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Acts 16:1-15

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Welcome to Red Oak. I’m glad you guys are here. If you have a Bible let’s open up to Acts 16. We are continuing on in our study through the book of Acts and we are going to be in Acts 16 tonight. Hopefully, we will get all the way through verse 15 of Acts 16.

Although it may not seem like it, tonight’s passage is all about the spread of the Gospel. I’m so happy we sang that last song to lead up to this passage. Even though at the beginning we are going to focus on Timothy’s circumcision, which is such a strange place for this chapter to go at this point, we are really going to focus in on Lydia in the latter part of this chapter, which I am really excited about, because Lydia’s household is a template for our own. So, we are going to talk about the Gospel spread in our homes and through our homes.

So, Acts 16. If you remember, at this point in Acts it’s all about the spread of the Gospel. So, Paul has already been on his missionary journey. He’s been out and back sharing the Gospel everywhere and then when he gets set and gets back from his first missionary journey he hears news that these guys are spreading the word that unless you are circumcised you can’t be saved. So, Paul and friends are like, “No, that’s not right. We’ve got to go up to there.” Remember how Rob talked last week about how they had a big council about it and they decided that they were not going to tell people that they had to be circumcised to be saved because that is works and salvation is in Christ alone through faith alone by grace alone and that’s it? So, they get done with this council and they are like, “Let’s go encourage the brothers again. Let’s go spread the good news of the Gospel and let’s bring this letter along saying that we’ve all decided that you don’t have to be circumcised to be saved. Let’s go. So, they get to the very first city here and do the strangest thing imaginable. They leave Antioch and Acts 16:1 says,

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him….

What?!

… because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.

Pause. That decision was, y’all don’t have to be circumcised. They’re carrying a letter that says, “Y’all don’t have to be circumcised,” but then Paul says, “Timothy, you need to get circumcised.” What’s going on here, exactly? So, verse 5 says,

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Why on Earth did Paul have Timothy circumcised? Why, at the first city he rolled into with this letter that says, “We are not causing anybody to be circumcised. You don’t have to be. That doesn’t equal salvation.” In fact, remember back when we studied through Galatians, in Galatians 2, there was a lot of pressure on Titus to get circumcised by the believers and Paul was like, “No, Titus, you are not getting circumcised. We are not going to do that.” Paul refused for Titus to be circumcised, so why in the world is this the case? You would expect Paul to act like he did with Titus and be like, “No, Timothy, you are not getting circumcised. In fact, this is a good example. We will take you along with us and be like, ‘Nobody has to be circumcised to be saved, in fact, here is Timothy. His dad is Greek and his mom’s a Jew. He is not circumcised. See?’” But that’s not what he does.

What I want to do is look at a couple of differences between Titus and Timothy. Again, this is not where we are going to focus tonight but remember last week when Rob was talking about the reason that they told the Gentiles to avoid certain things? It didn’t have anything to do with salvation. It had more to do with fellowship and with wisdom. That’s what’s going on in these verses. So, with Titus, the guy back in Galatians about who Paul said, “No, you’re not getting circumcised,” there are a few differences. Titus was Greek, not Jewish, and the pressure was coming from believers. These believers were saying, “Titus, if you’re really a Christian then you are going to get circumcised because circumcision equals salvation.” The issue was salvation so Paul said, “No.” The difference with Timothy is that Timothy was a Jew. Now, he was half Jewish-half Gentile but his mom was Jewish, which carried more weight here. It seems like his dad is off the scene. But Timothy was loved by the believers. The believers weren’t pressuring him into anything. For this instance with Timothy, circumcision didn’t equal salvation; circumcision equaled strategy. Because Paul knew that he was fixing to go with the message of the Gospel and he wanted Timothy to come with him, and the Jews wouldn’t let Timothy into the synagogues if he wasn’t circumcised. That is Paul’s main avenue of sharing the Gospel. So, for strategy’s sake, as a missionary strategy to make the message more palatable to the Jews, he said, “Timothy, you need to get circumcised.” John Piper said this,

The same freedom that caused Paul to refuse Titus’ circumcision allowed him to remove the stumbling block of Timothy’s lack of circumcision so that more Jews may be won to Christ.

