

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XLI. Sticking With God's Leading Amid Hardships

(Acts 16:11-40)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 16:11-40 records how after God had led Paul's ministry team by way of circumstantial guidance to evangelize in Europe, they faced multiple hardships in that effort. Their reaction to those hardships coupled with God's response to their reaction to those hardship provides us invaluable insight for our application:

II. Sticking With God's Leading Amid Hardships, Acts 16:11-40.

- A. When God circumstantially led Paul's ministry team to cross the Aegean Sea to minister there, that guidance involved a vision of a Macedonian man asking him to come over to Macedonia and help them, Acts 16:9.
- B. When they went to Macedonia, Paul's team faced trials, but they still stuck to God's leading, Acts 16:11-25:
 - 1. They faced and stuck with God's leading regardless of finding a lack of Hebrew men for a synagogue:
 - a. When they crossed the sea and came to Philippi, the largest city in southeastern Macedonia (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, Map 13: The Missionary Journeys Of Paul), on the Sabbath, they had to go out of the city by a river where they expected to see other Jews meeting for prayer, Acts 16:11-13b NIV.
 - b. Ten Hebrew males were required for a synagogue to be established, but in the absence of enough men, the Hebrews would meet for prayer by a body of water. (Ibid., fn. to Acts 16:13; Henry Alford, The Grk. Test.: Vol. II – The Acts of the Apostles, the Eps. To the Romans and Corinthians, 1852, p. 163)
 - c. Paul's vision in God's call that he go to Macedonia involved a Macedonian **man**, but Paul and his team had to sit down by a river and minister to a group of Hebrew **women** in the *absence* of *men*, Acts 16:13c.
 - d. Nevertheless, Paul still ministered and led the woman Lydia to Christ, Acts 16:14. She was baptized in the river along with her household, and she persuaded Paul and his coworkers to stay with them, Acts 16:15.
 - 2. Paul's team faced and stuck with God's leading though facing angelic conflict opposition, Acts 16:16-25:
 - a. Paul's ministry team was then plagued by a demon-possessed girl who closely followed them shouting that they were servants of the Most High God who proclaimed the way of salvation, Acts 16:16-17.
 - b. After she had followed them many days with these statements that would harm the credibility of the Gospel they taught due to its promotion by a demon-possessed girl, Paul exorcised the demon, Acts 16:18.
 - c. However, this exorcism angered the girl's masters who had made a lot of money by using her to predict the future, so they stirred up other people and the town leaders to beat and imprison them, Acts 16:19-24.
 - d. Nevertheless, though beaten and imprisoned, their feet placed in stocks, Paul and Silas were up until midnight singing praises unto God, being testimonies to the other prisoners who heard them, Acts 16:25.
- C. In response, God rewarded Paul's ministry team with spiritual victory in their ministry, Acts 16:26-40:
 - 1. The Lord caused a great earthquake to shake the prison so that all of its prison doors were opened and everyone's bands were loosed, Acts 16:26.
 - 2. The warden, being responsible for any prisoners who escaped, drew his sword to kill himself, but Paul urged him to refrain from doing so since none of the prisoners had escaped, Acts 16:27-28.
 - 3. The warden then asked Paul what he must do to be saved, Acts 16:29-30. Some think he asked about salvation from hell while others think he asked about deliverance from execution for the freeing of the prisoners. (Ibid., B. K. C., N. T., p. 400) When Paul replied that the warden and his household should trust in Christ to be saved, they heeded Paul's advice and joyfully ministered to Paul and Silas, Acts 16:31-34.
 - 4. The next day, when the city rulers told the warden to release Paul and Silas, Paul replied that they had beaten uncondemned Roman citizens, troubling the rulers so that Paul made them come and publicly escort him and Silas out of the prison in honor in defense of the credibility of their Gospel, Acts 16:35-39. Paul and Silas then went to Lydia's home to encourage believers before leaving Philippi, Acts 16:40.

Lesson: *When Paul and Silas stuck with God's leading that they continue to minister in Macedonia regardless of discouragements and hardships to the contrary, God powerfully moved to enable them to minister effectively there.*

Application: *If God leads us even circumstantially in a certain direction, may we stick with that guidance, assured that the Lord will meet our needs and make our work effective even if we face difficult trials along the way.*