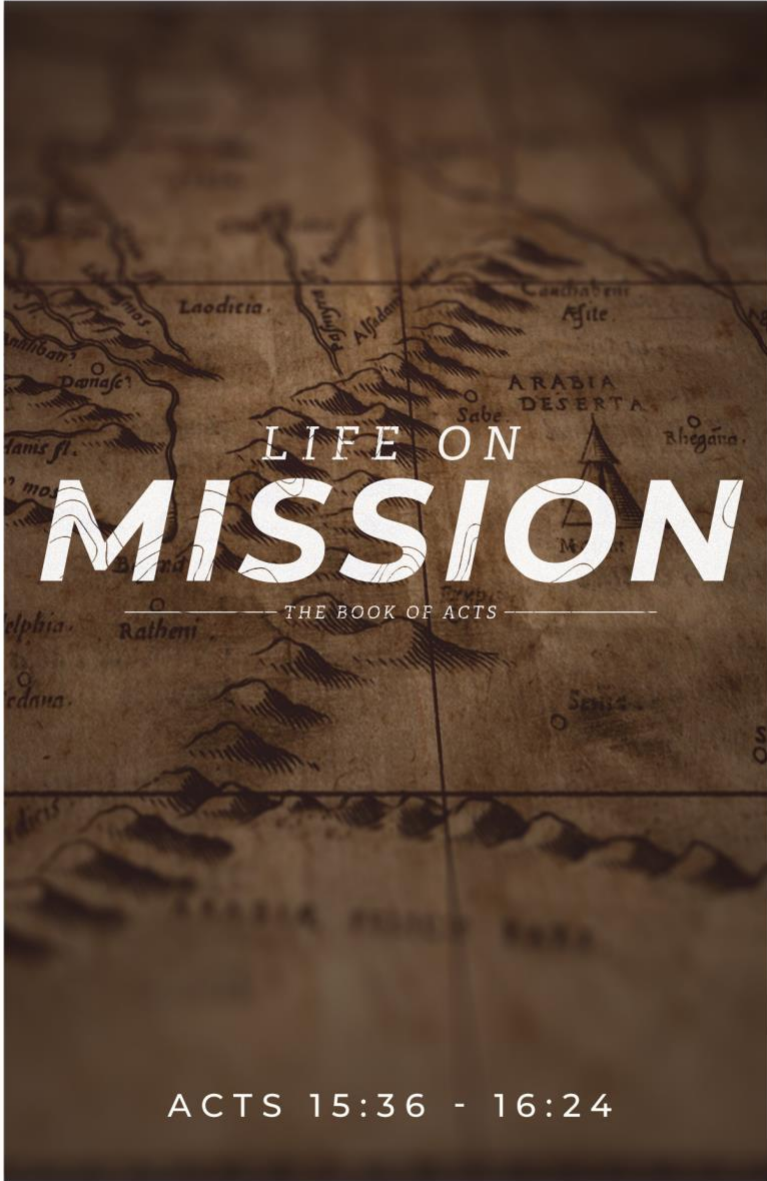
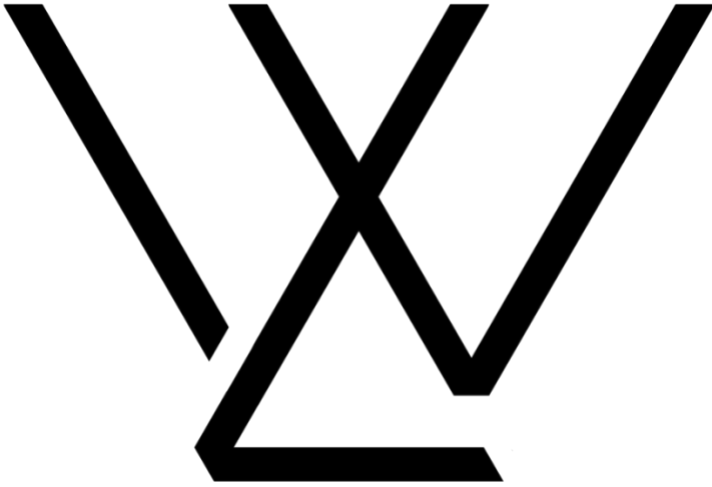




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 9 - 12





Word to Life's are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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Week 9: Acts 15:36-41

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 15:36-41

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 15:36-41 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** After reading Acts 15:36-41, what are your initial impressions of the dispute between Barnabas and Paul concerning John Mark?

- **Activity:** Read the passages below and write down what you notice about John Mark.
 - Acts 12:12

 - Acts 12:25

 - Acts 13:4-14

 - Colossians 4:10

- **Question:** Create pros and cons lists for choosing to take John Mark on your missionary journey. What do you notice?

- **Question:** If you were faced with choosing whether to include John Mark on a future missionary journey, what would you have done?

- **Question:** How would you describe your typical response to conflict? In what ways could your response(s) to conflict become more God-honoring?

- **Pray:** We are going to spend several days this week unpacking relational conflict. Pray that God would soften your heart to see and accept any changes He may want to make in your life.

Week 9: Acts 15:36-41

Day 2: When People Collide

READ: Acts 15:36-41

EXPLORE:

If you have ever had the unfortunate experience of being surprised by an argument that seemed to pop out of nowhere then you are probably familiar with what took place between Paul and Barnabas in the end of Acts 15. The apostles' conversation started out innocently enough. They expressed a desire to "*return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.*"¹ The trip and its destination was not the issue for Paul and Barnabas; the traveling companions were.

Barnabas, the encourager who had included Paul when others drew back in fear,² wanted to take John called Mark. Because of John Mark's previous defection from the ministry, however, Paul vehemently disagreed. Although Luke does not spend a tremendous amount of literary space in Acts unpacking this conflict, the split between Paul and Barnabas over what to do with John Mark was a critical part of the story in the early church.

Remember, at this point in the narrative, Paul and Barnabas had served together for approximately fifteen years. They had traveled and they had taught together. They partnered in ministry, and they often shared in sorrow. The Greek word chosen for their disagreement is *paroxysmos*. It is a rare word, carrying with it the passion and bitterness of the exchange. They disagreed, neither would yield, and a split took place.