1 Corinthians 9 says,

To the Jews I became a Jew in order to win the Jews.

This isn’t inconsistency on Paul’s part, it’s strategy. What’s going to win the most people to Christ? What’s going to do it? For Timothy to be circumcised so that there isn’t a distraction. And what would preach the sufficiency for Christ in Galatia? For Titus to remain uncircumcised. So, both of these things were done for the strengthening of the believers. It’s strategic. What is crazy is that Timothy doesn’t complain, “Hey, nobody’s got to get circumcised! Great!,” and then Paul says, “Actually, Timothy, it would be a good idea.” Timothy is not like, “For real? No! No, you’ve got the letter!” Timothy doesn’t complain at all. Timothy’s mindset—and this should be our mindset—is that if that’s going to win more people to Jesus, I’m in. For us, so often we are too quick to refuse any inconvenience or refuse any infringement on our freedoms. Paul said, “If it will win somebody to Christ I will never eat meat again.” That’s a big deal. Timothy said, “If it will win more people to Christ, I’ll get circumcised.” That’s a big deal. How many of us won’t let go of smaller freedoms for the sake of the Gospel.

Now, Paul has already made it clear that salvation doesn’t equal circumcision. We did a whole book study on that. That was the debate at the council—unless you are circumcised you can’t be saved. But he’s already made it clear, also, that if it’s not about salvation then circumcision is a non-issue. In Galatians 5, he said,

In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

So, Paul is saying, “Get circumcised, or don’t, I don’t care. But don’t say that circumcision equals salvation.” Because then you’d be saying that lawkeeping equals salvation. Then you would be in need of a Savior that’s already come. That’s where many Jews find themselves today. They slipped right back into circumcision equals salvation and lawkeeping equals salvation. We need a Savior because we can’t keep the laws.

So, I really like this quote,

Circumcision couldn’t make Timothy acceptable to Christ but it would make him acceptable to the Jews.

That’s big. So, Timothy joins the team and now they go on through the cities, and start telling people that freedom is in Christ, and they strengthen and grow the Church.

So, let’s move on. At Acts 16:6, we are going to focus in on a woman named Lydia. Lydia is an amazing woman. She’s a single mom, it seems. She is living in Philippi at the time, even though she’s not from here. She’s one of the most amazing women in Scripture and she is used in a huge way in the Scripture. Let’s pick up in verse 6 and we are going to look at a map. It says this,

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7 And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Alright, if you are like me, you start reading place names like this and it’s like, “And they went through the region of *huhuhuh* and *huhuhuh*, and they couldn’t go to *huhuhuh*, so they went to huhuhuh.” You’re like, “I got nothing. I’ve got no clue what we are talking about.” If they’d have said, “They started in Atlanta. They were headed to Charlotte but they couldn’t go up there so instead they rerouted to Asheville,” we’d be like, “Alright, I got you.” So, let’s look at a map and hopefully you guys in the back can see. We blew this up a little larger so hopefully you can see the city names.



Mysia

Ephesus

Antioch

Phrygia

Jerusalem

So, what we have here is the Mediterranean Sea here and Jerusalem is right about here. It says that from Jerusalem they went down to Antioch, which is north, but everything is ‘down’ from Jerusalem elevation-wise. Also, it’s the holy city so you always go down from Jerusalem wherever you go. So, they go down to Antioch, which is right here, which is the starting point, and then it says they go through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia. Now, we know that here in Lystra is where they picked up Timothy and had him circumcised. That was essentially the first city they went to. So, they went through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia and it seems like these guys are going to try to head from Phrygia, right here, to Ephesus. They have been here before and it seems like that is where they are trying to go but it says they have been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia. That’s where they were planning to go. So, how did the Holy Spirit forbid them to do that? I don’t know. We don’t know. We just know it was a closed door. We don’t know if there was opposition or if it was a vision or something like that. We just know it was a no-go.

