



15. 'Expanding our horizons'

Acts 16.¹⁻¹⁵

Background

The progress of the gospel in the early years of the Christian church was phenomenal, underlining a basic biblical truth that 'God makes things grow': that's who He is and what He does, and it's no surprise, therefore, that when Jesus goes about building His church, the work is characterised by such growth.

That it's *He* who orchestrates the work is evident again in this passage, in the way that He so sovereignly hedges Paul and his companions in to where He means them to be, preventing them (we're not told exactly how, but to Paul it was clearly the Lord's doing) from entering and ministering in areas to the north and south and driving them ever westward until they reached Troas, situated on the coast – which was effectively the 'end of the road'.



Where Paul had perhaps been thinking of bringing the gospel to a new country, the Lord had in view a new *continent*. The distance between Troas in Asia and Neapolis in Macedonia may be relatively small, but it represented a quantum leap in terms of the progress of the gospel; and it underlines the fact that so often the Lord is not only a step ahead of us, but plans on a bigger scale than us as well.

Having recognised that it's the Lord who orchestrates it all, it's important, too, to see the careful 'strategising' on the part of Paul. Being reliant on the wind of the Spirit doesn't obviate the need for the spiritual sailor to use the rudder, and to manage his/her sails! Taking Timothy on board as a trainee was no random act, but part of a consistent 'strategy' on the part of Paul: as was the way in which, having crossed into Macedonia, he went straight to the 'leading city' of the area.

Read the whole passage to get a sense of how the Lord is ever expanding His people's horizons. '**Days**' (2), (4) and (6) are the ones to start with if you can't cover them all! There are additional questions for discussion on those days.

1) Monday 12th June – pray for today's young people

Read [Acts 16.1-2](#)

".. whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek" (Acts 16.1)

Timothy was just a quiet lad from a non-descript place, with a mixed (and, who knows, mixed-up) parentage. He'd never have imagined the role which, in the sovereign plan of God, he'd be called to fulfil. From his youth the Lord had been at work in his life!

Are there children and young folk in your congregation for whom the Lord prompts you today through this Scripture to be praying?

Consider the ministry of Timothy's mother and grandmother to him (see [2 Tim.1.5](#) & [3.14-16](#)): how does their example challenge and inspire you?

Prayer: *Watch over the children growing up in our land in these days, Lord. Guard them against all deception, keep them from what would be harmful, lead them in Your ways.*

2) Tuesday 13th June – a 'next generation' perspective

Read [Acts 16.2-3](#)

".. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey .." (Acts 16.3)

The Scriptures exhort us always to have an eye for the next generation. Paul's pattern in ministry (see [Acts 12.25-13.5](#)) was to work in tandem with a mature leader and to take along a 'trainee' who would grow thereby into fruitful ministry.

In what ways does your fellowship follow this pattern in seeking to train up the next generation for ministry?

How might this be developed?

Should the leadership of a church take more of an initiative in calling younger men and women into 'training' roles and to undertake our [2-year training programme](#)? How might that be done?

Why did Paul, who was adamant that believers did *not* have to be circumcised (see [15.1-21](#)), have Timothy circumcised?

Prayer: *Help me so to declare Your mighty acts, Lord Jesus, that the next generation will learn to put their trust in You, and rise up in their day to do great things for You.*

3) Wednesday 14th June – the faith mustn't be fudged

Read [Acts 16.4-5](#)

".. the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" (Acts 16.5)

The 'assembly' in Jerusalem had sharpened the thinking of the church and clarified what lay at the heart of the gospel. The church benefits from, and is strengthened by, such clarity in the formulation of gospel truth: and that clarity is attractive to others!

In what ways do confessional statements, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith, strengthen believers in their faith

What are the benefits of 'catechising' people through the likes of [the Shorter Catechism](#)?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for those who explain to me the truths of the gospel: help me to see how the gospel applies in every situation and to speak and act accordingly*

4) Thursday 15th June – He knows the plans He has for you

Read [Acts 16.6-8](#)

".. the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to .." (Acts 16.7)

Jesus knows what He's doing, even if we're confused at what's going on. Why would the Lord who'd called Paul to preach to the Gentile world prevent him from preaching to .. well, the Gentile world? Jesus's plans are much bigger than Paul's – and yours!

In your own experience in what ways have you found yourself 'kept by the Holy Spirit from' a certain course of action?

'Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse' (Philip Yancey): **what has been your experience of that?**

Think of other narratives in the Bible where God's providences seem (at least initially) to run counter to His promises and plans: how do these narratives help you when things don't work out as you think they should?

How as a believer are you able to handle situations which leave you very frustrated?

Prayer: *Your ways are not my ways, Lord, for You see the end from the beginning. I'm glad of that. When it feels like I'm getting nowhere, help me to trust Your plans for me.*

5) Friday 16th June – God is always doing a new thing

Read [Acts 16.9-10](#)

".. after Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave .." (Acts 16.10)

Troas is the end of the road, with only sea beyond. What perhaps might have seemed like a dead-end, however, was in truth but a launch-pad for a further significant expansion of the gospel. A new continent beckoned. God is always doing a new thing!

What factors served to lead Paul and his companions to the conclusion that "God had called us to preach the gospel to them"?

What lessons does this hold for us as believers as to how God guides?

Prayer: Give me the wisdom to discern Your call, the boldness to embrace it, wherever it may lead and whatever it may cost, and the strength to fulfil it for Your glory.

6) Saturday 17th June – Jesus at the centre

Read [Acts 16.11-12](#)

“.. we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city ..” (Acts 16.12)

Jesus’ strategy started at the centre (Jerusalem) and worked outwards (Judea, Samaria, the world): Paul seems to have adopted a similar strategy – start at the centre (Philippi) and see the gospel flow out from there. Keep your living well ‘centred’.

Is it valid to see this as a basic gospel ‘strategy’ for our living, both as individuals and as a fellowship?

To what extent and in what ways are your movements shaped by a concern to spread the gospel?

What is the *central* activity of your living, and in what ways can you see God’s grace overflowing from that into the lives of others?

We have been set by the Lord in the centre of the city at a time when concerns for the ‘revitalising’ of the city centre are to the fore (you may be interested to read the ‘whitepaper’ from [‘Our Union Street’](#)): how might we maximise the opportunities which such a location provides?

Prayer: Jesus, be the centre, be my source, be my light, be my hope, be my song. BE the fire in my heart, be the wind in these sails, be the reason that I live. [[Michael Frye](#)]

7) Sunday 18th June – opening the floodgates

Read [Acts 16.13-15](#)

“.. the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message ..” (Acts 16.14)

The Lord opens doors (see [Rev.3.7-13](#))! The Lord opened the door to Macedonia, and Paul opened his mouth to speak. The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, and she opened her home to house the whole mission team. When the Lord’s at work floodgates open!

If conversion is a miracle of the Lord’s working, from the narrative here what advice would you give to someone who is seeking new life in Christ?

In what ways are you able to provide support to those who are proclaiming the good news of Jesus?

Prayer: As people gather for worship today, O Lord, may there be many whose hearts are opened and whose lives are changed as they hear Your word being preached.