We need to understand what Scripture is and is not telling us about this specific passage in question. Luke's primary purpose in recording this story is not to critique one decision over and against the other.

¹ See Acts 15:36 for reference.

² See Acts 4:36-37 and 9:27 for reference.

In fact, he spends only one verse discussing John Mark's decision to leave during the first missionary journey.³ The impression we ought to be left with in this text is that two good men could not agree and that led to a lamentable split in their ministry partnership with one another. Certainly, the split was bitter and difficult, but this biblical text is not primarily designed to vilify one party against the other.

This ought to serve as a reminder that sometimes things fall apart not because one party is villainous, but because all of humanity is plagued by sin. In a world that is broken and in need of the redeeming grace of God, even well-intentioned people will collide. The fracture between Paul and Barnabas is a potent picture of how sin and human rebellion against God can cause strife and disagreement even when both parties are interested in continuing in ministry. We ought to anticipate the inevitability of conflict in a world beset by sin, but we also ought to long, in accordance with God's sovereign will, to see unity and shared mission amongst the church.

BIG IDEA: In a world that is broken and in need of the grace of God, even godly people will collide.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In your opinion, is there a difference between disagreements that exist because we live in a world stricken by sin and disagreements that exist because one or more individuals is directly sinning? If so, how can you discern the difference?

³ See Acts 13:13 for reference.

Week 9: Acts 15:36-41

Day 3: Agree to Disagree

READ: Acts 15:34-41; Philippians 4:2-3

EXPLORE:

After a long missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas have finally returned home to Antioch. Upon arrival from their adventure, Paul excitedly looked at his dear friend Barnabas and basically said, "Let's do that again!" Initially, Barnabas responded with an emphatic, "Why now?" Though this is not how the conversation went, we should be amazed by the unique dedication these men have for Jesus. Even though they agreed that they should return to mission work, they have a sharp disagreement about whether John Mark should join them. In view of this biblical example of conflict, let's consider some practical tips on how we ought to deal with disagreement and conflict.

1. Disagree Without Being Disagreeable

The person we become in disagreement matters. It is one thing to disagree with someone, but it is another thing to disagree with someone well. Who we become in a heated conflict is extremely significant. Often, pride takes control, and we bear down to win the argument rather than striving to win the relationship. We ought to pray for humility when we are faced with relational conflict remembering that if we win a disagreement, but become a sinfully disagreeable person in the process, we have lost what matters more.

2. Seek Understanding

Frequently we will find ourselves in sharp disagreement with someone and miss the real point. Because we do not first seek understanding, we can often argue without purpose. Amid disagreement, we need to slow down to ensure that we understand what the other person is truly saying. In many cases, when you seek understanding, you will find that there is shared ground underneath a manufactured misunderstanding. Be a person who asks lots of questions, remains thoughtfully quiet, and genuinely listens. Seek

understanding by asking for clarity on what is and is not being said. It is nothing short of a tragedy to have a heated exchange with someone with whom we do not actually disagree. Genuine disagreements do exist, but we ought to humbly seek understanding to determine what is truly going on.

3. Trust God

As we can see in the story of Paul and Barnabas, disagreement will sometimes cause a parting of ways for Christians. This split does not mean we must hold onto bitterness or resentment toward that individual or community. Instead, these disagreements can encourage us to trust God amid the separation that has taken place. For Paul and Barnabas, we can see that the kingdom of God was better served because two different missionary journeys took place instead of one. We too can have confidence that as we seek to do right by the Lord, He will still be active in accomplishing His purposes.

BIG IDEA: Disagreement happens among Christians, but we can still honor God in how we respond.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Who do you become in disagreement? Are you a disagreeable person who simply seeks to win or do you truly seek common ground for the sake of unity?

- **Read:** *The Peace Maker* by Ken Sande as a biblical guide to resolving personal conflict.

Week 9: Acts 15:36-41

Day 4: Commended to the Grace of the Lord

READ: Read Acts 15:36-41

EXPLORE:

The focal point of this passage often centers on the sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. Who was right? Who was wrong? What words were exchanged? Who would we have sided with? Today, conflict is not only embraced; it is often celebrated. One needs to look no further than the success of reality TV for proof. It seems that we cannot get enough of which real housewife said what to whom. Obsessing over the conflict in this passage causes us to miss the main point of living in the unity that the grace of the Lord provides.

It is this grace, verse 40 tells us, that the church in Antioch commended Paul and Silas to before they left on their missionary journey. Notably absent from Biblical record is an equal commending of Barnabas and John Mark. I (Lucas) believe, however, that it is a mistake to interpret this as the church in Antioch taking Paul's "side" in the matter. This presumes that the conflict wasn't resolved. There is not enough evidence to assume that Paul and Barnabas stormed away from each other in a huff. We simply know that they separated from each other. This is an important distinction to make because churches are made up of people with different backgrounds, cultures, ideas, and preferences. While this diversity is a testament to the power of the gospel, it is also a reminder that disagreements among believers are inevitable. It is how we respond to disagreements that makes the difference.

While there is much we don't know about the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, here is what we do know: both Paul and Barnabas loved the Lord and wanted to tell others about Him in the most effective way, John Mark would later prove a valuable

companion to Paul⁴, two missionary teams were sent out instead of one, and, finally, God's grace was put on display.

With this specific focus in mind, let's look at the idea of being commended to the grace of the Lord. The term "commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord" harkens back to the time Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their first missionary journey.⁵ This took place with fasting, praying, the laying on of hands, and sending them off.⁶ This similarity in this phraseology following the sharp dispute is incredibly significant. Namely, the conflict did not keep the future missionary journeys from being effective and gospel centered.

Although they disagreed about how best to do it, Paul and Barnabas did not stop serving the Lord. Instead of evangelistic paralysis, Paul and Barnabas continued the work of sharing with others the grace of the Lord to which they had been commended. Instead of celebrating conflict, the church in Antioch celebrated the fact that missionary teams were going out. And in this endeavor, as in working through conflict, God's grace is critical to success.