But that doesn’t stop them. Their persistence is amazing because they don’t turn about and be like, “It’s not God’s will. Let’s go back. Let’s go home.” They are like, “We know He wants us to go somewhere,” so what they do is when it says they have been forbidden to speak the Word in Asia is they go to Mysia. So they start heading north up to Mysia and they attempted to go into Bithynia, which is north, but it says that the Spirit of Jesus, again, didn’t allow them. So, they can’t go west, they can’t go north, they came from the east, and the ocean is to the south. They are being squeezed. Do you see this? God is directing them exactly where He wants them to go. They can’t go to Ephesus and they can’t go up north, so God is squishing them into one small direction. God is directing them to a purpose here. So, it says,

they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, passing by Mysia,

They skirt right on up there.

They came to Troas. Alright? This helps us out, right? This is way better than *huhuhuh*, right? It gives us some context. So, they came to Troas. Troas is this city right here and it’s right on the coast. They get to Troas and that’s where they pick up Luke.

How do we know that? Because the pronouns change. In verse 6, it says, “and they went,” and in verse 7, “when they had come,” and in verse 10, it changes and says, “we went” and “we sought to go.” So, the author is picked up in verse 10 here. They pick up Luke to join them in Troas. So, it says, they went down to Troas and now, verse 9,



And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

Now, if you look to the left up here is the region of Macedonia across a little stretch of ocean there. He has a vision at night and there is a man who is clearly from Macedonia, saying, “Come over here. Come across the ocean. Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Verse 10,

And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we (including Luke) sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

You think so? God just closed every possible avenue in the world, “No, not there. Nope, not there. No. I want you to go right here.” So, we are at the end of the road. We are on the coast. So, God gives them a vision at night, saying, “Right here is where I want you to go.”

Especially, we younger guys—we want God to speak to us like this. We wish God’s will was so clear to us, like, “God, do you want us to go onto the mission field? Should I get married to that person? Should I take this job?” We want to go to sleep and there be something like a man from this insurance company going, “Come over here and work for us.” So, why does God work like this in the past but not so much like that now? Have you ever wondered that? Why are there so many miracles and visions back in the day and not now?

I heard a great illustration just yesterday about this from our friend Jamey Dew from Southeastern. Think about when you are building a house. What is the tool you use first? Well, you might use a chainsaw first. You’ve got to clear some land. Then, you might use a bulldozer, or a stump grinder. You might dig up some stumps and grade off the land. But then, when you are done with that you put those tools away and move to something else. You might be doing concrete, and rebar, and later on you are doing sub-flooring, and when you are done with those tools you put them away. Toward the end of the building of the house you are no longer using a chainsaw. You are using small things like paintbrushes. You are doing more finesse work. So, when you are talking about miracles and things like that and why don’t we see them so often today, it’s not that they couldn’t happen but it’s that that phase is largely over. It could be that as homeowners one day you pull out a chainsaw to clear something in your yard but that’s not the primary tool you use today, right? So, for the most part, we are talking about the initial explosion of the Gospel. There are tools being used in that age that aren’t so often used today. Today there are tools being used that weren’t so often being used then. The way God directs us most often now is through His completed Word, and wisdom, and fellowship with other believers. These are different tools than were used then. That’s another message for another day. But we see these guys are directed for a purpose. “We want you to come over to Macedonia and help us.”

Verse 11,

So, setting sail from Troas (which was the port city), we made a direct voyage to Samothrace.



Philippi

Neapolis

Samothrace

Troas

Do you see that tiny little island that all that is pointing to, Samothrace? It’s a little bitty island about halfway to Macedonia. It’s actually like a mountain in the ocean that sticks up about 5000 feet. But the terms that it uses are really interesting. It says,

We made a direct voyage to Samothrace and the following day to Neapolis.

Now, we know that journey is about 156 miles and they made it in two days. In chapter 20, it takes them five days to make the return journey. It seems like God is not only directing their paths but He is literally pushing the boat forward. The term that is used, “We made a direct voyage to Samothrace,” is a nautical expression meaning that the wind was heavy at their backs. God is directing them for a purpose, literally pushing the boat forward, and shutting all other areas. Imagine if you’re on the boat. You’re thinking, “Man, we’ve seen visions, God has closed doors, and He is pushing our boat right now. Millions of people are fixing to get saved. This is going to be crazy. It’s going to be like Jonah. We are going to walk up and say, ‘Repent!,’ and we are going to see the biggest work of God that’s ever been done.” But look at what happens when they get there. It doesn’t happen like that.

