

Acts 16:9-15  
July 26, '09

"GOD AT WORK IN THE LIFE OF LYDIA"

I AM NOT A GOLFER.  
I HAVE NEVER BEEN A GOLFER.  
I HAVE PLAYED, THOUGH.  
ONCE.  
I SPENT ONE MORNING GOLFING MANY YEARS AGO.  
YOU MIGHT THINK THAT, SINCE I NEVER DID IT AGAIN, I DIDN'T ENJOY IT.  
NO – IT WAS PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE.  
I ENJOYED IT SO MUCH, I DECIDED I'D BETTER NEVER DO IT AGAIN BECAUSE I WAS CERTAIN I'D GET HOOKED & I COULD AFFORD NEITHER THE FINANCIAL NOR TIME COMMITMENT THAT WOULD BE REQUIRED.  
SO I RESOLVED TO NEVER DO IT AGAIN.  
AND I HAVEN'T.  
THE STORY OF MY ONE DAY ON THE GOLF COURSE, THOUGH, REMINDS ME OF THIS STORY OF LYDIA.  
IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE, MOST OF MY FRIENDS GOLFED.  
THEY WERE CONSTANTLY ASKING ME TO JOIN THEM, BUT I CONSISTENTLY REFUSED.  
MY REJECTION OF THEIR INVITATIONS, THOUGH, WAS MOSTLY DUE TO MY FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY.  
I DIDN'T WANT TO LOOK LIKE AN IDIOT.  
TEAM SPORTS ARE ANOTHER MATTER.  
IF YOU'RE PLAYING FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL OR HOCKEY, YOU'VE GOT TEAMMATES WHO CAN COVER YOUR LACK OF SKILL.  
BUT THE THOUGHT OF STANDING ON A GOLF COURSE WITH MY FRIENDS WATCHING ME MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF WAS TOO MUCH FOR MY FRAGILE EGO TO HANDLE.  
BUT ONE DAY, CHARLIE HESSLER CALLED ME & TOLD ME HE WANTED ME TO GO SOMEWHERE WITH HIM.  
HE WOULDN'T TELL ME WHERE – HE JUST SAID HE'D PICK ME UP & WANTED ME SPEND THE MORNING WITH HIM.  
WHEN WE SET OUT, I HAD NO IDEA WHERE WE WERE GOING.  
WE ARRIVED AT A LOCAL GOLF COURSE & CHARLIE PULLED INTO THE PARKING LOT.  
I SAID, "CHARLIE, WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?"  
HE SAID, "WE'RE GOING GOLFING."  
I SAID, "I CAN'T GOLF."

“SURE YOU CAN. AND I’M GOING TO PROVE IT TO YOU TODAY.”

“I DON’T KNOW *HOW* TO GOLF.”

“I DO & I’LL TEACH YOU.”

“I DON’T HAVE ANY MONEY WITH ME.”

“DON’T WORRY. IT’S ON ME.”

“I DON’T HAVE ANY CLUBS.”

“I’VE GOT TWO SETS IN THE TRUNK.”

“AH, BUT I’M LEFT-HANDED.”

“I KNOW YOU ARE. SO’S MY DAD. I’VE GOT HIS CLUBS FOR YOU.”

SO CHARLIE & I SPENT THE MORNING GOLFING – MY ONE & ONLY EXPERIENCE ON A GOLF COURSE.

CHARLIE REFUSED TO TAKE “NO” FOR AN ANSWER.

HE WAS DETERMINED HE WAS GOING TO GET ME ON A GOLF COURSE & TEACH ME HOW TO GOLF.

LIKE I SAID, I ENJOYED THE EXPERIENCE SO MUCH I DECIDED I’D BETTER NEVER DO IT AGAIN. IN THIS PASSAGE IN ACTS, THIS IS WHAT LYDIA DOES.

SHE REFUSES TO TAKE “NO” FOR AN ANSWER WHEN SHE INVITES PAUL & HIS COMPANIONS TO STAY AT HER HOUSE.

THE WORDS IN GREEK LET YOU KNOW THAT SHE WAS BOTH *PERSISTENT* & *INSISTENT*.