BIG IDEA: In all things, God's grace should frame our understanding and actions.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What specific steps can you take to ensure that disagreement with another believer does not lead to evangelistic paralysis?

- **Question:** It seems that secular culture's entertainment preferences have shifted from "happily ever after" to conflict-laden reality TV. Have you seen a similar shift in Christian culture? If so, what can you do to make sure you do not promote this trend?

⁴ See 2 Timothy 4:11 and Colossians 4:10 for reference.

⁵ See Acts 14:26 for reference.

⁶ Acts 13:23 for reference.

Week 9: Acts 15:36-41

Day 5: When Disciples Disagree

READ TOGETHER: Acts 15:36-41, Proverbs 15:1, and Colossians 4:6

***Instructions:** We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

No two people see everything exactly alike. One person may have 20/20 vision and the other person may have an astigmatism. Have you ever stared at the clouds on a bright, sunny day and saw something completely different than your friend or spouse? You may have seen a cloud shaped like a dog while your friend saw the same cloud but thought it looked like a rat. As human beings God has made each of us uniquely different; we all interpret what we see just a little bit differently.

This is what we witness in our reading today. Paul and Barnabas are not seeing things from the same perspective. Since the matter is so important and personal, they have a sharp disagreement. This matter is important because it is a missionary journey, and you probably couldn't name five more important things in all the world than a missionary journey. The matter is personal because John Mark is Barnabas's cousin.

It seems Paul does not want to take John Mark not only because he is lacking something in character, but also because he is considering the importance of their mission and the well-being of the churches that they will visit. John Mark had just proven that he was not ready for a missionary journey and Paul seemed to believe that this could not change so quickly. Paul didn't want to let the church down; since

the decision was in his hands, he voted against John Mark joining them. Barnabas, on the other hand, seemed to see enough in John Mark to give him another chance.

Who was wrong? Well Luke doesn't really tell us. The results seemed to turn out positively for both groups. Barnabas and John Mark were able to continue to evangelize the island of Cyprus. Paul and Silas were able to go back and visit the churches that had just recently been established through the first missionary journey.

Since no two Christians see things exactly alike, we must operate out of grace for one another. We ought not be quick to judge. When we disagree with another believer on a matter of opinion, we should immediately respond by listening well. The temptation of course is to do a lot of talking and try to prove our side of things. However, it would be wise to listen well and make sure we completely understand the other person's perspective. Then, if we still disagree, we can calmly share our point of view with humility. We may not actually come to a complete agreement, but by God's grace we can maintain peace with one another.

BIG IDEA: Disagreement provides us with the opportunity to grow in godliness.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Have you had a disagreement with a fellow believer in the past for which you wish you could get a "do over?" List some things you should have said or done differently.

Week 10: Acts 16:1-5

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 16:1-5

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 16:1-5 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** In the apostles first visit to Lystra, the people initially thought Paul and Barnabas were gods and later proceeded to stone Paul. How would this background context from Acts 14 shape our view of Timothy who was from Lystra?

- **Question:** Based on what you read in the biblical text, why do you think Paul chose to circumcise Timothy?

- **Question:** What do you notice about the churches' response to the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council?⁷

- **Optional Activity:** Timothy is described as one who had a good reputation with others prior to his ministry with Paul. Spend some time searching the Scriptures to see where else you can see a description of Timothy. What do you notice?

⁷ See Acts 16:4-5 for reference.

Week 10: Acts 16:1-5

Day 2: Calling Our Youth

READ: Acts 16:1-5

EXPLORE:

As Paul made his way back through areas where churches had been established on a previous missionary journey with Barnabas, he stopped in reverse order. He started with Derbe, then Lystra, and he ended in Iconium. Upon his return, he saw the churches were fairly well established and producing disciples. Timothy was one that particularly caught his attention.

Timothy was a young man with a strong and sincere faith which was being lived out so distinctly that he had established a great reputation among the believers in both Iconium and Lystra. Timothy would be an interesting case study as he was the son of a mixed home. His mother was a devout Jew, and his father was a Greek.⁸ Additionally, Paul mentioned later in a letter to Timothy that his faith was strong which was, no doubt, from the influence of his mother Eunice and his grandmother, Lois. Some draw the conclusion that young Timothy was raised by a single mother and grandmother. This would have been common as most men didn't live past their 40's and they often married very young wives. This is part of the reason caring for widows was such an important part of the culture and church ministry.

Paul sensed a calling on Timothy and felt he would be a valuable addition to the missionary team. His sincere faith, his youth, and his mixed heritage made him an asset and great candidate to become a disciple of Paul, whose primary ministry was to the Gentiles. Moreover, Timothy would need to possess a zealous sincerity to persevere through the opposition and oppression he would certainly face. As such, his youth provided a much-needed vitality for the long

⁸ Biblical scholars have often assumed that Timothy's father passed away or was absent because he is never mentioned by name in the text.

missionary journeys in which he would demonstrate endurance and patience when engaging both Jews and Gentiles alike. We should be careful to not overlook the obvious courage of Timothy to accept the calling to leave his family and follow Paul into the dangerous field of mission work. To leave his mother, a widow, must have come with heart wrenching consideration for her wellbeing.

An important application we should glean from this story is the importance of identifying the sincere faith and unique gifting of young believers. Right under our noses there may be pastors, missionaries, and church leaders that have the potential of great kingdom impact. Would we be willing to call disciples to bypass a lucrative job, the allure of comfort, and comfort-seeking tendencies to spend their lives for the sake of the gospel? Too often, we have allowed our culture to develop young people than our churches. As a result, we ought to purposefully and diligently identify the unique and God-given gifts and callings that have been placed on the lives of young people.

BIG IDEA: The identification of sincere faith and unique gifting is critical for the growth and development of the individual and the church.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Think about your children or the youth of our day. Would you be willing to encourage them to take a path that doesn't involve college, comfort, and prosperity? Why or why not?
- **Question:** Who do you know who has sincere faith and unique qualities that could be used for ministry? How could you encourage them in their calling?
- **Read:** *Don't Waste Your Life* by John Piper.