Let me pause for a second. Even though it doesn’t look like it, this is one of the huge turning points in history. The Gospel is coming to Europe. This is a big, big deal that God is directing them to.

Verse 11,

So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi…

It’s a ten mile walk from Neapolis to Philippi, right up there.

…which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony…

So, it’s a Greek city that’s been overtaken by the Romans. It’s a leading city and, of course, Luke would say that since he’s from there. He’d be like, “This town is the best.” We know it has a population of about 5000 to 10000 and it was a Greek city that had been overtaken by the Romans. So, they finally get to Philippi. This seems to be where God has been blowing the boat to, shutting all the doors to get them to, and pushing Paul to, and here is going to be the great harvest.

Verse 13,

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

That was it. There was no synagogue in Philippi. There were just some God-fearing women who had gathered together. You had to have at least ten male heads of households to have a synagogue. So, it appears here that there weren’t ten. It appears that there wasn’t even one because there is no God-fearing, Jewish man that is meeting here. It’s only woman, and in this culture women were low. You know, the Bible is consistently elevating women—consistently. But in this culture women weren’t thought of so highly. So, when they get there this would not seem like a grand beginning for the Church in this area, although it would be a great place for Paul to start because if there were no synagogue the faithful Jews would meet by a body of water because there were a lot of ceremonial washings that they would do. So, these women who met by the riverside[[1]](#footnote-1) are women who followed Yahweh but they had not yet heard of Jesus. They were faithful Jews but they were not yet Christians. So many people had to be wondering, “Where is the great work that God is driving us to? Where are the millions that are going to be saved?” Somebody had to wonder about the moves they had made. “We traveled across the ocean. We are supposed to be moving and shaking in this cultural hub and we are out here with just a handful of ladies?” But God is doing a work that is bigger than anything they could imagine.

John Calvin says this,

When they entered the principle city they found no one they could help and had to go into the countryside to speak in an obscure and deserted place. Even there they found not one man who would listen to their teaching. They found just one woman who wanted to be a disciple of Christ and she was a foreigner. With such results, who would not have thought that they had been foolish to have undertaken the journey. But the Lord makes it look as if His work is humble and weak so that His power may eventually shine more clearly. It was good that the beginnings of the kingdom of Christ were like this so that they might savor the humility of the cross.

It may not have looked like it but God was driving them to a huge work and it was going to start with one single mom. It’s crazy. God directed them across the ocean to save one single mom, Lydia. It’s awesome.

Verse 14,

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.

Now, God had passed over a lot of great mission fields, a lot of great nations, a lot of great cities, even passed by thousands of people in Philippi to get to this one single mom. Lydia is not a man but she seems to be the head of her household. We are not told whether she was divorced or whether her husband had died but the fact that she’s working professionally as a merchant, independently of a man in this culture, tells us she is likely a single mom. We know she’s a mom because the word that is used for household is not usually used for just servants; it’s usually used for kids. So, here you have a single mom, Lydia, and she is amazing. She is getting business done. She’s a businesswoman. Usually, when Paul is talking about widows he is saying, “We need to team up and take care of all these widows.” Not Lydia. She’s good. She’s doing just fine. She’s taking care of herself, right? She’s getting business done. She’s a businesswoman who is traveling around. She seems to be manufacturing, and marketing, and distributing her product, and she is likely one of the most wealthy people in Philippi. She’s dealing with purple goods, which we know got a high price, so she’s likely wealthy. She’s a homeowner and she owns a big enough home so that later on we see that the whole church in the region is meeting in her house. She’s doing just fine.

