

August 30, 2026

“Lydia, the Generous Hostess”
Lesson 5

Acts 16:11-15, 40

Intro

Today’s passage comes during Paul’s second missionary journey. During this trip, he visits places he went to previously, including Galatia. But Paul also wants to travel to places that haven’t heard the gospel message before, so he heads further into Roman Asia. He goes to Troas and Macedonia, where he meets Lydia, the faithful witness we study today. The Bible teaches us to show hospitality to others (see Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2, and 1 Peter 4:9). Jesus himself teaches that when believers show hospitality to “the least of these brothers and sisters of mine”, it is seen as doing that to Jesus Himself. Today’s study shows a first-century example of hospitality toward a stranger. Through this example, we will see how Christian love is embodied.

Read Acts 16:11-15

1. vs. 11: Paul has talked to a man who had a vision that Paul was to go to Macedonia (vs. 8-10)
 - The “we” indicates Luke, the author of Acts, was on this trip with Paul
 - They sail across the Aegean sea to the east coast of Macedonia
 - It only takes a day, due to the prevailing winds, which are coming from behind them
 - In Acts 20:6, the same journey going the opposite direction takes 5 days
2. vs. 12: They go to Philippi, about 10 miles inland from the coast where they land
 - Philippi was named after Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great
 - It is located on a major Roman highway, resulting in significant trade traffic
 - It is an important city to Rome commercially and administratively
 - It is basically in the center of the Greco-Roman world
 - It’s population is primarily retired Roman soldiers; there are few Jews there
 - Paul says they stayed “several days”, likely only a week at most
3. vs. 13: The report here of Paul’s actions on the Sabbath are different from his usual procedure
 - He would usually go to the synagogue on the Sabbath
 - Going to the river on that day instead of the synagogue indicates there wasn’t one
 - By Jewish tradition, it takes at least 10 Jewish men to have a proper synagogue
 - It is likely that there weren’t 10 Jewish men in Philippi at that time
 - 1st Century Jewish practices required running water for ritual cleansing practices
 - If there’s no synagogue, then the river would be ideal for prayer and worship
 - Women had more independence in 1st Century Macedonia than other Greco-Roman areas
 - In Philippi, women held leadership spots in various places
 - Many of these areas were pagan and cultic worship temples, like for Artemis
 - Women of the time were expected to follow their husbands’ religious practices
 - However, many Roman husbands complained of the influence of “foreign” religions
 - These are religions that weren’t Greco-Roman
 - Historians record that many Gentile women converted to Judaism

This finding makes Paul's interaction with both Jews and Gentiles unsurprising
Women played a significant role in the growth of the church in the 1st century
(See Acts 18:2 and Philippians 4:3)

Paul is about to meet a woman who will become a key member of the church in Philippi

4. vs. 14a: Paul meets Lydia, whose name and hometown are both significant

Lydia is also the name of a district in the Roman province of Asia Minor

Some believe she may have been a slave at one time

It was common for enslaved people there to be named after their homeland

This Lydia is from Thyatira, the capital of the district of Lydia

The city was known for producing dyed materials, with purple being very prominent

Creating purple dye was a difficult task, extracting fluids from a murex snail

This difficult process and the rarity of the color made it the most expensive cloth to own

Purple clothes were usually only owned by the wealthy and royalty

Lydia is called here "a dealer in purple cloth"

This indicates she is financially successful—she is wealthy

5. vs. 14b: Lydia being called "a worshipper of God" can mean one of three things:

1) The is a Jewish woman, who worships God regularly

2) The is a Gentile who has converted to Judaism

3) She is a God-fearing Gentile, like Cornelius in Acts 10

Because of the lack of Jews in Philippi, #3 seems the strongest possibility

Lydia is ready to hear the gospel message—her heart is "opened" by God

She doesn't think about what she's heard; she acts

She responds to Paul's message, indicating she accepts the truth of the gospel story

6. vs. 15a: Lydia and her household were baptized

The impression here is that it happened quickly after her "open heart" response

It's possible they were all baptized that same day

In Acts, faith and baptism are often mentioned together

The Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, the Philippian jail (ch.16),

The Corinthians in ch.18

This is the first mention of a *household* receiving baptism (Acts 16 is the next)

Lydia may be the head of her household as a widow, with authority over those in it

7. vs. 15b: Lydia self-identifies here as "a believer in the Lord"

She appeals to Paul and Silas as a fellow believer—as one like them, a Christian

Her identity has shifted from "worshiper of God" to "believer"

Lydia's response to her baptism / conversion is one of generosity and hospitality

She asks the men to stay at her house

It's likely Lydia is a Gentile, and that her home doesn't practice Jewish purity laws

There is some degree of faith and courage in Paul agreeing to stay there

Jews don't associate with non-Jews, especially to stay at their houses

This shows how the gospel of Christ breaks old barriers and traditions

Paul can feel at ease being a guest in this house, as they are now "on the same side"

This act of hospitality also has a very practical side
There aren't hotel chains then, as we know them now
This offering provides a safe place to rest, have a meal, and care for their animals

Read Acts 16:40

8. vs. 40: This verse is at the end of a well-known story about Paul and Silas
In Philippi, they cast out a spirit from an enslaved woman who is a fortune-teller
Her owner is upset at the loss of income, and he gets them beaten and put in jail
That night, God sends an earthquake which breaks their chains
Instead of leaving, or being mad at the jailer, they convert him and his household
The next morning, Paul tells the authorities he is a Roman citizen
The authorities escort him and Silas from jail, and request that they leave Philippi
Where do they go...? To Lydia's house!
They need a place to rest up and recover from being in prison
They go to a place that they know will offer hospitality and safety
Paul also gets a chance there to see and encourage the brethren in Philippi
Lydia's home is likely a "church", a place where believers meet to worship

Application: Hospitality is essentially "love in action". When we show hospitality and generosity and kindness, we demonstrate our love for God and others. Lydia exemplified this by providing a welcoming space for people to gather, share meals, engage in fellowship and prayer, and to encounter Christ. Lydia provided Paul with a base for his ministry, and somewhere to return to when he needed a place of rest. Today, hospitality is likely to include sharing a meal with new members of your neighborhood or of the church community. It could include providing a place for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. Hospitality is an expression of love that comes from our experiencing the ultimate in love—our salvation through Christ's death on the cross and subsequent resurrection. This love transformed Lydia's life, and she used it to transform the lives of others. We need to consider how we can use our hospitality to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Lydia's example of hospitality and faithfulness. May the Holy Spirit continue to transform our hearts so that we may be good examples of hospitality. We ask to be willing to open our hearts and homes to welcome others, even strangers. In Jesus' name, Amen.