Week 10: Acts 16:1-5

Day 3: Does Paul have a double standard?

READ: Acts 16:1-5 and 15:19-21

EXPLORE:

At first glance, Paul seems slightly hypocritical with his young protégé Timothy. Allow me (Stephen) to explain. In the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, the church leaders, alongside Paul, made the argument that Gentile Christians did not have to be circumcised in accordance with Jewish customs to faithfully follow Jesus.⁹ When Paul invited Timothy to accompany him in ministry, however, he proceeded to circumcise the young leader from Lystra, prior to continued ministry.¹⁰ Seemingly, Paul participated in what he had previously declared unnecessary. We are left with the question, “Does Paul have a double standard?”

The quick answer to this looming question is a resounding...NO! Paul did not have a double standard when he chose to circumcise Timothy. Let’s take a closer look.

Even though the Jerusalem Council established that Gentile circumcision was not required to follow Jesus, it did not rebuke Jews who chose to continue this historic practice. This cultural nuance is incredibly significant when we consider the person and ministry of Timothy. It is important to note that much of Timothy’s upbringing and journey in the faith happened within a distinctively Gentile context.¹¹

⁹ See Acts 15:19-21 for reference.

¹⁰ See Acts 16:3 for reference.

¹¹ His upbringing in Lystra and lack of circumcision would have led to a perceived status as a Gentile. Although Timothy’s mother and grandmother were Jewish, his father was a Gentile, and he was not circumcised until later in life. As a result, his geographical and genealogical contexts would have been also perceived as Gentile.

Although Timothy's father was Greek, he would have been considered a Jew by many because of his mother's faith and lineage. As a leader with partial Jewish heritage, Timothy's lack of circumcision would have potentially been a hindrance to his ministry with Paul. The conclusion in Acts 15 is abundantly clear; circumcision is not necessary for salvation or inclusion in the church. Although circumcision was not obligatory, in the case of Timothy, it would prove to be beneficial.

Timothy was not forced to become culturally Jewish against his will to serve in ministry; he was compelled by the love of Christ to serve faithfully, even if that meant radical change! Timothy was circumcised prior to ministry not out of a sense of unhealthy obligation, but from a place of healthy cooperation. Acts 16:1-5 does not represent a contradiction to the gospel-saturated Christian freedom that was reiterated in Acts 15, it embodies it. What we see in this biblical text is yet another powerful example of ministry compromise and cooperation, without corruption. At great cost to themselves, both Paul and Timothy chose to sacrifice, compromise, and cooperate for the sake of loving others like they had first been loved by Christ!

BIG IDEA: Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy was not a contradiction with the Jerusalem Council because it was a logical, tactical, and beneficial decision for missional effectiveness.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How was the decision to circumcise Timothy different from the decision to not have other people circumcised in Acts 15:19-21?
- **Question:** Acts is filled with examples of church leaders who were required to personally sacrifice to minister effectively. How often (and in what ways) have you sacrificed to serve and love others like Christ?

Week 10: Acts 16:1-5

Day 4: Find a Paul and Choose a Timothy

READ:

EXPLORE:

In a recent conversation with a ministry mentor, I (Stephen) was told an incredibly basic, but profound truth. My mentor simply said, “Stephen, most people are simply waiting to be asked to lead.” In a sense, my mentor was alluding to the fact that many are gifted, ready, able, and simply waiting to be invited into increased leadership and influence.

In my assessment, Paul’s relationship with Timothy presents us with an inspiring example of this principle put into practice. Paul, an apostle with an ever-increasing influence in the first-century church, purposefully invited Timothy to participate in life and in ministry. First and foremost, Paul established a relationship with Timothy. He often wrote about how he considered Timothy like a son.¹² Second, Paul shared authority with Timothy. On multiple occasions, Timothy was considered a co-sender with Paul of various letters to ancient churches.¹³ Finally, Paul shared ministry with Timothy.¹⁴

In view of this example, a few questions must be asked. Namely, who is your “Timothy?” Who has God placed in your life to mentor and disciple as you share life, authority, and ministry? Who has God called you to mentor into their full potential as a follower of Christ? Additionally, we ought to ask a different, but equally pivotal set of questions. Primarily, who is your “Paul?” Who has God sovereignly placed in your life to mentor you in love, encouragement, and correction?

¹² See I Corinthians 4:17 and I Timothy 1:2 for reference.

¹³ See II Corinthians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, and Colossians 1:1 for reference.

¹⁴ See Romans 16:21 and I Corinthians 16:10 for reference.

We desperately need to remember that the life of faithfulness and ministry is not an individualized affair, separated from the loving influence of mentorship and Christian community. When you commit to find a Paul and humbly invest in a Timothy, you have invited new opportunities to be deeper sanctified into the image of Christ. Intentionally seeking mentorship and purposefully mentoring is a commitment to being a disciple who makes disciple-making disciples. here are a few practical points about finding a “Paul” and choosing a “Timothy.”¹⁵

- Discipleship is best initiated and executed in the context of genuine relationship.
- Discipleship ought to always take place in the context of godly boundaries and a biblically grounded community.
- If you are a parent, you are called to be the primary disciple-maker of your child.
- If you are seeking someone to disciple you, it is best to join them in an area of their ministry and flexibly accommodate to their schedule.

BIG IDEA: Simply, be discipled and disciple others.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** There are no discussion questions today. Simply, take the next best step in being discipled and discipling others. Write down what you did and what you plan to do and share it with your LifeGroup.

¹⁵ These practical points are not designed to function as an exhaustive list.

Week 10: Acts 16:1-5

Day 5: Mentoring and Modeling Faith

READ TOGETHER: Titus 2:1-8

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

When I (Sabino) was a sophomore in high school, an older godly man asked me if I wanted to be in his church small group. This small group would entail Bible study and accountability for young men. At the time, I knew this was exactly what I needed in my life, and I eagerly accepted the offer. This mentorship would be used by God to deeply change me and set my life on a course for a future in the ministry. In our passage, we see Paul offering a young man by the name of Timothy a mentorship of a lifetime.

