

Acts 16 | Casey Talley

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[0:00] Hi, good morning. Can everybody hear me? Is that working? Yeah? All right. We're going to be in Acts chapter 16 today, so you can go ahead and start turning to Acts chapter 16. While you're doing that, I want to just give a little bit of context to the chapter, what's going on here. As we saw last time that Paul and Barnabas have split. They've gone separate directions. Barnabas took Mark and Paul took Silas. And so in Acts chapter 16, we're going to see Paul right towards the beginning of his second missionary journey, traveling with Silas from region to region, proclaiming the gospel. And so that's kind of what's going on here. We see in the first few verses that Paul is going to meet Timothy, and Timothy's going to join him and Silas. And then later on, we see that Luke also joins them as the narration switches to the first person from the third person. So we have Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke.

And so there's four of them. I'm probably going to say Paul every time just for simplicity because it's easier, but just know it's a group of them. So Acts chapter 16, we're going to kind of be jumping from section to section. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, imitate me as I imitate Christ. And that's what I want to look at this morning is how do we imitate Paul as he imitates Christ?

That is an incredible burden, incredible responsibility to place on yourself. I'm amazed that Paul would say that. But it's something we're called to do. And so I want to look at Paul's life. I want to look at the way he lives and find three lessons from this chapter that we can take to heart and will hopefully change the way that we live.

So I'll go ahead and open in prayer and we'll get into it. Lord, be with me this morning as I speak. Lord, give me wisdom. Lord, be with all of us. Give us ears to hear. Not to hear me, but to hear your word, Lord, and be changed by it.

Just give us a Sunday that is glorifying to you, Lord. And it's in Jesus' name I pray. Amen. All right. So Acts chapter 16. The first section we're going to look at, we're going to go from verse 6 through 15.

[2:06] And I have three points this morning, three lessons I think we can learn from this chapter. And they are how to submit, how to suffer, and how to share. Those are the three main points we're going to look at.

How to submit, how to suffer, and how to share. And so our first one, how to submit, we'll read verses 6 through 15. It says, So setting sail from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city in the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony.

And we were staying there in this city for some days, and on the Sabbath day, we went outside to a gate to a riverside, where we were supposing there would be a place of prayer. And sitting down, we began speaking to the women who had assembled.

And a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening, whose heart the Lord opened to pay attention to the things spoken by Paul.

And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. And she prevailed upon us. All right, so there's a lot there, but the one thing I want to look at, the one question I want to answer from that section is, What does it look like to submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

[3:49] I think that's something we all want to do. It's something we're all called to do, to submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And so I have a few things here that I think we see in Paul's life and the life of

the men that are with him.

And the first one is, obey what you know. Obey what you know. What we see in this chapter, especially in verses 6 through 10, we see powerful moments when the Spirit intervenes and gives explicit, specific guidance and direction.

Right? And I think we sometimes have the misconception that that is what it was like for Paul all the time, was a constant voice from the Lord. Here's where to go. Here's what to do. That he always knew exactly what the will of God was, what he was supposed to be doing, where he was supposed to be.

But we see even in this section that that's not the case because he goes the wrong way twice.

Right? Paul did not have constant, explicit guidance from the Holy Spirit. He didn't know exactly where to go and exactly what to do all the time.

Right? But what he did have was a command from Jesus, go, for I will send you away to the Gentiles. Right? He had a command from Jesus. He didn't know exactly where. He didn't know exactly when, exactly how.

[4:58] But he knew he was called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. And we see at the beginning of this chapter and really all throughout the book of Acts that Paul is obeying that command. Right?

The reality is that as believers there will never come a point when we are without the guidance of the Holy Spirit because we have the word of God. Right? We have the word that the Spirit inspired. Right?

The guidance from the Spirit is not always a loud, obvious, spiritual experience. Sometimes guidance from the Holy Spirit just looks like reading the word he's given you and obeying it.