THAT’S WHY LYDIA HAS BECOME THE MODEL IN THE CHURCH FOR THE VITAL CHRISTIAN VIRTUE OF HOSPITALITY.

I THINK THERE’S A GREAT DEAL WE CAN LEARN FROM HER EXAMPLE.

THIS IS A GREAT STORY & IT HAS MONUMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE.

THERE ARE ANY NUMBER OF FASCINATING ASPECTS TO THIS CRUCIAL EVENT IN ACTS.

PAUL HAD IN HIS MIND THAT HE WAS GOING TO BE TRAVELING IN A CERTAIN PART OF THE WORLD.

HE WAS CERTAIN THAT HE WAS BEING CALLED IN ONE DIRECTION & YET HE WAS THWARTED AT EVERY TURN.

FINALLY, HE HAS A VISION THAT HE’S TO GO IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DIRECTION.

HE ENDS UP IN THE CITY OF PHILIPPI.

NOW WE KNOW PHILIPPI BECAUSE OF PAUL’S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

WE KNOW THAT PHILIPPI EVENTUALLY BECAME PAUL’S FAVORITE CHURCH.

WHILE OTHER CHURCHES WERE RELUCTANT IN THEIR SPIRITUAL & FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF HIS MINISTRY, THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH WAS ONE THAT HE COULD ALWAYS DEPEND UPON TO PROVIDE HIM WITH WHATEVER SUPPORT HE NEEDED.

**BUT THAT WAS LATER.**

**AS PAUL ENTERED THE CITY ON THE DAY OF THE PASSAGE WE'VE JUST READ, HE'D NEVER BEEN THERE BEFORE.**

**HE WAS AT, WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN, A LOW POINT IN HIS MINISTRY.**

**HE WANTED TO BE SOMEWHERE ELSE.**

**HE WANTED TO BE DOING SOMETHING ELSE, BUT GOD HAD CALLED HIM HERE TO PHILIPPI – A CITY THAT DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A SYNAGOGUE.**

**THERE WERE JEWS IN THE CITY, BUT NOT ENOUGH FOR A PLACE OF WORSHIP SO, AS WAS CUSTOMARY, BELIEVERS WOULD GATHER BY THE RIVER FOR WORSHIP & PRAYER.**

**ON THE SABBATH, PAUL & HIS COMPANIONS WENT TO JOIN THEM.**

**HIS EXPERIENCE THAT DAY WOULD FOREVER CHANGE THE COURSE OF HIS MINISTRY.**

**IT HAPPENED BECAUSE HE WAS WILLING TO LISTEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

**HE WAS WILLING TO OBEY WHEN THE SPIRIT SENT HIM A DIRECTION HE HADN'T INTENDED ON GOING.**

**SOMETIMES – NOT ALL THE TIME, BUT SOMETIMES – THERE IS A REASON WHY THINGS DON'T SEEM TO WORK OUT THE WAY WE PLANNED THEM.**

**THE SALE OF THE HOUSE FALLS THROUGH.**

**THE ANTICIPATED JOB OFFER DOESN'T MATERIALIZE.**

**THE TEST RESULTS COME BACK WITH A DISMAL PROGNOSIS.**

**SOMETIMES IT'S JUST WHAT IT IS & WE HAVE TO COPE.**

**BUT SOMETIMES IT REALLY IS GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL HAND LEADING US SOMEWHERE & JUST WAITING FOR US TO SEE IT – TO LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT & FOLLOW THE PLAN.**

**HOW FORTUITOUS FOR PAUL & FOR THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL THAT HE WAS WILLING TO BE OPEN TO THAT LEADING OF THE SPIRIT THAT TOOK HIM TO PHILIPPI & TO THAT LITTLE GATHERING OF BELIEVERS BY THE RIVERSIDE.**