It is a rare thing indeed to say that you have been mentored by an apostle of Jesus Christ, but this was Timothy's great honor. Timothy would learn how to study, pray, preach, lead, and serve from the apostle Paul. We can be sure he would also learn many lessons from Silas and from all the churches they would visit together. He was able to witness firsthand many local congregations being built up in their faith and many people coming to Christ for the very first time in these locations.

This teaching of mentoring and modeling is replete throughout the Bible. To help us grow, we need mentors who are further along in their Christian maturity than we are. We need to see Christians modeling or demonstrating their faith in front of us so that we can

witness what our faith looks like embodied in a person. We also need to be mentors and models for other believers as well.

So how do we find a mentor and pick someone to mentor? If you are looking for a mentor, look for someone you see that is full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit. Look for someone who has been a Christian longer than you and that you have witnessed through trials and has come through them stronger in their faith. Simply and graciously ask them if they might mentor you in your faith and generally leave it up to them concerning what it will entail. If you are looking for someone to mentor, I encourage you to look for someone who is already hungry and teachable. You don't want to try and mentor someone who is uninterested or not seeking it. You cannot feed the full, but you can feed the hungry and they will grow hungrier still. Finally, seek help from the pastoral staff to either be mentored or to find someone to mentor.

BIG IDEA: Paul mentored and modeled his faith for Timothy.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Who do you look up to as a model of faith? List out the qualities of the person that you look up to and pray that God would give you those same qualities.

Week 11: Acts 16:6-15

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

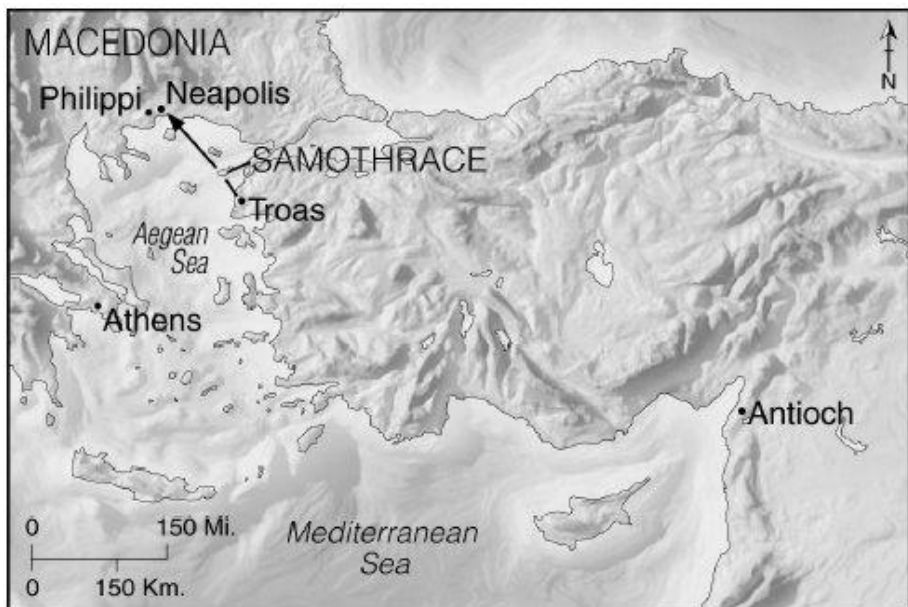
READ: Acts 16:6-15

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 16:6-15 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** What was the experience of the early missionaries in Acts 16:6-7? If you were in their position, how would you have responded?

- **Map Activity:** The map below is a depiction of Acts 16:11-12. As you read the biblical text, familiarize yourself with the various places.
 - o **Compare:** Acts 16:11-12 with Acts 20:6 what do you notice about the different travel experiences?



- **Activity:** Outline the events of Acts 16:11-13. What do you notice about the actions of the missionaries?

- **Question:** The characterization of Lydia reveals that she was not merely listening to Paul, her heart was open and receptive to the gospel. When have you experienced a situation of listening without receptivity?

Week 11: Acts 16:6-15

Day 2: Gospel Helps

READ: Acts 16:6-15 and James 2:14-17

EXPLORE:

After completing their first missionary journey, Paul and his team began to process through where they would travel next. They had some ideas on what they might be, but it wasn't until Paul received a vision from a man asking for help in Macedonia that they knew where God was sending them. There is much this text does not tell us. Who was this man? What did he need help with? Who specifically was he asking help from? Regarding these questions, some have speculated that the help was really needed from Luke because he was a physician. The profound and sobering truth is that we just don't know.

Amidst all the confusion of this passage, one thing remains clear. Paul and his companions were convinced that this was their opportunity to communicate the gospel of Jesus. This text certainly reveals a lot about prayer and visions, but it illuminates so much more. First, earthly need is rooted in a deeply spiritual problem. Second, earthly aid should be accompanied by gospel proclamation.

Let's consider Jesus for a moment. As we watched our Lord walk through this hurting, sin-riddled world, he often used the suffering and brokenness of people to express His love to them by meeting their physical needs first accompanied with a message of the hope He offers beyond this world. Jesus fed people who were hungry with bread but also explained He is the bread of life.¹⁶ Jesus taught that He is the light of the world and then proceeded to heal a man that was blind from birth.¹⁷ The Lord validated His message of hope in the gospel through serving people in their acute times of need. No doubt this service came because of his inherent love for them as image

¹⁶ See John 6:1-59 for reference.

¹⁷ See John 8:12-30; 9:1-41 for reference.

bearers of God. Yet, from it came an opportunity to point each person to the deeper spiritual reality and cause behind the need.

As Christians, we must follow Jesus's example to both *serve* the needs and *share* the name of Christ with others. We must avoid neglecting one or the other. To meet needs without an accompanying gospel is to neglect the weightier matter and subsequently miss an opportunity to point them in the direction who satisfy every need for all eternity. The truest and most lasting change can come only by the Spirit of God changing hearts through the gospel message.

Likewise, to share the gospel without consideration of earthy need represents an egregious neglect of James's command to express our faith by caring for those around us. Jesus said, "*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"¹⁸ Our lives should reflect this same sentiment as we seek to serve others and, in doing so, point them to the one who came to offer them hope in the area that they are most hopeless, the forgiveness of sin.

