

Lesson Overview

Week of February 28

1 Life Need:

Discuss how we can let divisions get in the way of serving God.

2 Bible Learning:

See how Paul and his company brought the Gospel to Lydia and her household.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Poster and Reproducible Sheet—Women in the New Testament

3 Bible Application:

Explore how we can overcome divisions to serve the Lord.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Reproducible sheet—Diversity: A Model of Heaven

4 Life Response:

Serve the Lord with everyone, no matter your differences.

Church/Home Theme:
Christ Jesus Is Our Savior

Lesson Focus:
Don't let worldly divisions limit your service.

Lesson Scripture:
Acts 16:11-15, 40;
1 Corinthians
1:26-30

Called to Serve

God's Kingdom—Those who live out a worldly ideology have a bad habit of drawing conclusions about the usefulness of a person according to their education, finances, employment history, and other such achievements. People who don't have a great education or lots of money or a great work history will compare themselves to those with more and conclude they have nothing to offer. But this is not the case in God's kingdom. The Father calls all to serve regardless of one's status in society. He desires for all hands to be on deck. Everyone is needed to serve in God's vineyard.

Lydia's Conversion—Lydia is a perfect example. The Holy Spirit instructed Paul to travel to Philippi, where he found a small group of women who met down by the river. He shared the Gospel with these women, and Lydia, the head of the household, opened her heart to Christ. As a result of this one women's conversion, the Lord established a strong Christian congregation in Philippi.

Be Wise—Paul said the Christians in Corinth were not as full of book knowledge as other people were, nor as rich and influential, but they had an advantage—they had the wisdom of the Lord. They knew that God chose the lesser things of this world, the things most people did not value, and exalted them. They were now righteous, meaning their sin was covered before the Lord (2 Cor. 5:21). They were sanctified: they were "set free from every sin" (Acts 13:39) by the blood of Christ and strove to be holy, to grow and be transformed into new desires for God and His ways (1 Pet. 1:15). Further, they were redeemed, meaning that they had been purchased with the price of Christ's death from being slaves to sin. Their eyes were now on the Lamb of God who conquered sin, not worldliness or worldly divisions, so they could go forth and serve everyone.

As Your Students Arrive

Ask your students to think of things that can divide us. Some answers could include our ethnic background, social class, education, or economic situation. We may also believe stereotypes about groups of people, which can lead to divisions as well.

Link to Last Week

Some volunteers may want to share about being a team to reach others with the Gospel and how that could work.

1 Life Need

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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.*

LESSON FOCUS: Don't let worldly divisions limit your service.

Discuss how we can let divisions get in the way of serving God.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:10, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."

Ask your students to read the story in the student book, then form small groups to discuss their answers to **Questions 1, 2, and 3.**

For Question 1, students may tell stories about being discriminated against because of their ethnicity, race, sex, education, or social class.

Question 2 reminds us that we often look first at the differences to make ourselves seem superior to those other people. We also create divisions and stereotypes of others so we don't have to get to know them personally. It is much easier to criticize the actions of others at a distance rather than understanding the full context of their situation through relationship.

Finally, Question 3 may lead to many personal answers that revolve around discrimination from ethnicity, race, sex, education, or social class. It definitely should not happen if the discrimination comes from Christians who claim to be serving the same Lord.

2 Bible Learning

See how Paul and his company brought the Gospel to Lydia and her household.



On the poster sheet, read the final two paragraphs, then note on the poster the photo of the possible site of the baptism of Lydia and her household in a stream just outside the city gate of ancient Philippi.

- Paul and his companions desired to pray on the Sabbath, and found a place of prayer on the banks of a river outside of Philippi. Jews often gathered there if no synagogue was in the town.

- A group of women had gathered at the river to worship, and Paul and his companions spoke casually with them.

- One of the women was Lydia, a dealer of purple cloth who worshiped God. With an open heart, after hearing the Gospel, she was baptized along

LYDIA AND HER HOUSEHOLD ACCEPT THE LORD

Read Acts 16:11-15, 40 with students and discuss the following key points:

- Paul and his companions set sail for Macedonia to preach the Gospel.
- Once in Macedonia, they traveled to the town of Philippi to minister there.

BIBLE EXTRA

Women in Greek Society

In ancient Greece, women had a limited public role in society. They were unable to vote, own land, have an inheritance, or speak publicly, partly because they were considered too emotional. Men were the “rational” members of the society. The woman’s primary job was taking care of the household, which the Greeks considered an honorable role, and she did not often venture outdoors where it was considered “unsafe.” When her husband entertained guests, she was expected to retire to the servant’s quarters.

However, in Acts we find examples of women accepting the Lord including the “prominent” women in Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:4, 12). Macedonia seems to have been a Roman province where women were allotted more freedom than elsewhere in Greece. The “prominent” women could have been wives of important officials or wealthy widows of status. They had a significant role in society though they were still limited by what they could do in a male-dominated culture.

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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.



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 825-827 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

with her household.

- She invited the company to her house to stay, which they did.
- Later, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison but then released by Roman officials. When they were released, they went to Lydia's house and were encouraged by the believers before they departed.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 4

Philippi was a major city in Macedonia, the Roman province in what is now northern Greece.

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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

BIBLE EXTRA

Thyatira: City of Guilds

Lydia was a dealer of purple cloth in the city of Thyatira, in Asia Minor, which had a reputation for being a leader in the trade of colored textiles. In fact, there is archaeological evidence of multiple guilds of dyers and other craftsmen there, more than any other city of its time. There were guilds for workers of wool, linen, and leather, as well as tanners, potters, and bronze smiths. Thyatira eventually became the home of one of the early churches and was the recipient of a message from Jesus recorded in Revelation 2:18-28.

BIBLE EXTRA

A Woman, Not a Man

As Dr. Warren Wiersbe points out, it is interesting that Paul in his dream saw a man calling out, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9), yet the first convert recorded in Macedonia—in Europe—was a woman. Paul knew that a saying of the rabbis was, "It is better that the words of the law be burned than be delivered to a woman!" but "that was no longer Paul's philosophy," Dr. Wiersbe says. "[Paul] had been obedient and the Lord had gone before to prepare the way."

BIBLE EXTRA

Roman Prisons

Prior to returning to Lydia's home, Paul and Silas spent time in a Roman prison in Philippi (Acts 16:23-24). While a few prisoners such as enemies of Rome were kept long-term, most prisons in Rome were used to house condemned prisoners shortly before their execution (though a few were able to be released on appeal). The archaeological evidence of these prisons show us these were vile and filthy places. Most were subterranean structures, built underground in order to cut off access to sunshine and fresh air. Some had a trap door to a nearby sewer where the bodies were dropped after execution.

Paul stopped there to look for a group of Jews who had established either a synagogue or a “place of prayer” (vs. 13).

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 5

Lydia was a successful businesswoman who sold purple-dyed cloth, a luxury item in New Testament times. She evidently had become quite wealthy as well since she had her own house to offer to Paul and his team as a place to stay.

GOD CHOOSES THE FOOLISH THINGS

Next, read 1 Corinthians 1:26-27 and

BIBLE EXTRA

The Wise and the Foolish

In the eyes of unbelievers, the Corinthian Christians were fools. From Paul’s description, it seems as if few, if any, of them were intellectually impressive, according to the sophisticated society of the day. Perhaps that is why they were tempted to incorporate some aspects of Greek philosophy into their belief systems; to do so would give them a more respected status within their society. But Paul warned the Corinthian believers against such desires. He told them to remember what they were before they became Christians (vs. 26). Most of them were less educated people from the lower classes. But God had entrusted to them “the most valuable message the world has ever known.

