

LYDIA, GENEROUS HOST

“This spread was simply too much, my man!” said Reginald Lewis as he pushed back from the table.

Reginald, his wife, and his two children were at the home of his friend, Ernest Mitchell. Reginald and his family were passing through town, and Ernest had insisted that they stay with his family for the night.

“How does your daughter like the lasagna? We know she doesn’t eat meat,” Ernest’s wife said. Ernest had grilled a variety of meats and vegetables, and had even made sure to make a meatless lasagna. And now, Reginald was stuffed.

As the two families chatted over the meal, Reginald found himself looking around at the house. It was modest, though in good condition. Ernest wasn’t very well-off, but he was beyond generous. They hadn’t asked the Mitchells to make something special for their daughter, but they did anyway. And he was already so generous in cooking such a lavish meal for everyone else!

When the evening was drawing to a close, and everyone was shuffling to bed, Reginald pulled Ernest aside. “Thank you,” he said. “I’m so glad to have friends like you and your wife who are always supportive, hospitable, and loving. It’s been overwhelming.”

1 When have you experienced the kind of hospitality that makes someone feel truly seen?

2 Where might God be calling you to disrupt routines to extend hospitality?

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.

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

Paul's Second Journey

Paul's mission beyond southern Galatia—often called his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)—began with a series of setbacks. Paul and Barnabas had ended their partnership when Paul refused to let Barnabas's nephew, Mark, rejoin their mission (Acts 15:36–39). Paul regrouped, selecting Silas as his new partner. Together they revisited the churches Paul had helped found and recruited Timothy to their team (Acts 15:40–16:5).

And setbacks continued. Paul and Silas first tried to head west into the Roman province of Asia (modern Turkey), which had the major city of Ephesus as its capital. However, as the author tells us, the Holy Spirit prevented them from preaching the gospel in Asia (Acts 16:6). The author does not explain what this roadblock looked like: it may have been an audible voice, a spiritual sense, or a set of circumstances that hindered them. Nevertheless, Paul and Silas shifted their sights to Bithynia (northwestern Turkey), a province located north of Galatia. They journeyed through the nearby province of Mysia, but the Holy Spirit blocked their entry into Bithynia (Acts 16:7). Uncertain of their next steps, Paul and Silas traveled through Mysia to the city of Troas, a port located on the Aegean Sea.

In Troas, Paul and his team had their breakthrough. Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia (modern Greece, North Macedonia, and Albania), a Roman province with its capital at Thessalonica. In the vision, the Macedonian man pleaded with Paul to come preach, so Paul and his team immediately made arrangements to leave for that destination (Acts 16:9–10).

In verse 11, Paul and his companions set sail from Troas.

Surprisingly, the author refers to the team as “we,” suggesting that he was with Paul on this journey. There are several “we” passages in Acts (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–8; 27:1–28:16). Scholars debate whether the author claims to be an eyewitness *himself* or used the diary of one of Paul’s traveling companions to write these accounts. Regardless of their source, the “we” passages show that the author relied on eyewitness accounts in composing his narrative.

The team sails straight to the island of Samothrace in the northern Aegean Sea. While faster and more convenient than other types of travel, sailing was highly dangerous; and sailors often stopped frequently at ports on the way to their destinations. With its more than five-thousand-foot mountain aiding visual navigation and a thriving, independent city, Samothrace served as a natural stop for sea journeys.

After spending the night, Paul and his companions sail to Neapolis, a port city on the Macedonian coast. As a port, Neapolis connected Asia to Macedonia. It also served as the start of the *Via Egnatia*, the famous road linking Rome to its eastern territories. Paul likely walked this road to Philippi, Thessalonica, and the other cities he visited in Greece (see Acts 16:12–18:18).

In verse 12, Paul’s team heads to Philippi, a city located roughly a day’s journey from Neapolis. Luke mentions two things about it. First, the province of Macedonia was divided into four districts; and Philippi was one of the most important cities in the eastern district. Secondly, Philippi was a Roman colony, a city founded primarily to settle and reward veterans of the Roman army. When Philippi was founded, Rome awarded it the rights of self-governance and freedom from paying taxes. The church that Paul starts in Philippi remains loyal to him throughout his ministry, providing him with financial support when other churches in Macedonia did not (Phil. 4:15).

1 What setbacks did Paul face when he started his second missionary journey?

2 How did God show Paul where to travel and preach the gospel?

3 What do the “we” passages of Acts tell us about the book’s author?

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.

¹³ On 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. ¹⁴ One 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. ¹⁵ 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.

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⁴⁰ After 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.

