

Called to Serve

Denisha, you are creative, smart, and a good manager with a strong work ethic,” Kerah said. “And no one can deny you’re young and beautiful.”

“Thanks, Kerah,” Denisha said, “but all those things, plus me being black, have also worked against me. Those three store trainees last month took one look at me when I tried to train them and instantly decided they didn’t like me. They grumble behind my back all the time.”

“Well, you’ve overcome so much,” Kerah reminded her. “You’ve juggled school and work and made it to the top. I think they’re envious of you because you’re in management even though you’re younger than they are. And maybe they don’t want to be bossed around by a black woman.”

“I listen to advice and even take constructive criticism,” Denisha said. “I really do; I’m always open to that. I want to improve, and I want to keep getting better because I want to do a good job; I want to build up the store. I can change a lot of things about myself, but I can’t change the color of my skin.”

“Don’t give up,” Kerah encouraged. “Your other employees love you.”

“I won’t give up,” Denisha said. “I’m going to be the best manager in the division with the most revenue. I’ve been through plenty, and I’m going to show those new guys just how gracious a manager I am and how great a store we can have. That’s what Jesus would want me to do.”

1. *When have you been discriminated against just because of who you are?*

2. *Why do we often emphasize the differences between ourselves rather than the similarities?*

3. *Has discrimination by others ever kept you from serving the Lord? Explain your answer.*

Lydia and Her Household Accept the Lord

Acts 16:11-15, 40, KJV

11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Acts 16:11-15, 40, NIV

¹¹From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹²From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

¹⁴One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

¹⁵When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

⁴⁰After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

During Paul's second missionary journey, in a dream he saw a man from Macedonia asking for help, so he and his team headed west (16:8-10). From Troas on the west end of Asia Minor they sailed to Samothrace, an island in the Aegean Sea, and then to the port of Neapolis on the mainland of Greece. From there it was 10 miles to Philippi. As a Roman colony, this city served as a trading hub where travelers and merchants from all over the world come and take in exciting news and developments from all over.

On the Sabbath, they looked for "a place of prayer" (vs. 13) outside the city and found a group of women praying. Jews often worshiped by rivers because of the ritual bathing requirements of the law.

At the river, Paul and his companions began to converse with the women. One in particular who responded was named Lydia, a dealer in expensive, dyed-purple cloth, which meant she was probably wealthy. She was "a worshiper of God" (vs. 14), a Gentile attracted to Judaism, who now responded to the Gospel and experienced saving faith. She and all her household were baptized. She possibly was a widow successful enough to maintain a large household with multiple servants and a house that could accommodate Paul, his companions, and other new converts.

Knowing that Paul and his team would need a place to stay, she offered her hospitality, and they gladly accepted her generous offer. Later, when Paul and Silas were released from prison, they went back to Lydia's house to encourage the believers gathered there before heading for Thessalonica.

4. Why did Paul stop in Philippi on this missionary trip?

5. What was unique about Lydia?

God Chooses the Foolish Things

1 Corinthians 1:26-27, KJV

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men

1 Corinthians 1:26-27, NIV

²⁶Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you

KJV

after the flesh, not many mighty,
not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

NIV

were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

In First Corinthians, Paul called attention to the “no-status” people who are often called by God to do significant work in their small circles of influence. Small acts of kindness and compassion done in the name of Christ are multiplied by the millions of believers all over the world. The impact on civilization and the world is like a holy tsunami rolling over a dry and thirsty world.

While God wants us to participate in the advancement of His kingdom, He wants us to be humble. Biblical humility will always compel us to acknowledge that God alone is the source of all the good we are capable of doing. Few of the Corinthian believers were wise by human standards, meaning they did not have the knowledge of education. Greek cities erected statues to the wise men of that culture. This worldly wisdom apparently did not describe the majority of people in the Corinthian church.