Right? If we want our lives to be led by the Spirit, step one is to obey the word that the Spirit inspired. Very often I find myself praying for guidance, praying for some kind of direction while my Bible sits collecting dust in the other room.

Very, very often I text my boss with questions about the schedule, changes of the schedule, what's going on, whatever. Hey, this meeting was moved.

[5:56] What time is it? 1 or 1.30. And every time her answer is the same, she always says, did you check your email? And every time my answer is the same and I always say, no, I did not. And I check my email and there's the answer.

Right? And I think that's what we look like a lot of the time. Right? Did you check your email? Did you read the word of God before you went to him and asked for direction and guidance? Right? And so if we want to be led by the Spirit, step one is to read the word of God and find what he has to say.

Because I can know what he wants from me at any given moment. I might not know exactly where to go, exactly what to do, but I can know for sure what the word of God says. Right? And so guidance from the Spirit begins with the word he's already given.

But it's one thing to read the word of God for guidance and direction. It's another to obey it. Right? We're not only called to look to the word of God for guidance, we're called to obey the word of God. And what I see here is that the Spirit's guidance comes in the midst of obedience, not before obedience.

The Spirit's guidance comes in the midst of obedience, not before it. Right? I think we see that here and I think we see it throughout Scripture. That Paul is already obeying and then he receives guidance.

[7:04] He receives guidance as he obeys, not before. We see that a few other places. I'll just look at two. Proverbs 3 verse 6 says, In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight.

Right? In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight. So there is a condition to my path being made straight and that is that I acknowledge him in all my ways. If I want my path to be made straight, I need to acknowledge the Lord in my ways.

Right? Obedience comes before guidance. Or guidance comes in the midst of obedience. Romans 12, 1 and 2, the only other one we'll look at. Offer your body as a living sacrifice.

Right? Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed through the renewing of your mind.

Right? Why? So that you may discern the will of God. Right? To discern the will of God, I need to

offer my body as a living sacrifice.

Right? Guidance comes in the midst of obedience. Right? And it may be a controversial point. I don't think it comes in disobedience.

[8:04] Paul Washer says it this way. He says, It does little good to cry out for extra biblical manifestation while biblical principle is being violated. If I want guidance from the Spirit, I need to first and foremost obey.

Number two, what I see here is accept when the answer is no. Accept when the Spirit says no. We'll look at verse 7 again. It says, They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

And after they came to Mycenae, they were trying to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them. Right? So in this section, we have three instances where we see guidance from the Holy Spirit.

And the first two are just the Spirit saying no. Right? Paul goes the wrong way twice. Not intentionally, but the Spirit prevents him from going into Asia and then from going into Bithynia. Right?

And what we don't see from Paul is we don't see him try to beat down a door that the Spirit is closed. What we do see is that he keeps moving after each closed door. Right? He doesn't sit down and pout.

[9:05] He doesn't lock himself in a room and meditate for a week saying, I'm not going to do anything until you tell me exactly where you want me. He keeps moving. Right? Because, and again, it goes back to that first point that he may not know exactly where to go, but he knows what he's been commanded to preach the gospel.

Right? And so he keeps moving. And my main point here really is that closed doors are not a lack of guidance. Closed doors are a form of guidance. Closed doors are not a lack of guidance. They are a form of guidance.

And we can see that in this passage, that through closing doors and saying no, the Spirit is actually directing Paul, showing him where to go. Right? And we'll have to do a little bit of geography here, but Paul and Silas are coming from the east.

They try to go south to Asia. The Spirit says no. And they try to go north to Bithynia. The Spirit says no. And so through only a no from the Spirit twice, the Spirit has shown them exactly what direction he wants them to go.

The only option is west. Right? The Spirit is guiding and leading Paul simply by telling him no. Right? And so really the point is not just that we need to accept no as an answer, but to recognize that a no from the Spirit is guidance from the Spirit.

[10:13] The Spirit is guiding Paul through telling him no. Our next point, recognize the Spirit's authority. Recognize the Spirit's authority. Let's look at verse 14.

