

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- When has God led you in a direction that didn't initially make sense but later revealed His purpose?
- What people or cultures does society try to emulate today in order to be accepted and liked?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How do you see the difference between being "self-referenced" versus "Christ-referenced" in your own walk with God?
- What strikes you about how Paul and Silas responded to their imprisonment? How can we cultivate that kind of joy in difficult circumstances?
- In what ways might God be expanding your understanding of how the Gospel can reach people you wouldn't expect?
- How does this passage challenge cultural prejudices and biases?
- What prejudices might God be asking us to confront today?
- What can we learn from the three conversions in this passage (Lydia, slave girl, jailer) about how God works in different people's lives?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

- Are there any places God might be leading you that don't make sense right now?
- Do you have cultural biases that might be limiting your view of God's work?

PRAYER FOCUS:

- Praise: Thank God for His work in unexpected places and people
- Confession: Acknowledge any prejudices or biases that limit our view of God's work
- Request: Ask for grace to follow God even when His leading doesn't make sense



WEEK 1 THE LITTLE ROME ACTS 16:11-40

TODAY'S VERSES:

Acts 16:11-40
Matthew 9:13
Philippians 2:9-11

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WEEK 1 – THE LITTLE ROME – ACTS 16:11-40

As we start this series looking at the letter to the Philippian church, we have to start with Paul's first encounter with the city as found in Acts 16. Philippi was known as "The Little Rome" and was a privileged Roman colony that prided itself on Roman culture and customs. They stylized their city after Rome, followed all Roman decrees, and wanted to **be** Rome. Part of their special privileges was that they were exempt from paying the heavy taxes that citizens in other cities paid. They were also excused from certain military service while receiving military protection, since Philippi was an outpost for Roman soldiers and many retired there.

Paul's Journey – Paul's journey leads him from being self-referenced in his relationship with God (meaning he wanted God on his own terms) to someone who is Christ-referenced.

- **A self-centered (referenced) follower of God** defines God by themselves and what they like.
- **A Christ-centered (referenced) person** is someone who ceases to place God in a box and starts to follow Him wherever He leads.

Paul thought he needed to protect and draw lines around God to protect Him, but God is bigger than us and doesn't need us to protect Him. He wants us to **image Him to the world**.

Paul's Change – Read Acts 16:10-15. God uses the city of Phillipi to broaden Paul's understanding of what the Gospel brings. What Paul most likely thought he said yes to was not what he found. For instance, he received a vision of a man and instead encountered a group of women by the river. We see that in God's mission, God is saving people while expanding

Paul's own heart in the process. Similarly, God wants to open our hearts and minds to understand His call to us too, so that we would engage others with curiosity and hope, pointing to the restoration God offers us.

Welcome to Philippi! Paul becomes grieved by how a slave girl (a child) was being exploited and abused by people and spiritual forces. Paul dismisses the demon in the child with the words: *"I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her."* Note that he specifically uses the name "Jesus" and not another title, such as "the Most High God." He used the occasion to set aside all of their 'gods' and their oracle and proclaim to them the name of Jesus. In front of the largest audience possible, Paul sets someone in bondage free in the name of Jesus.

As a result of healing this slave girl, Paul and Silas are accused of teaching things at odds with the surrounding culture. An angry mob beat them with rods, followed by the magistrates putting them in jail. Despite the injustice, Paul worships God in the midst of his suffering. While worshipping God (in a jail cell), an earthquake opens all the cell doors. The jailer sees all the doors open and is about to take his life when Paul intervenes. This jailer doesn't have an understanding of heaven, hell, sin, or grace, and yet he asks to be "saved." His answer gives him more than he ever bargained for as Paul explains the Gospel. The jailer and his entire house believe, and everyone gets baptized.

Jesus quotes the Old Testament book of Hosea in *Matt 9:13 Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'* For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." We must learn what that means if we are to be effective in not just understanding, but reaching, culture. The Gospel makes all the difference when we allow God to change our views to what He truly intends.