What’s crazy is a lot of people think Lydia is a former slave because her name is generic; it just means a woman from Lydia. And it’s Latinized, which probably means that her former slave master was a Roman. Maybe she was a former slave. And what’s funny is that the city that Lydia was from was in Asia, where Paul was not allowed to speak in Thyratira. So, if Lydia had been home on this day she would have not have heard the Gospel. God had blown them across the ocean but how in the world did this single mom get from Asia all the way to Philippi, become a follower of Yahweh, and be out on the riverside on this day? It’s because God was making the two things meet in His sovereignty. He was doing a huge work. God was at work making this one divine appointment. What’s crazy is that when Paul had that vision in Troas of a Macedonian man saying, “Come over and help us,” the Macedonian man turned out to be a woman, or at least the woman was used to reach Macedonian men. So, it’s pretty cool. As a woman who had potentially been freed from slavery, Lydia would have been primed to hear the Gospel that frees from slavery. So, look at what happens at the end of verse 14. She’s a worshipper of God, she’s listening to the message, and it says,

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

So, Paul brought the message to Lydia but the Lord opened her heart to believe what was said by Paul. Now, we know for somebody to come to Christ that somebody has to bring the Word, right? Somebody has to preach for another person to come to Christ but we know that preaching alone does nothing unless God has His inward calling. I can stand up here and say true things but if the Spirit of God is not working through me and in you it’s going to fall flat. God has to add His inward calling, and what happens here is that Lydia hears and probably a lot of women in the countryside there by the river heard. But God opened her heart, her previously closed heart, so that she could pay attention to what Paul was saying. The Spirit enabled her to hear and her affections were drawn to Christ and she was saved. This is the miracle—that God blew Paul across the ocean, that He shut other doors, and that He directed them and gave them a dream of where to go. This is the miracle that God was leading Paul to. And if that was it, even if Paul had just been obedient to go, that was enough. Even if just Lydia came to the Lord, that would also be enough, right? That would be more than enough.

Kent Hughes said this,

Rome didn’t know it but the flag of Christianity was unfurled in the Roman Empire that day and the reigning Christ was about to win many to himself.

God was doing a huge work. Lydia coming to Christ is big, big news. So, she is saved, and she’s baptized, and her whole family gets baptized. Now, did Lydia share the Gospel with her family? It’s unclear. It seems like they are all baptized together with Paul at the river but it’s clear that Lydia is such an influencer within her family that when she hears the truth and the Spirit opens her mind that they follow her wholeheartedly, and they believe, and they are baptized. See, she’d been preaching the truth of God, of Yahweh, in her house. She had been worshipping God with her family as a Jew and when she received the truth they were eager to listen and they followed her belief and were baptized.

Usually, when we hear of these glorious things like Paul having this vision, it usually happens to us like it happens to Lydia; her influence in her family, her belief, and her discipleship were the flag of Christianity that was unfurled in Rome. So, it goes on and says,

…after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us…

She’s a businesswoman. She’s negotiating, “Hey, y’all come stay with me.” And it appears like there’s some pushback, like, “Nah, we’ve got to get going. There’s are a lot of other people out here.” But she negotiates like a businesswoman, “No, you need to come stay with me,” and “Nah, nah, we’re good.” Then, “Listen, do you really believe I’m a Christian?,” “Well, yeah,” then, she said,

“If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

She’s a businesswoman and she’s negotiating. I love it. Why does she do this? She wants to be a part of what God’s doing. She’s newly into God’s family and she wants to be a part of what God’s doing. It’s not that she gets saved and now she’s content. She’s like, “Alright, I want to do what you’re doing. I want to win people to Christ.” We see later on that Lydia is a pillar of the church in Philippi. We see that in verse 40. The church is meeting in her house and later on Paul is launching missionary endeavors in the city from her house. It is from Europe that the Church really spreads. Look at history—it’s from Europe that the Church really spreads. Really, it was the first Christian continent and until recently it was the main base of missionary outreach. Where did all that start? With Lydia, this single mom by the river. That’s where it started. And where did it start for Lydia? Her house, with her kids, and then from her house to her community. It’s really cool. Her household is a template for many, many faithful households, and she’s a single mom.

I can’t overstate it, and I’d like to step out of the passage for just a couple of minutes. I don’t do this often but I want to speak topically for a minute just about the importance of Gospel focus in our homes. Some of you are not parents but you will be some day. Some of you are past that part of life. But I can’t overstate the importance of Gospel-focus in the home because there has been a shift with so many great pastors, and podcasts, and things like that, to outsource biblical teaching, and evangelism, and discipleship from the home to the Church. May it never be. Spiritual training and discipleship was never meant to be primarily the job of professionals, of pastors, of children’s pastors, and youth pastors. It’s primarily always meant to be the job of the family. Look at Deuteronomy 6. We will have this verse on the screen. This was not written to priests; it was written to the people. This is one of the most important verses in Israel’s history. There is the *shema[[2]](#footnote-2)* and then the greatest commandment.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This is written to all the people, “These words that I command you,” teach them to your kids. Then He mentions some set times: when you go to bed and when you get up, teach it. Then he mentions some impromptu times: when you are sitting down or when you are walking by the way, teach it. Take these impromptu times to teach the Gospel but also take set times to teach the Bible to your families. This is on us. We are to teach the Bible to our families.