BIG IDEA: Gospel proclamation ought to be accompanied by gospel care.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Is your life lived as one sent here to serve the needs of others? Consider the last month, when have you demonstrated a selfless act of service for others?
- **Question:** In your service to others, do you find it hard or easy to include the gospel to those you are serving? If not, take time to consider why.

¹⁸ See Matthew 20:28 for reference.

Week 11: Acts 16:6-15

Day 3: Incarnational vs. Attractional

READ: Acts 16:11-14

EXPLORE:

You have probably heard the expression, “We are building the plane as we fly it.” It is a common phrase which alludes to the fact that a lot of life is comprised of figuring it out as you go. Some things you can organize, schedule, and tactfully execute, but other aspects of life feel more like constant game of learning as you go. One thing I (Stephen) really appreciate about the history of the early church was the way they were willing to stay flexible in ministry practice and methodology. This truth is put on display in the city of ancient Philippi.

When the traveling ministers arrived in that city, they had to be flexible to serve effectively. Instead of easily locating a large place of worship in Philippi, the missionaries had to work for it. Specifically, they had to travel outside the city gates where they thought prayer would be taking place. Now, it is likely that Paul and his traveling companions knew of the prayer practices that often took place outside of city walls, but the principle is clear. Christian ministry is not simply about waiting for convenient environments, it is about actively seeking opportunities to embody the grace and truth of Christ. In contemporary ministries, the question of how churches should engage on mission is often broken down into two different models. They are the attractional and the incarnational models respectively. The titles of these approaches may seem daunting, but they are not.

If the attractional model were summarized in a simple phrase, it would be, “Come and see.” In short, the approach does what its name suggests, it centers upon the idea of attracting others into the church life. The attractional model of church ministry encourages members to bring others to participate in weekly gatherings. If the incarnational model were summarized in a simple phrase, it would

be, “Go and be.” Rather than seeking primarily to attract those outside the faith to attend the collective weekend gathering, the incarnational approach seeks to encourage and equip believers to actively share their faith in the rhythms of life.

Although these approaches to ministry can often be brought into competition with one another, it is important to notice the nuanced compatibility of these practices. Acts is an example of this reality. At certain points in church history, people are invited to come and see, and, on other occasions, they are invited to go and be. In Acts 16:11-14 we see the limited potential of the attractional model in the city of Philippi. As a result, the traveling ministers primarily sought to go and be amongst the prayer-filled gathering of women. This biblical example and others like it should challenge us to be flexible with our approach to life and ministry as we seek to honor the Lord every day.

BIG IDEA: The church is called not merely into an attractional model of ministry, but an incarnational model of ministry.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Consider the attractional and incarnational models of church ministry. What are some of the positives and negatives of each approach if it were isolated from the other? Write down some thoughts to share with your LifeGroup this week.

- **Question:** In your opinion, which of the two approaches to ministry is put into practice more: attractional or incarnational? Why do you think this is the case?

Week 11: Acts 16:6-15

Day 4: Exploring the Character of Lydia

READ: Acts 16:11-15

EXPLORE:

The way that a character is introduced in Scripture is never accidental. Every detail is intentional and purposeful. In general, biblical authors communicate a lot using minimal detail. Through today's Word to Life study, we are going to be looking at the person and influence of Lydia. In the process discussing Lydia's characterization, we will be highlighting some principles of biblical interpretation that ought to be helpful when you read and study other scriptural passages.

One of the most significant aspects about Lydia's characterization might just be the easiest to overlook. Simply, we are given her name. Many characters in Scripture are left nameless. In stark contrast, the person of Lydia is described by name. Most likely, the mentioning of her name is meant to indicate some level of prominence in Philippi. This heightened social status is further supported by Luke's description of Lydia's profession.

She was a seller of purple goods. This detail is not incidental, and it is indicative of her personal wealth. Lydia was apparently wealthy enough to be able to host Paul and his traveling companions.¹⁹ This sort of kindness and personal wealth would have been somewhat rare in the first century, but it was not uncommon for the church in Philippi to demonstrate a unique kindness toward the Christian Mission.²⁰ The willingness of wealthy benefactors like Lydia to support missionary work was incredibly significant for the early spread of the gospel.

¹⁹ See Acts 16:15, 40 for reference to Lydia hosting them before and after their imprisonment.

²⁰ See Philippians 4:10-23 for reference to the unique generosity of the Philippian church.

It is important to note that Lydia's contributions, character, and legacy fit alongside an impressive list of influential females in the early church. Luke intends for us to see Lydia in the same light as the women of Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and even Priscilla in Corinth.²¹ Undoubtedly, these godly women heard of the unifying and liberating message of what had been accomplished in Christ that was for Jew and Gentile, for slave and free, and for male and female.²² The fitting response to the gospel for these women was abundant generosity and righteous living. Lydia fits right in!

Not only was she incredibly generous, but her heart was opened by God and receptive to the good news about Jesus. It is well within reason to assume that Lydia was one of the first converts to the gospel in the city of Philippi. Although you will not find her name written on every page of the New Testament, her influence and legacy can be found through the life and ministry of Paul and his churches.

BIG IDEA: The characterization of Lydia intentionally highlights her prominence, wealth, generosity, and righteousness.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Watch the 5-minute online Bible Project video entitled, "*Character in Biblical Narrative.*" It is a very helpful reiteration of some concepts expressed in this Word to Life.

- **Optional Activity:** It's time to practice your ability to notice biblical characterization. Read the following texts, write down characteristics you notice, and attempt to make conclusions about the individual in Scripture.
 - Hushaj: (II Samuel 15:32-37)
 - Jacob and Esau: (Genesis 25:24-28)

²¹ See Acts 17:4,12,24 and 18:2 respectively for references.

²² See Galatians 3:28 for reference.

