

WEEKLY REFLECTION

Though the book of Acts tells the story of the early Church fulfilling the mandate of the risen Lord Jesus (Acts 1:8), it also shows how God's Holy Spirit works through His faithful. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in Acts 16, where we see numerous examples of Spirit-led detours: the Spirit's guidance to Paul as He forbade them to speak the word in Asia (v.6) and a similar instruction to refrain from passing into Bithynia. (v.7) The Macedonian Call, a vision that Paul received of a man from Macedonia pleading with him to go and help (v.9-10); His softening and opening of Lydia's heart to pay attention to the gospel. (v.14) The power of God prevailing over the slave girl as the Spirit cast out the spirit of divination inside her (v.18), and the supernatural peace and joy that God gave to Paul and Silas as they were worshipping Him from prison. (v.25) The same God that they worshipped set them free (v.26) and moved them to care for the jailer in both word and deed, causing him and his household to come to Christ. (v.27-34)

Before Jesus commanded His disciples to go to the end of the earth, He first told them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. (Acts 1:8) He told them to stay in Jerusalem and to wait for the promise of the Spirit, to be "clothed with power from on high." (Lk. 24:49) Jesus knew that without the help of His Spirit, we would be powerless. And indeed, it is only because of the empowerment of the Spirit that the Church was able to be so effective for God.

Do you lean on your own strength, church? Or do you surrender to Him daily and wait for His Spirit's guidance? Learning to discern for the Holy Spirit may not come naturally, but it will point us to Jesus and bring life.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

What has been your experience with the Holy Spirit's guidance? How have you felt Him speaking to you? (e.g. through the Word of God, inner convictions, pictures, an audible voice, by opening / closing doors etc.) How do your experiences compare to those outlined in Acts 16?

QUESTION TWO:

Paul and Silas were led on numerous Spirit-led detours in their attempt to be faithful to God. They include: (1) being forbidden to share the gospel in Asia and Bithynia; (2) receiving the call to preach the word in Macedonia; (3) their encounter with Lydia as the Spirit opened her heart to pay attention to the gospel; (4) their conflict with the slave girl and her owners, which landed them in prison; and finally, (5) an opportunity for the jailer and his entire household to come to Christ through their imprisonment.

What do these detours tell you about the heart of the Holy Spirit and the nature of His guidance? What can we expect as we attempt to follow His leading and guiding in our everyday life?

QUESTION THREE:

Take some time now to practice stillness in the presence of God. Set aside all distractions to focus on Him and wait expectantly for whatever it is He wants to share with you. Don't discount any thoughts that pop up or stir up in your mind. Allow them to just be as you practice discernment of God's Spirit. If you find yourself struggling to hear from Him, now might also be a good time to ask God why that is.

Share what you have received with your life group members afterward, and take some time to pray into what you have received. Remember that no questions or thoughts are too big or small for God, and allow Him to lead the way.