Let me ask a question. You don’t have to raise your hands if you don’t want to. No big deal. This is not an indictment on anyone’s family because a lot of people grew up in homes where there were no believing parents. It’s not an indictment on anyone if you don’t want to raise your hand. But my question is, how many of you grew up in a home where family worship happened regularly, as in you sat down and read the Bible together and studied the Bible together? How many of y’all grew up in a home where family worship happened regularly? Okay, great. About ten. To be honest that’s a lot. I asked that question to a church last month where there were about 250 people in the room and three people raised their hands. Now, some people may have not wanted to raise their hands and that’s fine but if you think about how many people grew up in a home like that it is usually a small percentage. I’m not going to ask how many of y’all are doing it right now but it should be a higher percentage than that. Because if we aren’t teaching the Word to our kids, who is going to? We can’t outsource it to the one hour a week at church.

I’m going to read a couple of quotes on the importance of Bible study in the home. Some of these guys were Puritans and will use the word “prayer” or “family prayers” but what they mean is a family worship time.

J.C. Ryle said,

A believer’s own home has first claim to his attention.

Martin Luther said,

The head of the household is a bishop and priest in his house.

Thomas Brooks, a Puritan, said,

A family without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and exposed to all the storms of heaven.

That’s a big deal, man. For those of you who have kids, and those who will have kids, and those who have had kids, there are storms out there. Think about the storms of pressure at school, of their phone in their pockets, the storms of what’s going on on TV—a family without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and exposed to all the storms of heaven.

Charles Spurgeon said,

I trust that there are none here present who profess to be followers of Christ who do not also practice prayer in their families.

He goes on to say,

I esteem family prayer so highly that no language of mine can adequately express its value.

Lastly, he said,

How can we hope to see the kingdom of our Lord advance when His own disciples don’t teach His Gospel to their kids?

In a sermon about Lydia, on this same passage, he said,

If the Gospel doesn’t influence our homes, it is little likely to make headway amongst our community.

That’s big. If the Gospel doesn’t influence our homes, it’s little likely to make headway amongst our community. It begins in the homes. If we want to reach our counties—Cherokee County, Swain County, Graham County, Clay County—if we want to reach our counties with the Gospel it begins in our homes. We men in the room know that we are the pastors of our families. If you’re a dad, you’re a pastor, like it or not. If you are a dad, you are a pastor, and your job is to lead and teach. That’s not the church pastor’s job. It’s not Brody’s job, or the elders’ job, that’s our jobs, and no amount of church programming can make up for dads who don’t do their jobs. I’m speaking kind of harshly here but it’s true; this is our job as dads. I know there are several single moms in our church and you are going to have to shoulder a heavier burden but God is with you. Why else would He put examples like this in the Scripture? Here we have Lydia and God is making a huge difference. Traveling across the ocean to get to this single mom and then exploding the Gospel in Europe from this single mom. You can do it. There is hope. Why else would God put a story like this in here?

So, to the parents, let me give three things about our responsibility to our children. There are many but let me just name three and give a couple of notes on that then jump back into the text. Some of the things our families need from us.