They finally get to Macedonia, and they meet Lydia, and we'll just read verse 14 again. It says, A woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening, whose heart the Lord opened to pay attention to the teachings of Paul.

Whose heart the Lord opened. Now, this specific instance is evangelism. And this is true in evangelism, but I think that biblically this is true for the Christian life in general, that it is the Spirit's work, not ours.

Right? The Christian life, and especially in evangelism, it is the Spirit's work. It is not our work.

Right? Ultimately, Paul was not behind the conversion of Lydia. Right?

She did not believe because she listened to Paul's teaching. Her heart was not changed by Paul's teaching. She listened to Paul's teaching because her heart was changed. Right?

[11:19] And we see in Acts 16, and really throughout the book of Acts, that the Holy Spirit is a spirit of power. And he is guiding the apostles, and he's working through them, and he's changing hearts and lives, that it's his work.

He is the main character of the book of Acts. It's his work. Right? And in this next section, these next three verses, or four, I think we see a contrast between the spirit and a spirit.

So I want to read that real quick, right after the conversion of Lydia. We'll just look at verses 16 through 19. It says, All right.

So, again, there's a lot here. I just want to look at one thing. One contrast between the spirit and a spirit. Right? We see that this girl has a spirit of divination. And the contrast is this.

That the spirit of divination is being used by men for profit. The Holy Spirit is using Paul. Right? And that's a very important distinction. And I think it's something that we need to remind ourselves of constantly.

[12:48] And the way I say it to my students is this. That the Holy Spirit is not your Pokemon. Right? The Holy Spirit. And that's silly. But it's the way so many people view the Holy Spirit.

As a tool in their hands. The Holy Spirit is not a tool in my hand. I am a tool in his. Right? To submit to the Holy Spirit is to recognize that he is the one with authority. And allow him to use you.

Right? This is the Holy Spirit's work. All right. Our second point here. How to suffer. We'll go ahead and read this next section. Paul and Silas after their encounter with this servant girl end up suffering.

So verses 19. We'll go through 26. 19 through 26. It says, But when her master saw that their hope of profit had left, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities.

And when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, These men are throwing our city into confusion being Jews. And are proclaiming customs that are not lawful for us to accept or observe being Romans.

[13:51] So keep that in mind. That the basis for this accusation is Paul and Silas' Jews stirring up trouble among the Romans. Right? And the crowd joined together to attack them.

And the chief magistrates, tearing their garments off of them, proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. And when they had inflicted them with many wounds, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely.

Who, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet and stocks. But about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God.

And the prisoners were listening to them.

And suddenly there came a great earthquake so that the foundations of the jailhouse were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. And we'll stop there for now.

Alright, so three things here that I want to look at. Number one, how to suffer. And how to suffer well, really. Number one is recognize the sovereignty of God. If there's anything that tends to challenge our belief in the sovereignty of God, it's suffering.

[14:53] There's a popular question, and I'm sure you all know it and have heard it. A question that atheists will ask all the time. If God exists or if God is good, why do people suffer?

Alright, that's their question. What's interesting is they never ask, if God is sovereign, why do people suffer? They never ask, if God is in control, why do people suffer? They don't challenge his sovereignty, they challenge his goodness.

In this question, there is an assumption that's being made by the atheist, and I think it's a good assumption. It's an assumption that I respect. And the assumption is that if there's a God, he must be sovereign.

If there is a creator, he must have authority over his creation. And unfortunately, it seems that the most prominent challenges to the sovereignty of God don't come from outside the church.

They come from inside. There's a popular evangelist that I see on social media all the time, usually on YouTube. He goes to college campuses and he preaches the gospel and he answers questions that the students have for him.

[15:52] And I really like this guy. I usually love what he has to say. But I saw this clip the other day that popped up on my feed where he was asked this question. If God is good, why is there suffering?

And his answer was essentially to say that God is not responsible for suffering. And not just that he's not responsible for it, but he brought up an example of his niece who died in a car accident, his

nephew who was born with a disability.

