

OPENING THE FLOODGATES

We hope this series of studies will issue in the floodgates of heaven being opened afresh! You'll find the background to the series [here](#).

This is the last study in the present series, and after this there'll be a couple of weeks' break before the next series begins. The Community Group leaders will be meeting together on October 8th with a view to reviewing this set of studies (among other things), and hopefully there'll be much mutual benefit through that!

No pressure!

Please don't feel any pressure to answer *every* question in your Community Group! I've stuck with the pattern of there being 7 (sets of) questions, as much as anything to provide a set of daily study notes for those who find it helpful to work their way through the passage like that. The time you have in a Community Group is limited and inevitably, therefore, you may need to be selective in which questions you look at.

Priorities!

You'll know your own group, so use what you'll find most helpful. Key questions for us all as a fellowship this week are probably questions 4, 5 & 6, so do aim to cover at least these in the time that you have: and again please feed back any insights which would seem to be of benefit to us all!

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8. *“.. so the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers ..”* (Acts 15.35-16.15)

Right in the middle of the section we'll look at in this study there's this reference to the churches being strengthened in the faith, and growing daily in numbers.

We've noted before how *God makes things grow*. Running through this passage here we see spiritual growth, numerical growth, geographical growth and 'cultural' growth. It's an impressive picture which is painted for us! Not to demoralize us but to encourage us. This is just who God is and what He does: He makes things grow! Acts is the record of how that happened.

1. Read Acts 15.35-16.15. By the end of this passage the gospel has been taken 'overseas' for the first time: the gospel has sails now as well as 'wheels'! There's a momentum here which we're meant to sense: and yet at the same time, it's all very down to earth and 'messy' – and, of course, as you read on into chapter 16 you'll see it gets 'messier' still!

Which parts of this narrative can you relate to very readily (e.g. disagreements among Christians, mixed marriages, frustration; the Lord's clear guidance, responsive people, the ministry of hospitality, etc)?

2. Read 15.35-41. There's an interesting parallel here with what we saw back in Acts 6.1ff – a situation which issued in a remarkable spread of the word of God (Acts 6.7): for here, too, the significant spread of the word of God into Europe is prefaced by a notable dispute.

What was the dispute between Barnabas and Paul about?

On which side of the dispute do you think you'd have come down, and why?

Read **2 Tim.4.10**: do you think that Mark perhaps needed both 'the kindness and sternness/severity of God' (a phrase Paul used in Rom.11.22)?

In what ways can you see that God worked this dispute for good in the cause of the gospel?

3. Read 16.1-5. Despite a 'bad' experience last time out in taking a younger man along with them, Paul and Silas still choose to take another young man, Timothy, with them on this next trip.

Read **Galatians 5.2-6**. Against the background of Paul's thinking as expressed in Galatians, why did he circumcise Timothy?

The importance of the churches being 'strengthened' was a clear priority for Paul (read 16.5 along with 15.41 and 14.22): but exactly how are churches strengthened? What does that involve and how is it brought about?

4. Read 16.6-8. This must have been a frustrating time for Paul, Silas and Timothy – sensing the Lord had work for them to do but finding a lot of 'closed doors' before coming to what might have felt like a total 'dead end' (Troas was right on the coast).

Have you known times in your life where you've encountered similar frustration?

What do you think is meant by the reference to the Holy Spirit keeping them from preaching the word in Asia, and the Spirit of Jesus not allowing them to enter Bithynia?

And why do you think the Holy Spirit would ever keep them from preaching the word?

5. Read 16.9-10. There's a shift in v.10 from the third to the first person: it would seem that Luke (the author of this narrative and, significantly, a Greek) met up with them in Troas.

What do you think enabled Paul and his group to conclude "*that God had called us to preach the gospel to them*"?

Can we look for similar clarity in terms of the call of God upon our life as His people here? And if so how?

6. Read 16.11-13. The rest of this chapter will record in some detail the establishing of the church in Philippi. In pressing on to Philippi, of course, Paul and his companions effectively by-passed Neapolis – we can't be everywhere or do everything.

What two things does Luke tell us about Philippi?

How do they help explain why Paul and his group went there, rather than stopping at Neapolis?

How did Paul go about fulfilling the call to 'preach the word' to the city of Philippi?

Does this have any lessons for ourselves in terms of how we engage in mission?

7. Read 16.13-15. These verses record the first conversion in Philippi. It wouldn't be the last by any means, but it provides a helpful and encouraging insight into the miracle of conversion. We read last time how the Lord "*had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*" (Acts 14.27): here, in relation to a Gentile woman, we read how the Lord "*opened her heart*".

What factors were involved in Lydia's conversion? What factors were involved in the Lord opening *your* heart to respond to the message?

In what ways did that renewing work of the Lord in Lydia's heart and life find expression?

How does her response challenge you?