Lydia Hears God's Call

After staying in Philippi for several days (v. 12), Paul and his companions walk to the river on the Sabbath. When he entered a new city, Paul followed a principle of preaching to his fellow Jews before sharing the gospel with Gentiles (Acts 28:17–31; Rom. 1:16). Paul usually visited the synagogues, Jewish places of prayer and study (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). These meeting houses would give Paul the opportunity to find lodging among his fellow Jews. However, synagogues were expensive to build, and towns with smaller Jewish populations often used other spaces to gather.

In Philippi, the Jewish community gathered by the bank of a river on the Sabbath (v. 13). Paul immediately strikes up conversation with women there. Luke does not say whether these women were Jews or Gentiles; the group likely included both. What the author does make

clear is that one woman listens to Paul. Her name is Lydia, and Luke mentions several important things about her (v. 14). First, Lydia was a merchant of purple cloth. This luxury item was usually dyed with a pigment extracted from the glands of Mediterranean sea snails. The process was difficult, so such cloth was expensive. Lydia was thus probably a person of significant wealth. She also hailed from Thyatira, a city famous for its purple textiles. Thyatira was also located in the Roman province of Asia, the very place that the Spirit had prevented Paul from entering (Acts 16:6).

Secondly, Lydia was a God-fearer (Acts 10:2, 22; 13:16, 26), a Gentile worshiper of the God of Israel. Though not a Jew herself, her interest in Judaism prepared her to receive the gospel. Lydia listens to Paul, and God opens her heart to believe in his message (v. 14). After she and her household are baptized, Lydia invites Paul into her home (v. 15).

Hospitality was a virtue highly valued in the first century AD. Surprisingly, Paul's fellow Jews do not welcome or listen to him. In the midst of a Jewish gathering, it is the Gentile Lydia who listens to God's call and offers Paul a place to stay. She becomes Paul's patron, using her wealth to support him and his ministry. Moreover, Lydia remains loyal to Paul. When Paul and Silas have been beaten, thrown into prison, and released (Acts 16:19–39), Lydia does not refuse to associate with them. Rather than feeling ashamed of Paul and his team, she welcomes them into her home (v. 40). Her hospitality shows that she has truly joined God's people.

1 Where did Paul go to preach the gospel when he arrived in new towns?

2 What does Lydia's occupation as a purple-cloth dealer tell us about her?

3 How does Lydia show that the gospel has transformed her?

Living Hospitably

My father passed away in 2017. After earning his Master of Divinity, he devoted three decades of his life to coaching youth swim teams. Many of his swimmers went on to win national championships and even Olympic berths. Many more gave their lives to Christ through my father's ministry. Hundreds of people attended his funeral, far more than we had anticipated. My mother, sister, and I saw many people with whom we had lost contact over the years. What my father's former athletes mentioned most was not how effective he was as a coach or the scholarships they won under his training. Instead, they talked about my father's generosity and hospitality.

One recalled the year he spent living with us after his alcoholic father kicked him out of his home. Another remembered the times my dad bought her gas when she couldn't get to work. One after another, they shared memories of the ways my father had helped them in times of need. Whether it was with his money, his time, or his love, my father was always generous. That generosity was the way he showed the love of Christ to others. My father not only shared the gospel but also lived it.

Lydia's generosity and hospitality, like my father's, reflected Christ's love. Jesus told the Twelve, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Lydia showed such love to Paul: she invited him into her home, supported his ministry financially, and remained loyal to him when society stood against him. Her belief in the God of Israel was shown in her actions.

God expects hospitality from His children today. As we give generously to others, we preach the gospel by our deeds, strengthening some in the faith and inviting others into God's family.

1 What examples of hospitality and generosity have you experienced in your life?

2 Do you find yourself more comfortable showing generosity or receiving it, and why?

3 What are some practical ways that you can extend hospitality to others?

Creative Hospitality

In an age of increasing isolation, the art of hospitality is an incredible way to show the love of Jesus to others. Brainstorm a list of hospitable actions below (bringing someone coffee, inviting a neighbor over for dessert, babysitting, etc.). Then ask the Lord to bring to mind a person to whom you can put one of those hospitable activities into practice in the next few weeks.

I can show the love of Jesus through my hospitality by:

Key Text

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

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of August 31 through September 5

Mon. Romans 8:31–39—More Than Conquerors.

Tue. Genesis 13:14–18—See What God Has Promised.

Wed. Deuteronomy 34:1–12—The Promised Land Revealed.

Thu. Hebrews 4:1–11—God’s Promised Rest.

Fri. Hebrews 10:14–18—God’s New Covenant.

Sat. Psalm 27—Whom Shall I Fear?

Next Week: Joshua 1:1–11

We will be turning to the book of Joshua and the era when Israel entered the land of promise. What kinds of places make you want to welcome God to be with you?