And he said, God did not cause my niece to die in that car accident. And he said, God did not cause my nephew to be born with a disability. He could not reconcile the sovereignty of God with the reality of suffering.

And now neither can those students, probably. His answer was essentially to say suffering is not a result of God's will, but of the unfairness of life.

And what's ironic is that this evangelist referenced the book of Job to answer this question. And I think the book of Job gives the exact opposite answer. I'll quote John Piper here.

[16:53] John Piper speaking on the book of Job. He said, Job and his friends had questions about the nature and character of God. Is God good? Is he just? Is he punishing me?

But is he in control? Never. Never. Not once does Job or any of his friends challenge the sovereignty of God. And his friends gave some terrible advice. But they never challenged the sovereignty of God.

Right? Instead, Job says, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Right? And he says, should we accept good from God and not evil? And evil there is calamity. Right? Now, I don't want to pretend that this is a simple issue.

Right? This is a very complex issue. God is not the author of sin. We do live in a fallen, broken world. Right? There was no suffering in the garden. There will be no suffering in heaven. Right? And so it is complex.

I'm not saying it's easy. But I'm making one point here. And one thing that we really need to understand. And that is that at the end of the day, the absolute sovereignty of God in suffering is not up for debate.

[17:55] I'll look at a few passages here. Isaiah 45, 7. I form light and create darkness. I make well-being and create calamity. I am the Lord who does all these things. Lamentations 3, 37, 38.

Who has spoken and it came to pass unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? Amos 3, 6. Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it?

Right? God's sovereignty in suffering is not just a logical conclusion. It's something that God has explicitly made clear about himself.

That he's in charge. Right? Now, here's why I bring that up now. And here's what it has to do with Acts 16. Because we need to remember what we just looked at. God's guidance of Paul and Silas. The guidance of the Holy Spirit. If there's anything that Paul and Silas could know as they sat in that prison, as they took those beatings, it's that God put them there.

[18:54] It's that they were exactly where God wanted them to be. Right? The fact that God is sovereign over suffering is extremely important for us to recognize. Because the sovereignty of God in suffering is what gives the believer hope in the midst of it.

Right? To know that I'm suffering for a reason. I think sometimes we water down the words of Joseph. Right? To his brothers. What you intended for evil, God is able to use for good.

Is that what he said? No, he said what you intended for evil, God intended for good. But there is intention behind my suffering. Right? Paul's hope and our hope in the midst of suffering is that there is a good, loving, intentional God behind it.

There's intent in suffering. And we need to recognize the sovereignty of God in suffering. Because otherwise the rest of this doesn't work. Right? My next point, number two, is to rest in suffering. That we can rest in the midst of suffering.

Right? We can only do that if God is sovereign over it. If God is sovereign over suffering, then I can rest in the midst of it without complaint. And I think that's what we see from Paul and Silas. Right? They take a public beating, get sent to prison, and yet we don't see them fight back or cry injustice once.

[20:05] Right? And that's especially interesting because at the end of this chapter, after the prison, after they've already been told you're free to go, Paul says, and I'll just read if I can find it.

Paul says, here we go. The jailer repeated these words to Paul, saying, The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore, come out now and go in peace.

But Paul said to them, Having beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, they have thrown us into prison, and now they are sending us away secretly. No, indeed, but let them come themselves and bring us out.

Right? Remember that the basis of this accusation was that Paul and Silas are Jews, and they're stirring up trouble among the Romans. Right? Now they've been set free, and Paul says, No, they're trying to send us out secretly.

We're Romans, and this was illegal. Right? And my question is, why not before? Why not as they raised the rod to beat Paul, did he not say, Guys, we're Romans. This is illegal.

[21:04] And I'm not saying for sure. I can't know that that would have worked. But it seems that it would have, because also in verse 38, we see that when the magistrates hear this, they're afraid. Right? It says, The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.

This very well could have gotten them out of their suffering. So why didn't Paul bring it up beforehand? And the other question is, why did he bring it up at the end? And I think the latter answers the first.

