



Walking Through the Scripture Together

July 20 - 26, 2008

Acts 15:36-16:15

## The Fine Art of Catching the Wind

**Text** Acts 15:36-16:15 (TNIV)

### Disagreement Between Paul and Barnabas

<sup>36</sup>Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." <sup>37</sup>Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, <sup>38</sup>but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. <sup>39</sup>They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, <sup>40</sup>but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup>He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

### Acts 16

#### Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

<sup>1</sup> Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. <sup>2</sup> The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. <sup>5</sup> So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

#### Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia

<sup>6</sup> Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup> When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. <sup>8</sup> So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

### Lydia's Conversion in Philippi

<sup>11</sup> From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. <sup>12</sup> From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

<sup>13</sup> On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup> One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. <sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

### Thought

Church Street.

Dead End.

Sometimes, it is that simply and undeniably clear.

Years ago it had been suggested we check out a nearby locale as a possible church plant location. We made childcare arrangements for the kids (they were much younger then) and then made an early Saturday morning excursion — or better — pilgrimage of sorts to see what the Lord was doing.

Being well-behaved, good evangelicals and new to the whole "Holy Spirit show us the way" mode, we somewhat sheepishly prayed as we started walking the streets of the town early on that beautiful morning: "Lord, we're not very good at this and don't know exactly what we are asking for, but please take a holy 2X4 and show us clearly if you want us to come here to plant a church." We had no sooner breathed the last words when we looked up and there it was. A sign from the Lord. It said "Church Street." For a moment I thought I heard a heavenly chorus. But immediately looming behind it was another sign (we asked for one and here were two!), which read in even larger letters: Dead End.

We looked at each other. "Wow, he's good." We enjoyed the rest of our morning away from home, visited a few shops and the local museum. And then we drove away and like Lot's wife should have done we never looked back. The literal signs weren't the only signal, but they were the seal upon what we had gathered in our prayer and searching.

Clear signs call for thanksgiving (even when they aren't pointing where you wish). Ambiguous or even absent signs call for thoughtful and patient prayer and trust. There isn't a set formula for spiritual direction, but those are the essential ingredients for Jesus followers pursuing his kingdom.

## Small Group Discussion Guide

### Lean In

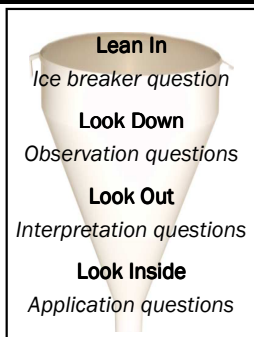
- When's the last time you actually had to stop and ask for directions? How easy or difficult is this for you? Why?

### Look Down / Look Out

- Why did Paul and Barnabas get into such a tiff over John Mark? Whom do you think was right? How well do you think this disagreement was handled by the two of them?
- Why do you think Paul selects Timothy to travel with him? Why does he have Timothy undergo circumcision after just arguing strongly against it in Jerusalem?
- What kind of barriers did Paul and his team encounter as they travelled on through Asia Minor? How did they respond to each barrier?
- How did Paul know God had called them to go to Macedonia? Whom did they meet upon arriving there? What kind of reception did they have?

### Look Inside

- How do you typically respond to barriers and delays and redirection? Do you usually see barriers in life as from the devil (to be prayed against) or from God (to be trustingly accepted)? How do you tell the difference?
- Review your own journey over that past year or two. What unexpected turns have you taken? What opportunities and obstacles have you faced? How well would you say you have been "catching the wind" of the Holy Spirit in your life? Do you feel like you've been in the doldrums lately? Catching a gentle breeze? Borne along by a rushing torrent? Explain.



## Family Discussion Guide

### Day One Acts 15:36-41 & Philippians 4:1-3

Why do you think Paul wouldn't want Mark to come with them on this trip after Mark left them before? Why do you think Barnabas wants him to come along? How easy or hard is it for you to give someone another chance after they have really let you down or hurt you? Why?

### Day Two Acts 16:1-5 & 2 Timothy 1:5-7

Would you have been more excited or scared by the idea of traveling with Paul — especially if it meant you had to have a really painful shot first? Why would you feel that way? What's the one place you would love to go as a missionary? What's the last place you would want to go? Why?

### Day Three Acts 16:6-8 & Galatians 5:24-25

How can you tell when God wants you to go somewhere or do something — or not to go somewhere or do something? How do you usually hear God's voice?

### Day Four Acts 16:9-12

When's the last time you saw somebody really needing help? What did you do?

### Day Five Acts 16:13-15

How can you make someone new to your school or neighborhood feel welcome?

## details, details...

### They parted company

Paul and Barnabas had a "paroxysm" — the Greek word used here has crossed over to English and means "any sudden, violent outburst; a fit of violent action or emotion." In other words, they had a bigger argument with each other than they just had in Jerusalem with the circumcision bunch. And a breach avoided there is not avoided here: they go their separate ways. The fact that Luke reports and doesn't whitewash or skip this episode is another mark of authenticity for his narrative. It also provides two powerful lessons: (1) Leaders are human and don't always make the best call or handle situations in the most godly manner and (2) God can use even the rank foul ups of leaders to advance the kingdom in ways that otherwise might not have happened. This will hopefully give us greater trust in God and make us more apt to forgive one another — as Paul and Barnabas evidently did.

### A disciple named Timothy

Paul refers to Timothy as his son in the faith (see 1 Cor. 4:17). He probably came to faith through Paul's first visit to Lystra back in Acts 14. His father may have been Greek, but his mother and grandmother raised him in the Scriptures from the day he was born (see 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15).

### He circumcised him because of the Jews

Why circumcision here for Timothy, but not for Gentiles believers? (Perhaps quite a burning question in Timothy's mind too.) Motive is everything. As a requirement for salvation, Paul would fight it to the death. As a requirement for effective mission work among Jewish populations across the Mediterranean world ("To the Jews, I became a Jew to win the Jews" see 1 Cor. 9:20), Paul would just pray such a valuable potential partner would have the faith and fortitude to make that sacrifice.

### We got ready to leave at once

Evidently Luke first met Paul during this stay at Troas and subsequently joined his team.

### We concluded that God had called us to preach to them

Authentic turning points in history are few. But surely among them that of the Macedonian vision ranks high. Because of Paul's obedience at this point, the Gospel went westward; and ultimately Europe and the Western world were evangelized. Our response to the call of God is never a trivial thing. Unimagined blessings will flow from it.

## On Hearing God

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God. Those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it; yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive. It is not pleasure which we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from a principle of love, and because God would have us.

**Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God***

Exclude all tricks, mechanical formulas and gimmickry for finding out what God wants us to do. We cannot reduce it to a device that we use to make sure we are always right. Indeed, I hope to make it very clear that the subject of hearing God cannot be successfully treated by thinking only in terms of what God wants us to do if that automatically excludes — as is usually assumed — what we want to do and even what we want God to do. *Hearing God is but one dimension of a richly interactive relationship, and obtaining guidance is but one facet of hearing God.*

**Dallas Willard, *Hearing God***

In his book, *Hearing God*, Dallas Willard goes on to list the following ways in which people are addressed by God in the biblical record (not that these would be the only ways we might hear God today...but they give us a feel for what we might expect):

- A phenomenon (see Daniel 5)
- A phenomenon plus a voice (see Genesis 15)
- A supernatural messenger/angel (see Luke 1)
- Dreams and visions (see Acts 10)
- An audible voice (see Genesis 22)
- The human voice (see Exodus 4)
- The human spirit or "still small voice" (see Acts 20:22-23)