BIBLE EXTRA

Imputed Righteousness

Paul taught that for the follower of Christ, Jesus becomes his or her holiness. This is known as the doctrine of imputed righteousness, and 1 Corinthians 1:30 is one of the verses used to defend this idea. Since we cannot accomplish any genuine form of righteousness on our own, the person who experiences justification through saving face has the righteousness of Christ attributed to him or her, thus enabling that person to stand in the presence of God—with whom he or she had been reconciled by the atoning work of Christ (see also Rom. 4:5; 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:20).

use these statements to review the Scripture:

- Paul told the Corinthians that God calls everyone, and He often chooses to reveal Himself to those who are thought unwise to confound those who believe they are wise.

- God also often chooses those who seem weak to the world to confuse those who believe they are strong.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 6

A person can gain wisdom and knowledge through books and education and be considered “wise” by others. Paul was writing to Greeks whose philosophers were considered the wisest in the ancient world, but theirs was not godly wisdom.

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”?*

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 7

God chooses the apparently foolish and weak individuals of the world to do this. All the human learning that does not include learning about the one true God is not the greatest wisdom in the world.

NO ONE MAY BOAST

Finally, read 1 Corinthians 1:28-30 and note these important ideas:

- God chooses the uncommon to confuse the common. In this way, no one glories in their own ability and status.
- God Himself gets all glory for making us wise, righteous, and sanctified.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 8

Salvation can only be accomplished by the atoning work of Christ on the cross, who was the perfect sacrifice for sins—something no other human being could ever accomplish.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 9

Since we have no righteousness of our own, the holiness of Jesus must be attributed to us if we are to ever stand in the presence of God.

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?

WINDOW ON THE WORD

There Is Neither...

Galatians 3:28 breaks down every roadblock of division we can think of in just a few words: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Paul mentions in this verse huge divisions that were common in his time. What’s sad is that these worldly divisions still exist today and keep us separated. Paul also told the Ephesians because of what Jesus did on the Cross, we are no longer “foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:19-20).

3 Bible Application

Explore how we can overcome divisions to serve the Lord.

Photocopy this page and give instructions to each group. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit and give those to the group discussing it.

Handout:

'Diversity: A Model of Heaven'



Read the instructions on the sheet, answer the questions, and share your answers with each other and the class.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "And a Little Child Will Lead Them" and answer **Questions 10, 11, and 12**. Jermaine Bell's hot dog stand is a symbol of how churches should be reaching out to everyone in need and serving them. Some churches are doing just that with clothes closets, soup kitchens, and after school activities for latch-key kids that reach people who otherwise are "divided" from the church because of income, for example. Some churches actually close their doors so that certain kinds of people do not come in. But there may be ways to overcome worldly divisions and serve through partnerships with neighborhood schools or second-language programs.

Knock Down the Divisions

On a board or sheet of newsprint, list some of the worldly divisions that can get in the way of serving others and sharing the Gospel. You may want to draw a wall around each one to emphasize they are barriers. Brainstorm and list ways that those divisions could be knocked down, and as you do so, cross out a wall. For example, a wall called "economic divisions" could be knocked down by offering a Christmas musical event that anyone would like to attend.

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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?

4 Life Response

Serve the Lord with everyone, no matter your differences.

One of the first steps in not having limits is walking by faith. You must walk by faith and not by sight. Ironically, sight can limit our vision. We cannot live by what we see because seeing has too many limitations. Faith causes us to live by leaps with no boundaries because there aren't any. When this happens, we can serve anyone freely because we start considering who they are in the eyes of Christ.

Ask students to read in their books, "How Do

You Consider?" For this exercise, you may want to have students return to the small groups they had in Step 1 to discuss the question, or you may want to do this together as a class. Many people in your class touch other people who you or your church might not be considering as people to reach with the Gospel because of prejudices or worldly boundaries. What about the people just across the street from your church, for example. What divisions may be keeping you from reaching them? What needs do they have that you could meet? Praying for them is good, but as someone has said, it's good to put feet to those prayers at times.

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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.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Deuteronomy 18:15-22. You will be starting a quarter of lessons on the Old Testament prophets and their faithfulness to God's covenant with His people. Ask your students to think of how they find out the truth about something.