Week 11: Acts 16:6-15

Day 5: Following God's Leading

READ TOGETHER: Acts 16:6-15, Proverbs 15:22

***Instructions:** We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

In 2015, my wife, Samantha, and I (Sabino) believed that God was calling us to the mission field. The only major question and unknown was where exactly we were supposed to go. The way I see it is that the Great Commission gives us Christians an open globe. In one sense, we can go anywhere because God commands us to go to all nations. Even though we have freedom in Christ to go anywhere we were still looking for direction or a pull to a specific place. We eventually sensed God's direction to the country of England. Our own experience is a little like what is happening in our passage.

Paul and company are exercising their freedom in Christ by seeking to enter different areas of Asia. For reasons only known to God, however, they were forbidden to enter. God was not upset with them for attempting to enter these places. They just needed further direction and clarification. That direction would come by way of a vision in the night to the apostle Paul.

Paul interpreted the vision as a call to go to Macedonia, but this is all he knew. When Paul and the team arrived, they had to use wisdom on what God wanted them to do next. There weren't specific instructions from God other than the location. They began to speak to the women who were present, which led to the conversion of

Lydia and her household. Now they knew this was exactly what God had in mind and what the vision meant.

How can we also follow God's leading? There are times when we have promptings about a place to go or something to do. It would be wise for us to share these prompting and thoughts with other mature believers. They can help us in discerning our call. We probably won't receive a vision like Paul did, but God still leads us through wise counsel and prayer. If we feel God's prompting, receive wise counsel, and desire to move forward then there is good reason to believe this is the specific direction into which the Lord is leading. One of the main keys is to make sure we are faithful like Paul when we arrive at the place, we believe the Lord is calling us. As we get to work God is faithful to provide and move on people's hearts.

BIG IDEA: Paul and the crew followed God's direction regarding their next step in mission.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** When was a time you believed God was leading you and how did it turn out?

- **Question:** Why do you think seeking counsel and wisdom from others is so important even when you have a strong prompting to do a good thing?

Week 12: Acts 16:16-24

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 16:16-24

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 16:16-24 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** The girl who was possessed by the evil spirit was saying true things about Paul, his companions, and their message even though she was spiritually oppressed. What should we glean from this experience in Acts?

- **Activity:** Read the account of Jesus restoring two demon-possessed men in Matthew 8:28-34. What similarities and differences do you notice between Matthew 8 and Acts 16?

- **Question:** What were the accusations brought forth by the slave girl's owners in Acts 16:20-21? What details of the story did they knowingly choose to leave out?

- **Question:** If you were in Paul and Silas's position at the close of Acts 16:16-24, how would you feel and why?

Week 12: Acts 16:16-24

Day 2: Un-slaved.

READ: Acts 16:16-24 and Luke 8:26-39

EXPLORE:

The opening sentence of our story is packed with information that sets up the scenario in our text today. We have a girl who is enslaved by worldly masters and a demonic master. The demon she is possessed by gives her a supernatural ability to tell the future which her earthly masters take advantage of for great financial gain. This gift of divination was known as the “python spirit” by the Greeks. It was highly revered. Greek and Roman commanders would even seek divine predictions before setting out on military conquests. This clairvoyant was a gold mine for her owners and was exploited as such.

Unfortunately, for her owners she also had another gift: annoyance. After following Paul and his companions around for days and shouting to the people about who they were, Paul turned around and rebuked the demon out of her. Literally. This greatly angered her owners because, without her gift, their opportunity for great gain was gone along with the girl’s value to them. For this, they had Paul and Silas thrown into prison. It is worth noting the irony that this girl’s freedom came at the cost of Paul and Silas’ freedom!

Whether this girl remained enslaved to those earthly masters or ended up following Jesus will be unknown to us until eternity. However, there are three things that continue today that we see in this text.

- 1. Exploitation of others.** Enslavement and exploitation come in many forms. Sin in the heart of people drive them to insatiable desires for pleasure, greed, and power. Pursuit of these things often comes at the expense of others as seen in enterprises such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, global labor abuse, and more. This suffering highlights for us the truth of what the

Bible teaches that we are all under the curse of sin and in desperate need of rescuing.

2. **Expedition of the Church.** We too are on mission to bring relief in the name of Jesus to those who are suffering. This might be through joining organized efforts of relief here and abroad or by recognizing needs of those around us. Sometimes this comes at great risk, but times of desperation create the best opportunity to point people to the ultimate freedom that comes through Jesus Christ.

3. **Expectation of God.** Whether dealing with demonic enslavement or emotional manipulation, we should expect our God to show up to deliver people from their bondage. Though this does not always come immediately or directly as we might want, we have confidence in our God who says, *“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”*²³ Our God never changes, and we should expect that He desires to bring help and healing to those that are broken. He calls Christians to go on His behalf and through their faith He often works. Therefore, we should pursue and earnestly pray for those that find themselves in such desperate situations.

BIG IDEA: Slavery is still very real and comes in many ways. Our God desires to set people free.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Think through some different forms of slavery we might encounter today. Are you aware of anyone that is enslaved in any of these ways?

- **Activity:** Consider how you might participate in the ministry and mission of freeing others from slavery. Pray and ask God to give you insight and courage to jump in for the sake of others.

²³ See Psalm 50:15 for reference.

Week 12: Acts 16:16-24

Day 3: Slave vs. Free

READ: Acts 16:16-24

EXPLORE:

Let's contrast this slave woman who had a spirit of divination with Paul, a bondservant of Christ who had the Spiritual gift of discerning of spirits. This woman's owners were making themselves rich on this demonic spirit of fortune telling. In contrast, from the loving lordship of Jesus, came the power to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons.²⁴ Servitude to the king of kings is a glorious thing. We need to remember that the apostles often cast out demons to their own detriment and without concern for their own welfare.

Because Paul and Silas cast out the evil spirit, they were seized, dragged through the marketplace, brought before rulers, stripped of their clothing, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison with their feet locked into stocks. All of this was the consequence Paul and Silas received for obeying the instruction of Jesus to his followers to cast out demons. Their service to God was totally opposed to the slave girl's slavery.

Look again at our story in Acts. The slave girl was given the opportunity to live in freedom from her spiritual bondage by Paul who had learned a better servitude under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Although her human owners weren't willing to see her set free, she was liberated from demonic possession because of the surpassing greatness and power of Christ.