Number one. Our responsibility to our children is to grow personally—for us to grow. I’m not talking about teaching them; I’m talking about for us as parents—and some of you are not parents in the room but maybe will be one day—our first responsibility is to grow. This is your family’s greatest need from you; greater than their need for food on the table, or college tuition one day, they need a holy parent, a parent that is seeking Christ and who is a student of the Word. If you want your kids to be growing in Christ, you have to be growing in Christ, you have to be a student of the Word. So often, we hear, “I’m not studying because I don’t have a lot of time.” True, it’s hard to do. It’s hard for me to do. It’s hard for you to do. We are busy so much. That’s why we keep having reminders in the Scripture, like in 2 Peter, where he’s like, “Make every effort.” Make every effort because there are areas in our lives that we make every effort in. We make every effort for advancement in our jobs or for hobbies that we’re interested in. We might make every effort to get our kids to the right practices or we might make every effort to be fit, or to cook well, or whatever it is. We have a plan for our jobs and financial future but do you have a plan for your personal growth? Is that strategized out? Do you prioritize that like you do your finances? Our first job is to be growing. To make excuses for our lack of Bible study is to run away from the biblical role of being a parent. This is demanding but flipping through a devotional on the toilet is not going to cut it. Our homes are open to the storms of heaven so we had better be seeking the Lord. For our own growth’s sake we need a permanent, passionate, deep, regular study of God’s Word.

The second thing our kids need from us is for us to lead and for us to teach what we actually study. I’m talking about an actual family Bible study, Deuteronomy 6 style. Teach these things to your kids when you lay down and when you get up and actually open the Bible and do it. Here’s the thing—you don’t need to have a Bible degree to teach the Bible. You can do it. Wherever you are and whatever your level is you can do it. Is it going to be awkward? Yes, it is. You are going to turn off Netflix for the first time in months and be like, “Well, alright everybody, we’re going to read the Bible tonight.” It’s going to be real awkward at first but it’s going to get good. It’s going to be something that’s lifegiving to your kids, to your family. Your kids don’t need an eloquent sermon. They don’t need a pastor to come in and do it. What they need is a parent who is studying the Bible and being changed by it, and seeing a great truth in the Scripture, and having their hearts deeply affected by God’s Word. They need a parent who is being moved and grown through the Scripture and who then just turns around and shows that to their kids. If you do this and if your heart is deeply moved in the Scripture and then you just turn around and tell your kids what the Bible says, that is good discipleship. That’s what Deuteronomy 6 is calling us to do. But if you want kids whose hearts are impacted by the Gospel, who are reading some great truth, and who are rocked by conviction, then we first have to be impacted by the Gospel. We have to be rocked by conviction and have our hearts changed by God. Good teaching is the work of God in the parent and then through the parent.

If you have never done this before with your family it might need to start with an apology. It can be quick, “Hey, you know we talked about Bible study tonight and we realized that is something that we don’t do, so that’s my fault. That’s my job and I’m sorry.” The end. “Let’s start it up. Alright, we are going to start in John. Does that sound good?” So, you read a few verses and talk about what it means, then close it up and pray, and that’s good. That’s godly leadership. That’s what they need to see from us. Single moms, that’s what they need to see from you. Dads, that’s what they need to see from you—it’s to lead.

Now, if you’re past this phase you say, “That’s sounds good. Thirty years ago, thank you.” If you are past this phase then you can be a godly patriarch. Imagine if you are the godly granddaddy who is having Bible studies with your grandkids, or if you’re a godly grandmama. If you don’t have that family on the scene, maybe it’s time for you to be Paul. Maybe it’s time for you to start traveling around and encouraging the young men and women who are around you. Maybe you don’t have that in your house but you can do what Paul’s doing. There are young believers out there and maybe you can take that guy out to eat. Maybe you can be an encouragement there.

The first thing is to grow, and the second thing is to lead, and the third one is to fight for your kids in prayer. Fight for your children in prayer. We know that trying to convince a natural man, a natural kid, a sinful kid that they need Christ—trying to convince them without the inward work of the Holy Spirit—is like trying to convince a blind person to see. “C’mon, see. Look at me.” It won’t happen. Trying to convince someone of their need for Christ without the work of the Spirit won’t happen so we need to labor over our kids in prayer. The Lord opened Lydia’s heart and He’s going to have to open your daughter’s heart. He’s going to have to open your son’s heart.