When it came to the legality of the gospel, Paul stood up and defended it. But when it came to his comfort, Paul took a beating. Right? Paul did not stand up to defend his comfort.

He stood up to defend the legality of the preaching of the gospel. Right? So he's not defending himself. He's defending the gospel. And I'm not saying, this is a difficult point, because I'm really not saying that we should intentionally run headfirst into suffering for the sake of suffering.

Right? Like, when I have a headache, I eat ibuprofen like they're Skittles. Right? I really, it's a very difficult point, because I can't draw a hard line and say that you need to always suffer intentionally.

[22:16] Just for the sake of suffering, I don't think that makes you more spiritual, to go out and look at the sun while you have a migraine and somehow think that that's going to build up some spirituality within you.

Right? But my point is, the only thing I can say is that because God is sovereign over suffering, I don't have to fight tooth and nail to avoid it or get out of it. But I am able to rest in suffering, knowing that God works all things together for the good of those who love him.

Right? Paul is able to rest in suffering. And that leads us to number three, which is that not only is he able to rest, but he's able to worship. To worship in the midst of suffering. Right?

And we'll look at verse 25 again. And it says, about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Right? A few things here. Number one, and this is very simple, but Paul's worship is not conditional.

His praise does not come after his deliverance. It comes in the midst of suffering. Is my praise conditional upon God's response to my prayers?

[23:21] Right? It says he was praying as well, and I'm sure he was praying for freedom. I'm sure he didn't want to sit there forever. Right? But he's worshiping before the answer comes. Right? It's easy to praise God when things are good, but true, genuine worship happens unconditionally.

In the good and the bad. Can you praise him in the midst of suffering? And then one more thing here with worship. Is that worship in the midst of suffering is a testimony to the world.

Right? It says the prisoners were listening to them. We know that it had an effect on the prisoners. Because when the prison doors come open, the prisoners stay put.

Right? Paul says not a single one of us has left. Not one prisoner took off running. So somehow, these prisoners were affected by Paul and Silas as they were in prison. The world is watching and listening to the way we respond to suffering.

When we respond to suffering with worship, we show the world how beautiful Christ is. That's really the point. Right? That's why God allows suffering. That's why we suffer as believers.

[24:26] Is to show, display before the world where our treasure is. That I love Christ more than I love my comfort. Right? Paul and Silas' worship displayed to the prisoners that Christ was more precious to them than their comfort.

Right? To endure suffering makes you look strong. But to worship in the midst of suffering makes God look glorious. Right? And that's the point. We worship to make God look glorious. All right? And my last point here, and this will be quick. We'll end with this. How to share. We'll read that next little section. Verses 26 through 31. It says, Right?

Right? This is just one point here. One very simple point. But it's that the gospel is simple. Don't lose the simplicity of the gospel. Right? The gospel is extremely complex.

But it is not complicated. Right? And there's a difference. It's good to see the complexity of the gospel. It's good to dig into the word of God and grow in our understanding of what Christ really did for us.

[26:01] But ultimately, the gospel is simple. You don't have to be a theologian to share the gospel. You don't need to spend years of intense study and preparation. Right?

It's good to deepen your understanding of the Bible and the gospel. And it's important. But ultimately, the gospel is simple. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. There was no power behind Paul's eloquence.

There was power behind the name of Jesus Christ. Right? The same thing that happened to Lydia happened to that jailer. Jesus Christ intervened. The Holy Spirit changed him. Right? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Let's go ahead and pray and the musicians can come up. Lord, be with us as we leave here. Lord, help us to imitate Paul as he imitated you.

To be more like your son. Lord, to submit to your spirit. To suffer well when it's our time. And Lord, to share the gospel. God, that's something that you've called all of us to do. It's something that we can know we're supposed to do, Lord.

[27:03] God, give us courage to do that, Lord. And help us to remember that your name is powerful. And that it's you alone who has the power to save. And I ask these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen.