday: A Father's Message - 2 Timothy 1:1-16
Sunday: Continue What You Have Leaned - 2 Timothy 3:10-11,14-17

KEEP IN MIND:

"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you." (2 Timothy 1:5, NRSV)

AIM FOR CHANGE:

UNDERSTAND the importance of mentoring younger Christians,
REALIZE we have a responsibility to share our experiences with others; and
DECIDE to become a mentor to someone in your church or community.

BACKGROUND:

On their second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas got into a heated argument over whether or not to take John Mark with them on the trip. Paul did not want John Mark to accompany them because the young man had deserted them in the middle of their first journey (see Acts 13:13). Paul was not prepared to give John Mark another chance, while Barnabas wanted to give his young cousin another opportunity to prove himself.

The debate became so significant that Paul and Barnabas decided to separate from each other. Barnabas and John Mark sailed for Cyprus, while Paul took Silas with him to Syria and Cilicia (see Acts 15:36-41).

Feelings of remorse about the separation from Barnabas over John Mark may have been what first attracted Paul to Timothy, or it may have simply been that Paul recognized the young man's potential. Whatever the reason, Timothy, whose name means "honored of God," would become a constant companion and beloved friend of

the great apostle.

It is appropriate that the last recorded words of Paul are in a letter he wrote to Timothy from his prison cell in Rome. Later, Timothy would also be imprisoned (Hebrews 13:23), but no other details are given and nothing is known of his fate.

LESSON COMMENTARY:

Paul Selects Timothy (2 Timothy 1:1-6, NRSV)

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

²To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands;

Paul and Silas's first stops were in Derbe and then Lystra. Both cities were in the region of Lycaonia in central Asia Minor and Galatia and within miles of each other. While there, Paul received favorable reports about Timothy from many of the people in the region. Timothy's mother, Eunice, was a Jew and had become a Christian (Acts 16:1). Both she and Lois, Timothy's grandmother, had instructed the young man in the Scriptures (see 2 Timothy 1:5). As a result, Timothy's exuberance and Christian influence were felt in the community.

Paul wanted Timothy to replace John Mark and join him and Silas on their missionary journey. However, there was one problem that still had to be addressed. Because Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father was a Greek (v. 3), Timothy had not been circumcised. Even though the Jerusalem Council had declared circumcision unnecessary for Gentile believers, Paul had Timothy circumcised. The great apostle felt that, because Timothy was half-Jewish, his not being circumcised could cause other Jews to focus more on the circumcision issue than the Gospel message. With that issue taken care of, Timothy would be able to witness to both Jew and Gentile.

Once Timothy was circumcised, he joined Paul and Silas on their travels through the region of Galatia, proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles and reminding them of the ordinances and doctrinal statements that were written by the Jerusalem Council. Those ordinances were concerned with: abstaining from things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, eating things that were strangled, and blood (Acts 15:29).

Paul had his reasons for circumcising Timothy, but Timothy had to volunteer for the procedure. Timothy was willing to undergo this ritual to remove any barriers to his witness for Christ. Sometimes we must be willing to sacrifice our rights to effectively communicate the Gospel message.

Paul and Timothy's relationship exemplifies the deep bonds that can form through shared faith and ministry. Believers are encouraged to cultivate such relationships within their own communities. The mention of tears and joy highlights the role of emotions in the Christian life. Paul's longing to see Timothy reflects the value of Christian fellowship. In a world where isolation is common, believers should prioritize gathering with others for mutual encouragement and joy. Paul's relationship with Timothy underscores the importance of mentorship in spiritual growth. Mature believers are encouraged to invest in the next generation of Christians. The anticipated joy of reunion with fellow believers points to the ultimate joy of eternal reunion with Christ and the broader body of believers in heaven.

1. How does the emotional bond between Paul and Timothy challenge or inspire your own relationships within the church?
2. How do you handle emotions like tears and joy in your spiritual life, and what can you learn from Paul and Timothy's example?
3. What steps can you take to become a mentor or seek mentorship in your faith journey, following the example of Paul and Timothy?

Paul Encourages Timothy to Remain Faithful (2 Timothy 3:14-16, NRSV)

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it,

¹⁵and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

Paul and Timothy provide us with a great example of how a mentoring relationship can and should work. While Timothy did not feel prepared for the task at hand, he was encouraged by his mentors. There are times when we may not believe that God can use us. However, knowing that someone we admire has confidence in what God can do through us can serve as a great encouragement. Notice what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Paul was able to encourage and comfort Timothy based on his experience and the comfort he himself had received. This speaks to our responsibility to give back that which has been given to us. The Bible says, "Give, and it shall be given unto you"

(Luke 6:38). This is not just referring to money; it relates to everything we receive. We have an obligation as Christians to give back. We need to give encouragement and assistance to those in our families, our neighborhood, and our church community.

Each believer must take personal responsibility to continue in what they have learned, ensuring their faith is active and growing. Believers are encouraged to remain steadfast in the teachings they have received, especially in times of trial or confusion. We are called to recognize and value the influence of godly mentors and teachers in your spiritual journey, as Timothy did with Paul, Lois, and Eunice. Be vigilant in discerning truth from falsehood, grounding yourself in the Scriptures and the teachings of trusted leaders. Early spiritual education, often from family, plays a crucial role in developing a strong, enduring faith.

The Scriptures are not just historical texts but are living and active, providing wisdom that leads to salvation. Believers should engage with the Bible regularly to grow in understanding and faith. Timothy's faith was nurtured by his family, highlighting the significant role that family plays in spiritual growth. Families should create environments that encourage spiritual discussions and learning. Believers are called to apply the wisdom of Scripture in their daily lives, making decisions and living in a way that reflects their faith in Christ. This involves both personal study and communal worship.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

1. Reflect on the role of mentors in your spiritual life. How can you seek out or become a mentor to others in your faith community?
2. What steps can you take to guard against false teachings in today's world, and how can you ensure your beliefs are rooted in Scripture?
3. Consider the impact of your early spiritual education. How can you contribute to the spiritual growth of the next generation?
4. How can parents and guardians effectively teach the Scriptures to children in today's context?
5. What practical steps can families take to create a spiritually nurturing environment at home?

LESSON TO LIVE BY:

The Scriptures serve as a comprehensive guide for teaching and imparting knowledge about God, His will, and His ways. The Bible provides moral and spiritual guidance, helping believers understand the nature of God and the principles of His kingdom. Scripture has the power to convict individuals of sin, revealing areas in their lives that are not aligned with God's standards. The conviction brought by Scripture leads to repentance and transformation, as seen in the story of King Josiah, who, upon hearing the words of the Law, tore his robes in repentance (2 Kings 22:11). The Holy

Spirit uses the Word to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).

The Bible not only convicts but also corrects, guiding believers back to the right path when they have strayed. The process of correction is part of God's loving discipline, as described in Hebrews 12:5-11, where God disciplines those He loves for their good, so they may share in His holiness. The corrective nature of Scripture helps believers grow in their faith and conform more closely to the image of Christ. Scripture serves as a tool for training believers in righteous living, equipping them to live lives that reflect God's character. The Bible provides the principles and examples necessary for developing a life of holiness and godliness, as seen in the lives of biblical figures like Daniel, who remained faithful to God despite living in a pagan culture (Daniel 6). This training prepares believers for every good work, as stated in the following verse, 2 Timothy 3:17.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON: 30 August 2026

Lydia, the Generous Hostess
Printed Text: Acts 16:11-15, 40
Devotional Reading: James 2:14-26
Background Scripture: Acts 16:11-40
Key Text: Acts 16:15

Zoom Sunday School Classes – 30 August 2026 10:00 AM EST
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Lydia, the Generous Hostess
Printed Text: Acts 16:11-15, 40
Devotional Reading: James 2:14-26
Background Scripture: Acts 16:11-40
Key Text: Acts 16:15

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Use Your Gift(s) to Serve - 1 Peter 4:7-11
Tuesday: God Rewards Hospitality - 2 Kings 4:8-17
Wednesday: A Capable, Entrepreneurial Woman - Proverbs 31:10-22
Thursday: Good and Faithful Servants - Matthew 25:14-23
Friday: The Wicked Servant - Matthew 25:24-30
Saturday: The Righteous Provide for Others - Job 31:16-28
Sunday: Lydia Welcomes Guests - Acts 16:11-15, 40



KEEP IN MIND:

“When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.”
(Acts 16:15, NRSV)

LESSON AIM:

CONSIDER how Lydia used her gifts and her place in society to support Paul's ministry,
REPENT of the times we have looked down on others who have not had the same opportunities or advantages, and
SERVE others joyfully through whatever means are at our disposal.

BACKGROUND:

After Paul and Barnabas' successful journey planting many churches in Syria and surrounding provinces, a new journey to plant churches was planned, this time throughout the Roman province of Asia. Paul and Silas set out from Antioch and were joined by Timothy while visiting a previously established church in Lystra. Soon after, the Holy Spirit deflected the group's plans to go into Asia and guided the men instead of to Macedonia. At this point, Luke (the writer of Acts) joined the team too, and they set sail from the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea.

After meeting Lydia, the team stays in Philippi preaching. They cast a demon out of a slave girl and her masters provoked an uproar that ended with Paul and Silas in jail. When an earthquake opened the chains of every cell in the prison and the jailer was about to kill himself, Paul and Silas led the man to Christ instead.

Paul and Silas benefited from the hospitality of wealthy converts, but Paul also knew that most Christians did not have much worldly wealth or status to boast of. He wrote to the Corinthian church to show how God uses that fact to His advantage so Christians should feel no shame in their lowly status.

LESSON COMMENTARY:

The Ministry at Philippi (Acts 16:11-13, NRSV)

¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis,

¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.

¹³On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there.

Philippi, a Roman colony, had a limited Jewish presence, as evidenced by the absence of a synagogue. According to Jewish tradition, ten males were needed for public worship. If there was no established synagogue, worshippers were to gather in an open area, near a body of water. The city gate was a common place for gatherings and trade, and going outside the gate suggests seeking a quieter, more natural setting for prayer and worship, away from the bustling city life. Those who sought to worship God, then, were mostly women and did so down by the riverside.

The Sabbath, observed from Friday evening to Saturday evening, is a day of rest and worship in Jewish tradition, rooted in the creation narrative (Genesis 2:2-3) and the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11). In the early church, Jewish Christians continued to observe the Sabbath, and Paul often used it as an opportunity to engage with Jewish communities (Acts 13:14, 17:2).

Rivers were significant in Jewish purification rituals (Leviticus 15:13) and were often chosen for prayer gatherings when synagogues were unavailable. The riverbank provided a serene environment conducive to worship and reflection, reminiscent of the Israelites' experiences by the waters of Babylon (Psalm 137:1).

Paul and his friends began to preach Christ to these women. Paul had learned that God did not show favoritism and the women who had converted to Christ had become a major source for the spread of Christianity in other places where he had preached. Sitting down was a traditional posture for teaching in Jewish culture, as seen in Jesus' ministry (Matthew 5:1). This indicates a readiness to engage in dialogue and instruction, following the example of rabbinic teaching methods. Paul and his team spoke to the women who had gathered there. The presence of women highlights their active role in early Christian communities. Lydia, mentioned later in the chapter, becomes a significant convert and supporter of Paul's mission (Acts 16:14-15). This gathering underscores the inclusiveness of the Gospel message, breaking cultural norms that often marginalized women in religious settings.

1. What does the setting of this passage (by the river, outside the city gate) teach us about the flexibility and adaptability of early Christian worship?
2. How can we apply the principle of seeking God in community to our modern context, especially in a world that often values individualism?
3. In what ways can we be open to God's work in unexpected places or through unexpected people in our own lives?
4. Where have you seen women take the initiative to start a gathering when men could not or did not do so?
5. How can you show God's love to others through hospitality?

The Conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40, NRSV)

¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.

¹⁵When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

⁴⁰After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.

Lydia "worshiped God" (v. 14), which indicates that she was a Gentile who worshiped Yahweh, but was not saved and not part of the Christian church. At the Lord's prompting, her heart was opened, and she understood and accepted Paul's message. Lydia's heart is to receive God's Word, so when Paul begins to speak, she listens and accepts the truth of the things he has to say. Lydia became the first convert in Europe. Then after accepting Christ for herself and being baptized, she was blessed to see her entire household baptized into the Christian community of believers. The joy she experienced in Christ must have been tremendous, for after her conversion she invited Paul and his companions to stay in her home as her guests and refused to let them say no.

Paul and the other missionaries traveling with him stayed with Lydia until their ministry in the city had concluded. After she and her household accepted salvation and are baptized, Lydia offers to house Paul's entourage at her home. Her home became the first church at Philippi. Paul later referred to the Philippian church as his "joy and crown" (Philippians 4:1). Lydia became one of Paul's financial supporters and was a loyal helper in his ministry. Lydia even fearlessly opened her house to Paul and Silas after they were released from prison. She did not let the fear of associating with people accused of rabble-rousing keep her from supporting God's workers. Her home is mentioned again later in Acts 16:40 as a meeting place where believers gathered to hear from Paul and Silas.

Lydia's conversion illustrates that it is ultimately God who opens hearts to the Gospel. This should encourage believers to rely on prayer and the Holy Spirit in evangelism. Lydia was already a worshiper of God, which prepared her heart to receive the Gospel. This highlights the importance of seeking God and being open to His truth. Lydia's conversion and subsequent hospitality to Paul and his companions show the significant role women played in the early church. This encourages women today to be active participants in ministry. Lydia, a successful businesswoman from a different cultural background, embraced the Gospel, demonstrating its universal appeal and power to transcend societal divisions.

Baptism is a public declaration of faith and an important step in the believer's journey. Lydia's baptism signifies her commitment to Christ and sets an example for new believers. Lydia's invitation to Paul and his companions underscores the

importance of hospitality in the Christian life. Believers are called to open their homes and hearts to others, fostering community and support. Lydia's faith is demonstrated through her actions—her baptism and her hospitality. True faith is always accompanied by action, reflecting a transformed life.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

1. In what ways does the opening of Lydia's heart by the Lord challenge our understanding of human free will and divine sovereignty?
2. How can Lydia's example as a worshiper of God before her conversion inspire us in our spiritual journey and openness to God's leading?
3. What role did hospitality play in Lydia's life after her conversion, and how can we apply this principle in our own lives and communities?
4. What does Lydia's account teach us about the relationship between faith and works in the Christian life?
5. How does Lydia's account encourage us to share the Gospel with people from different cultural and economic backgrounds, and what other biblical examples support this approach?

LESSON TO LIVE BY:

This lesson highlights the importance of mutual support and encouragement within the Christian community. Lydia's house serves as a meeting place for believers, illustrating the significance of hospitality and the home as a center for worship and fellowship. This also highlights the importance of community and fellowship in the Christian life, providing a model for modern believers to gather and support one another.

Even after facing persecution, Paul and Silas's actions demonstrate perseverance in ministry. Their commitment to the mission should encourage us as believers to remain steadfast in our faith. The immediate return to ministry after their release from prison shows that faith is active and resilient, encouraging believers to continue serving God regardless of circumstances.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON: 6 September 2026

Renewing Our Commitments
Printed Text: Joshua 1:1-11
Background Scripture: Joshua 1
Key Text: Joshua 1:9

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