Paul reminded them that they even though they were not wise by earthly standards, nor particularly influential, God still called them wiser than the “strong” people of this world. This describes Lydia. Though a successful entrepreneur, she still would not have been taken as seriously in many circles as her male counterparts. Even so, she had influence over the group of women in her circle of friends, and certainly in her household. We would do well to follow her humble example.

6. *What does it mean to be “wise by human standards” (vs. 26)?*

7. *What type of person does God choose to shame the self-proclaimed “wise and strong”?*

No One May Boast

1 Corinthians 1:28-30, KJV

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

1 Corinthians 1:28-30, NIV

²⁸God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Paul reminds us that God chooses the lowly and despised of this world to redeem—not those who glorify themselves. When people understand that their true spiritual condition is lowly and despised, then it follows that no menial task is beneath them!

Paul introduces a curious phrase here, that God chooses those “things that are not” (vs. 28) to render void that which boasts of solely human origin. Again, this is a reminder that God is the origin of every good thing we are capable of doing.

The good that we are able to do for the Kingdom happens because Jesus has “become for us” the “righteousness, holiness, and redemption” (vs. 30) we need to be reconciled with God. Christ’s redemption in us will ultimately be manifest when we finally stand before God, free from the presence of sin in our bodies or souls, and we can freely enter into the presence of God and dwell with Him forever.

8. *Why can no one boast about accomplishing his or her own salvation?*

9. *Why must the righteousness of Christ be attributed to us if we are to be justified with God?*

And a Little Child Will Lead Them

Superheroes come in many packages. They may not save the world or have super powers, but they may be like a six-year-old, African-American boy named Jermaine Bell. This little hero took all of the monies he was saving for a memorable Disney World trip and did something amazing with it. He served evacuees of Hurricane Dorian in South Carolina in 2019. Jermaine stood near a highway as many fled the city to safety from the storm, offering them hot dogs, chips, and water from his hot dog stand. This six year old with the giant heart said, “The people that are traveling to other places, I wanted them to have some food to eat so they can enjoy the ride to the place that they’re gonna stay at,” he told CNN. This hero served hundreds of people and wanted to serve more. “I just want to be generous.”

Jermaine’s generosity had a sound that was heard around the world and by officials at Disney World. At his birthday party a week later, Mickey Mouse showed up and surprised him and his family with an all-expenses-paid trip to Disney World.

Sometimes as adults we need to look to children as our role models. They show us how we should overlook the differences we see in others and serve them all, just as Jesus would. It is no accident that He told His disciples, “Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4). Sharing the Gospel and serving others is too important to let worldly divisions such as age, economic class, or ethnicity get in the way of our being like Jesus.

10. *Describe a time when you or your church overlooked worldly divisions to serve others.*

11. *Why would we let such divisions stop us from serving others or sharing the Gospel?*

12. *How is your church separated from the world around you so that serving it is difficult? How could you change that?*

How Do You Consider?

Do we “consider” people without prejudice? Sometimes our consideration is based upon prejudices and stereotypes. Sadly, there are those people we don’t consider at all because they don’t fit who we want to serve—they are too much not like us, for instance. How can we change our “consideration”?

► *Consider some groups of people in your community that your church is not reaching because of differences in ethnicity, race, education, or social class. How can your group change that and reach out to these other groups?*

KEY VERSE

And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

—Acts 16:15, KJV

When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

—Acts 16:15, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of March 1 through March 7

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Psalm 77:11-20—Remember God’s Acts of Deliverance.

Tues. Luke 16:19-31—They Have Moses and the Prophets.

Wed. Exodus 12:43-50—Instructions for Observing the Passover.

Thurs. Numbers 9:9-14—Foreigners and the Unclean Share in the Passover Meal.

Fri. Exodus 13:1-2; Deuteronomy 15:19-20—Consecrate All Firstborn to God.

Sat. Exodus 13:3-10—Observe Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Sun. Deuteronomy 18:15-22 —God Leads through Prophets.