Allow me (Leeanna) to ask the question, which spirit do you allow to influence you? The truth is that we will all stand before God one day and give an account for our words and deeds. We will not be able to blame the devil or say, "A force of evil made me do it." Certainly,

²⁴ See Mark 16:17 for reference.

there is a great demonic influence on human behavior, but we are fundamentally accountable for our choices. The reality is, that evil stems from the human departure from God's will and His way.

Demons are connected to their human host through a common thread of rebellion and sin. Remember that demons are spiritual beings who have rebelled against God. They inhabit humans who are persistent in unrepentance and sick with sin. A demon only has power over those who believe its lies. The good news is that something wonderfully liberating has already occurred in the cross of Christ. The death and resurrection of Jesus opened the way for us to believe the gospel message and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Like Jesus, a believer can say, "*The prince of this world is coming, but he has no place in me.*"²⁵ When we receive Christ, we receive a new Spirit. He comes to take residence in our body. We are now His temple and His home. In view of this truth, we can now draw near to God, resist the devil, and he must flee. When we know the Truth, the truth will set us free from bondage to follow the resurrected Christ.

Big Idea: The gospel proclaims that we can be freed from slavery to faithfully follow Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

APPLY:

- **Question:** The Scriptures are filled with warnings regarding spiritual warfare. How can we become more aware of the spiritual darkness and oppression that exist around us?

- **Question:** How is being a bondservant of Christ fundamentally opposed to being enslaved to demonic forces?

- **Optional Activity:** Read Ephesians 6:10-20 and spend time in your LifeGroup praying for one another and for those in your immediate community.

²⁵ See John 14:30 for reference.

Week 12: Acts 16:16-24

Day 4: When Good News is Bad News

READ: Acts 16:16-24

EXPLORE:

Joy and gratitude are the rightful responses when someone is liberated from demonic possession. In the case of the slave girl's freedom from the evil spirit in Acts 16, the only fitting response ought to have been thanksgiving and amazement. This was not the case. What should have been unanimously good news for all was bad news for some. The freedom of the slave girl was a loss of profit for her captors.

Those who had benefited from the slave girl's suffering were outraged at her recent, miraculous liberation. Clearly, the motivation for the slave owners was financial. When the slave owners found out that they could no longer profit from the slave girl, they brought Paul and Silas into the agora for some pseudo-justice. They were not interested in redemption; they were fixated on revenge.

First, they claimed that Paul and Silas were a disturbance to the city.²⁶ Most likely, they were appealing to anti-Jewish prejudices that existed within the first century and beyond. Second, they erroneously claimed that the Christian ministers were advocating against Roman practice. At various points in the history of the Roman Empire, it was indeed illegal to evangelize and convert a person to a non-Roman cult within the confines of an established colony.

Interestingly, the slave girl's owners chose to leave out some incredibly important information. When they brought forth their accusations, they unsurprisingly made no mention to the demonic exorcism. Additionally, they failed to mention the real, monetary motivations for their charges. To make matters worse, it is completely possible that the early Christian movement in and around

²⁶ See Acts 16:20 for reference.

Philippi did not actually violate any regulations established under Roman rule. As the story unfolds, however, neither the owners nor the crowd were interested in truth or justice. We should be reminded in Acts 16 that evil can even masquerade as justice when it fights against that which is good!

This story in the life of the early church demonstrates a very important reality of ministry in a complicated world. When the forces of evil receive a critical blow, they will fight back. The slave owners lost some proverbial ground and they certainly fought dirty to gain it back. In much the same way, evil will often fight to regain territory it lost to the righteous power of God, secured in Christ made available in the Holy Spirit. As followers of Jesus, we ought to be cognizant of this battle and the craftiness of evil as we learn to daily trust Christ and embrace what is true.

BIG IDEA: We should be aware of the attacks that can come when the forces of evil are threatened by the good news of God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** The slave girl's freedom was costly for those who benefited from her suffering. Can you think of any scenarios in our world today in which people gain from what is evil and strive against what is good?

- **Question:** When forces of evil fight to regain ground against godly progress, what should be the Christian response?

Week 12: Acts 16:16-24

Day 5: Freedom Comes with a Cost

READ TOGETHER:

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Conversion to the Christian faith is often not received well in Muslim countries. Families can view conversion to Christianity as a betrayal to the family. Often new believers can be beaten, disowned, or even killed. Freedom in Christ sometimes comes with a high cost. This is what we see in our passage today.

A slave girl who tells fortunes is set free from demonic oppression, but this is not received well by her owners. Clearly, they were just using this girl and had no real care for her as a person. They did not mind that she was possessed, because she was providing for them financial gain. They were greedy and Paul and Silas cut off their money-making scheme.

This girl's freedom would come with a cost. Paul and Silas are dragged into the marketplace before the city officials, and they are slandered. They did a good deed for the city and this girl, but they are falsely accused of disturbing the city. Then they were beaten severely with rods and thrown into prison. Topping things off, their feet were put into stocks, making them incapable of having any physical freedom in the prison cell. The cost of this slave girl's freedom was the persecution of Paul and Silas.

Because of the glorious gospel, however, this cost was well worth it to Paul and Silas. Later we will find them singing hymns and praising God in the prison cell. Paul and Silas went through an unpleasant difficulty, but a girl was delivered from the bondage of Satan. Their momentary affliction compared to this girl's lifelong freedom was no match. They could rejoice at the great thing God had done even though they had physical pain.

If we believe in Jesus, we also have received the freedom that comes in Christ. This has probably cost us in one way or another. Maybe we have lost friends or financial gain or even an earthly family. However, these things do not compare to all that we have received in Christ. We have received peace with God, forgiveness of sins, the righteousness of Christ, a new family, and eternal life just to name a few. As we meditate on these things, we soon begin to realize the good far outweighs the bad, therefore we can rejoice. Freedom comes with a cost, but the cost is well worth it.

BIG IDEA: Paul's good deed does not go unpunished.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Name as many good deeds in the Bible that you can that get punished. What do you think these stories teach you?

- **Question:** What are some ways your faith has cost you over the years?



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