**FOR IT WAS HERE THAT HE MET LYDIA.**

**LYDIA CLEARLY PLAYED A VERY SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL.**

**HER NAME IS ONLY FOUND IN THREE VERSES IN THE BIBLE & TWO OF THEM ARE WITHIN THIS PASSAGE.**

**FROM THOSE VERSES, WE CAN LEARN A GREAT DEAL ABOUT HER.**

**SHE WAS NOT A NATIVE OF PHILIPPI, BUT OWNED A HOME THERE.**

**SHE WAS A SELLER OF PURPLE & THIS, IN ITSELF, IS RATHER FASCINATING.**

**IN OUR DAY, WE CAN WALK INTO LOWE'S AND CREATE WHATEVER COLOR PAINT WE WANT.**

**CELL PHONES & LAPTOP COMPUTERS COME IN A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT COLORS.**

**YOU CAN FIND ITEMS OF CLOTHING IN WHATEVER COLOR YOU WISH.**

NOT SO IN DAYS GONE BY.  
PURPLE CLOTH WAS VERY RARE & EXPENSIVE.  
THE REASON IT WAS SO COSTLY IS BECAUSE IT WAS DIFFICULT TO MAKE.  
THE DYE FOR THE CLOTH CAME FROM A SHELLFISH.  
THE JUICE WAS WHITE WHILE IT WAS IN THE VEINS OF THE FISH, BUT WHEN IT WAS EXPOSED TO  
THE SUN, THE LIQUID CHANGED INTO BRIGHT PURPLE & RED COLORS.  
IT TOOK A LOT OF WORK TO CATCH ENOUGH SHELLFISH FOR A SINGLE GARMENT.  
YOU'VE HEARD IT SAID THAT EVERYONE LIKES SAUSAGE, BUT NO ONE WANTS TO SEE HOW IT'S  
MADE.  
TURNING THE SHELLFISH INTO PURPLE CLOTH WAS LIKE MAKING SAUSAGE.  
THAT WAS LYDIA'S BUSINESS & SHE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN QUITE SUCCESSFUL AT IT.  
SHE WAS CLEARLY A WEALTHY ENTREPRENEUR.  
BUT SHE WAS ALSO A WOMAN OF FAITH.  
SHE WAS A GENTILE – A NON-JEW – AND YET SHE BELIEVED IN GOD & OBSERVED THE JEWISH  
PRACTICES OF WORSHIP & PRAYER.  
SHE HAD SPIRITUAL LEANINGS, BUT NO ROOTS OF FAITH.  
BASICALLY, SHE WAS A SPIRITUAL NOMAD.  
AND THEN SHE MET PAUL.  
HER HEART WAS OPEN TO WHAT PAUL PROCLAIMED THAT DAY BY THE RIVERSIDE & HER LIFE,  
THE LIVES OF THOSE IN HER HOUSEHOLD, THE LIVES OF THOSE IN PHILIPPI & THE LIFE OF BELIEVERS  
EVERYWHERE WAS FOREVER CHANGED BY IT.  
SHE WAS SO EXCITED BY THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS, THAT SHE WANTED TO KNOW MORE & SHE  
WANTED TO DO HER PART TO ASSIST THOSE WHO WERE SHARING IT.  
WHAT SHE DID THAT DAY IS FASCINATING.  
IT MAY NOT SEEM LIKE A BIG DEAL TO US, AND YET AT THE TIME, THIS WAS SHOCKING – EVEN  
SCANDALOUS.  
SHE INVITED 4 MEN TO COME STAY AT HER HOUSE!  
THINK ABOUT THAT!  
EVEN TODAY IT WOULD RAISE A FEW EYEBROWS, BUT IN THE FIRST CENTURY IT WOULD HAVE  
BEEN UNHEARD OF!  
AND FOR PAUL TO ACCEPT THE INVITATION WAS EQUALLY OUTRAGEOUS!  
BUT HE DID.  
HE DID BECAUSE LYDIA WOULDN'T TAKE "NO" FOR AN ANSWER.  
WE COME BACK TO THAT.  
HER HOSPITALITY WAS GENUINE.

IT WAS OFFERED WITH ENTHUSIASM & WITH PASSION.

LYDIA ACTED AS IF *SHE* WAS THE ONE WHO WOULD BENEFIT THE MOST FROM THE OFFER.  
AND SHE WAS.

NOW, I KEEP REFERRING TO PAUL “AND HIS COMPANIONS.”

DO YOU REALIZE WHO THOSE COMPANIONS WERE?

THIS GROUP OF FOUR WAS MADE UP OF PAUL, SILAS, TIMOTHY & LUKE.