We’ll jump back into the text. Paul’s missionary journeys are centered around cities. They are centered around population centers and this is where our focus should be as well. But we are not trying to win the city of Andrews; we are trying to win households. We are trying to win individuals. We are trying to talk to moms and dads, right? When you look at this he speaks to Lydia and she is sharing that faithfully within her household. She sought the truth and then she passed on the truth to her family. Here’s what’s interesting, Lydia doesn’t put ministry in the community on hold until her family is all discipled, and grown, and gone. It’s not a sequence. Paul doesn’t bring the message, and the Lord open Lydia’s heart, and all her kids get saved, and she’s like, “This is so great! Now, let’s close the doors now that we are all saved and let’s back up because the world’s a dirty place. It’s a dark place out there where we just were five minutes ago, so let’s just stay at home and do Bible studies.” She doesn’t do that. It’s not a sequence where you insulate your kids from everything possible and then once they are grown, and out of the house, and you are sure they are doing great, and you are sixty, then now it’s time to get out there and minister in the community. That’s not what she does. She starts ministering with her family immediately. Immediately she goes out, “Hey, y’all come to my house. Can the church start meeting at my house? Are we going to go out and win people? Let’s go. Let’s start the missionary journeys from my house. Let’s do it.” Immediately she starts ministering. The first church in Europe meets in her house, and it’s her, her kids, a slave girl, and a Philippian jailer. That’s it. That’s how the Gospel spreads to Europe. This single mom and her kids, this formerly demon possessed little girl, and a jailer who was about to kill himself—that’s how the light of the Gospel split the darkness of Europe. It starts in her house. It’s beautiful. She didn’t just hole up in the house with her kids and the Gospel; she went out with her family to spread the good news.

Our homes should be an epicenter of Gospel spread. Think about what an epicenter is. It’s that point on the Earth vertically above the center of an earthquake. The earthquake rattles that one part and then shakes all the way out. That’s how our homes should be. Our homes should shake with Gospel purpose and then ripple out to the community. We can’t keep that just inside of our homes. God has left us the great gift of being His ambassadors to this county and to the counties around it.

If you look at 2 Corinthians 5, this is the last verse tonight. Starting in verse 16, it says,

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Now, listen to this.

18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation….

Pause. So, God reconciled us to himself and then He took that ministry of reconciliation and He handed that to you. He said, “Alright, that ministry that I just did with you, that’s yours now. Take that ball and run with it.” He gave that to us. He goes on and says this.

…that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

God is making His appeal to Andrews, to Murphy, to Robbinsville, to Hayesville—God is making His appeal to those places through you, and really He is going to make that appeal through you first to your family and then through your family to the community and eventually to the nations. That’s the good news of Lydia whose home as a single mom is a template for Gospel spread. That’s the good news of Timothy who wouldn’t allow any inconvenience, any pain, any shame to stand in His way for the spread of the Gospel. For us, we are too easily stopped. Paul is pressing on and he’s going, “Oh, the door is closed there? I’m going to keep pressing….Oh, the door is closed there? I’m going to keep pressing… Oh, the door is closed there? I’m going to keep pressing….It seems like just a few ladies by the river, I’m going to keep pressing.” Then the Gospel explodes in Europe. We hit one inconvenience snag, one tired night, and we are like, “Nah, I’m out.” God can explode the light of the Gospel in this community and He wants to do so in you, in your family, and through your family.

Let’s pray.

Jesus, we love you. God, I pray that our homes would be an epicenter of Gospel spread. I know there are so many people in here, maybe even the majority, who don’t have homes or families. Some of them are kind of past that phase of life and some have not yet entered into that phase of life, God, but I pray that whatever phase of life we are in that we would recognize the tenacious Gospel spread in these verses both through Paul, through Lydia to and through her family, through Timothy who would not be stopped at any inconvenience to make the message of the Gospel more palatable. While he didn’t flex on theology he flexed with compassion. Lord, I pray we would be the same. I pray that we would look for excuses to share and to be used as your messengers of reconciliation in this community, in our homes, and then through our homes. God, I pray that we would be used of you. We love you, Lord Jesus, in your name we pray. Amen.

1. Krenides River [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shema (“hear”) is the Hebrew word that begins the most important prayer in Judaism. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4, which begins with the command to “Hear.” The whole Shema prayer, which includes verses 4-9, is spoken daily in the Jewish tradition.

   Jesus was asked by a Pharisee who was considered to be an expert in the Law, “What is the greatest commandment?” (Matthew 22:34–36). Jesus answered by saying, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37–40). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)