YOU SEE, HERE’S ANOTHER ONE OF THE FASCINATING ASPECTS OF THIS PASSAGE.

THE BOOK OF ACTS WAS, IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, WRITTEN BY LUKE – THE AUTHOR OF THE THIRD GOSPEL.

IT IS HERE IN CHAPTER 16 OF ACTS THAT LUKE, FOR THE FIRST TIME, CHANGES THE PRONOUNS FROM THIRD PERSON TO SECOND.

UP UNTIL NOW, HE’S BEEN SAYING “THEY DID THIS” OR “THEY DID THAT.”

BUT NOW HE STARTS TALKING ABOUT “WE.”

OBVIOUSLY, LUKE HAS JOINED THE GROUP ON THEIR MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

EARLIER IN THE CHAPTER, TIMOTHY HAS ALSO JOINED THEM.

SO LYDIA HAS THE PRIVILEGE OF WELCOMING PAUL, SILAS, TIMOTHY & LUKE INTO HER HOME – A FIRST CENTURY “FAB FOUR” IF YOU WILL.

AND YOU KNOW SHE GOT MORE OUT THAT EXPERIENCE THAN THEY DID!

BUT SURELY THEY WERE MADE TO FEEL WELCOME BECAUSE IN THE ONLY OTHER REFERENCE TO LYDIA WE FIND IN THE BIBLE – LATER IN THIS CHAPTER – WHEN PAUL & SILAS HAVE BEEN RELEASED FROM PRISON, THE PLACE THEY GO IS THE HOME OF LYDIA.

HER HOSPITALITY WAS EXTENDED WITH SINCERITY & ENTHUSIASM.

MORE THAN LIKELY, THOUGH, IT WOULDN’T HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED IF NOT FOR HER PERSISTENCE & INSISTENCE.

SHE SIMPLY WOULDN’T TAKE “NO” FOR AN ANSWER.

GENUINE, SINCERE, ENTHUSIASTIC, PASSIONATE HOSPITALITY IS A VITAL CHRISTIAN VIRTUE.

IT IS ALSO A RARE CHRISTIAN VIRTUE.

I COULDN’T BEGIN TO COUNT ON THE FINGERS & TOES OF EVERYONE IN THIS SANCTUARY TODAY, THE NUMBER OF TIMES I’VE SAID TO SOMEONE, “*IF THERE’S ANYTHING I CAN DO, DON’T HESITATE TO ASK.*”

YOU KNOW WHAT I’M TALKING ABOUT, DON’T YOU, BECAUSE YOU’VE SAID THE SAME THING COUNTLESS TIMES.

IT HAS ALSO BEEN SAID *TO YOU* COUNTLESS TIMES, HASN’T IT?

HOW OFTEN, THOUGH, HAS THE PERSON FOLLOWED UP BY ASKING?

HOW OFTEN HAVE *YOU* FOLLOWED UP BY ASKING?

I'M SURE I WOULDN'T NEED MORE THAN A COUPLE OF MY OWN FINGERS TO GIVE THE ANSWER.  
CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY – LIKE THAT OF LYDIA – NEEDS TO BE EXTENDED WITH GENUINE  
SINCERITY & ENTHUSIASTIC PASSION.

AND IT ALSO NEEDS TO BE CONCRETE.

I PROBABLY HAD MORE THAN A DOZEN FRIENDS INVITE ME TO GO GOLFING WITH THEM.

I COULD EASILY TURN THEM DOWN.

BUT IT WAS ONLY WHEN CHARLIE GOT ME IN HIS CAR, DROVE ME TO THE GOLF COURSE, PAID  
MY FEE & HANDED ME A SET OF LEFT-HANDED GOLF CLUBS & WALKED THE COURSE WITH ME, TEACHING  
ME WHAT TO DO, THAT I EVER GOLFED.

LET ME OFFER A WORD OF CAUTION HERE.

SOMETIMES SOMEONE REALLY DOESN'T WANT SOMETHING – AND SOMETIMES (LET'S FACE IT)  
THEY DON'T WANT IT FROM *YOU*.

WE HAVE TO BE ASTUTE ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND & ACCEPT THAT.

BUT – PUTTING THAT ASIDE – THERE ARE ANY NUMBER OF OCCASIONS WHEN GENUINELY  
SINCERE & ENTHUSIASTICALLY PASSIONATE CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY IS TREMENDOUSLY APPRECIATED.

AS WE BEGIN THE “UNBINDING YOUR HEART” SERIES, LET ME ENCOURAGE YOU TO KEEP THIS IN  
MIND.

OBVIOUSLY, CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY IS ESSENTIAL WITHIN THE FAMILY OF FAITH –  
HOSPITABLE ACTIONS WE EXTEND TO THOSE OF OUR CHURCH FAMILY.

BUT LET ME ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO THE SAME WITH THOSE *OUTSIDE* THE CHURCH.

DON'T JUST MAKE A GENERIC, POLITE, OBLIGATORY OFFER OF ASSISTANCE TO SOMEONE.

GIVE THEM SOMETHING CONCRETE.

TELL THEM WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO.

WHEN SOMEONE'S GOING THROUGH A ROUGH TIME, DON'T SAY, “*CAN I BRING YOU A MEAL OR  
SOMETHING?*”

SAY, “*I'LL BE OVER AT 5 O'CLOCK TODAY TO DROP OFF SOME FOOD FOR YOU & YOUR FAMILY.*”

EVEN HERE AT CHURCH, WHEN YOU SEE A VISITOR, DON'T SAY, “*HEY, HOW ABOUT GETTING  
TOGETHER FOR A MEAL SOMETIME?*”

SAY, “*WE'RE GOING TO BIAGGI'S FOR LUNCH. I'M GOING TO CALL & CHANGE OUR RESEVERATIONS  
FROM 2 PEOPLE TO FOUR.*”

THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE THEY'LL TAKE YOU UP ON THE OFFER – IF FOR NO OTHER REASON  
THAN TO GET A MEAL AT BIAGGI'S!

I MENTIONED EARLIER THAT LYDIA WAS A SPIRITUAL NOMAD.

SHE HAD SPIRITUAL LEANINGS, BUT NO ROOTS OF FAITH.

OUR COMMUNITY TODAY IS FILLED WITH SPIRITUAL NOMADS.

THERE ARE PERHAPS MORE PEOPLE TODAY WITH A HUNGER FOR SPIRITUALITY THAN EVER BEFORE IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY.

NOW THAT MAY SEEM TO CONTRADICT SOMETHING I SAID LAST WEEK ABOUT THE ASTOUNDING PERCENTAGE FOR PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY WITH LITTLE OR NO CONNECTION TO A FAITH COMMUNITY.

IT ISN'T CONTRADICTORY AT ALL.

IN FACT, IT IS CONSISTENT WITH IT & IT PRESENTS US WITH THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY EVER AVAILABLE FOR SHARING OUR STORY OF FAITH WITH OTHERS.

THERE ARE PEOPLE ALL AROUND US WHO ARE DESPERATELY SEARCHING FOR MEANING IN LIFE – STRUGGLING TO FIND ANSWERS TO THE DEEPEST QUESTIONS OF OUR EXISTENCE.

PERHAPS YOU'VE INVITED SOMEONE LIKE THAT TO CHURCH.

BUT I'M GUESSING IT WAS MORE OF A GENERAL & CASUALLY POLITE INVITATION.

IT WASN'T EXTENDED WITH THE ENTHUSIASTIC PASSION WITH WHICH LYDIA EXTENDED HER INVITATION TO PAUL.

NOW, IF YOU'RE REALLY BOLD - LIKE MY FRIEND CHARLIE – SOME SUNDAY MORNING YOU COULD CALL THAT PERSON YOU'VE CASUALLY INVITED TO CHURCH & SAY, “HEY, I’LL BE AT YOUR HOUSE IN AN HOUR. I WANT YOU TO GO SOMEWHERE WITH ME.”

IF YOU GO OUT ON A LIMB LIKE THAT, I PROMISE THAT I – AND THE REST OF US HERE – WILL DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO MAKE THEIR EXPERIENCE A POSITIVE & UPLIFTING ONE.

WHO KNOWS – LIKE LYDIA, IT COULD CHANGE YOUR LIFE & THE LIFE OF YOUR FRIEND FOREVER. AMEN.

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