

What if...

God Called Us to Reach the City?

Acts 16

PPT Title

What if God Called Us to Reach the City?

Main Point: Following God's plan leads to great adventure and growth of the kingdom!

Key Verse: *He guides me in the right paths for the honor of His name.* - Psalm 23:3b

Props: Headphones connected to an MP3 player; A small paper bag with a doughnut or other treat inside; snail shell; strip of purple cloth.

BENEFITS OF LISTENING

Call up a volunteer. Ask him/her to put on headphones with music playing. In a voice loud enough for the audience to hear, but not for the volunteer to hear, give instructions: "(Name volunteer) _____, if you can hear me, wave at the crowd. If you can hear me, hop on one foot. If you can hear me, turn around and walk to the back of the stage. You'll see a paper bag with something good in it just for you." Say to audience: Hmm, there seems to be something wrong. What's the problem? (She can't hear you!) Oh. Let's try it this way. Remove headphones. Give instructions again so the volunteer can obey. Ask volunteer: What would have happened if you never heard me? (I'd miss out on the doughnut!) Thank your volunteer.

Say: So, because I had a good plan for (name), listening and obeying led to something really good for him/her! Well let me tell you, there's no one who has a better plan for you than God! He is always good, He knows everything, and He works everything together for good. We'd be crazy not to listen to Him and follow His instructions! Today we're going to see that following God's plan leads to great adventure and growth of the kingdom!

PPT Main Point

SAUL SEES THE LIGHT



Say: I'd like to talk about a man named Paul. You might remember hearing about him. Originally, he was known as Saul. He was a Jewish man, in training to become a Pharisee. He lived after Jesus was crucified, raised and gone to heaven. Sadly, Saul believed a bunch of lies. He thought all the awesome stories about Jesus were made up, or at least greatly exaggerated, and he did not believe that Jesus was God's Son. In fact, he wanted to get rid of all the people who *did* believe in Jesus. But then, one incredible day, Jesus appeared to Saul, and it changed everything! Suddenly Saul realized Jesus was raised from the dead and He was the perfect Savior who takes away our sin. This was great news for Saul because his sins were many! He once said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the worst sinner of all." (1 Timothy 1:15)

God had a BIG plan for Saul. God said, "I have chosen this man to work for me. He will carry my name to those who aren't Jews and to their kings. He will bring my name to the people of Israel." (Acts 9:15) When Saul started traveling to tell the great news to people who were not Jewish, he went by his Roman name, Paul.

God often gave instructions to Paul. God communicated to Paul in so many different ways; He spoke through the Holy Spirit, angels, visions, and dreams. And it's a *really* good thing that Paul was always listening and ready to obey.

THE PATH TO PHILIPPI

Say: Paul traveled with the friends God chose for him. How do you think they got around back then? Maybe by camel, donkey, and by boat.

By the time we get to Acts 16, Paul had taken one big trip to many different cities, countries and islands. Now he was taking a second trip. Refer to map to show the 2nd journey up to Lystra (at purple X). I'll read starting in Acts 16:6. This is Paul's friend Luke telling the story:



Paul and his companions traveled all through the area of Phrygia and Galatia. The Holy Spirit had kept them from preaching the word in Asia Minor. - Acts 16:6

Wait a minute! Did you hear that? The Holy Spirit kept them from preaching in Asia Minor. Refer to map. Who would ever imagine the Holy Spirit of God would stop someone from going somewhere to preach? In my mind, I would think "Asia? Sure. Go there. You can't go wrong preaching wherever you want." But wow. God had another plan - a better plan. Good thing Paul was LISTENING.

They came to the border of Mysia. From there they tried to enter Bithynia. But the Spirit of Jesus would not let them. So they passed by Mysia. [The Spirit stopped Paul again! Good thing Paul was listening!] Then they went down to Troas.

During the night Paul had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia standing and begging him. "Come over to Macedonia!" the man said. "Help us!" After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia. We decided that God had called us to preach the good news there. - Acts 16:7-10



Did you catch that? God spoke to Paul through a vision at night. In his vision (which must have seemed a lot like a dream) a man in Macedonia was begging for help. Luke says something interesting here: *We decided* God had called us to Macedonia. Apparently, after Paul saw the vision, he talked it over with his traveling buddies. "This is what I saw. What do you think?"

Application: When you hear a message from God, it's a great idea to talk it over with other people who follow Jesus (Proverbs 19:20-21). They can help you determine if what you heard follows God's word, and if it was truly God's instruction. God wants us to hang out with friends who follow Him. We call this living in community. We have a core group of like-minded people who can help us, encourage us to follow God, and help us determine what God wants us to do.

Say: In this case, the group agreed that Macedonia was their next stop!

At Troas we got into a boat. We sailed straight for Samothrace. The next day we went on to Neapolis. Refer to map. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony. It is an important city in that part of Macedonia. We stayed there several days.



On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate. We walked down to the river. There we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered together. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia. She was from the city of Thyatira. Her business was selling purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to accept Paul's message. She and her family were baptized. Then she invited us to her home. "Do you consider me a believer in the Lord?" she asked. "If you do, come and stay at my house." She succeeded in getting us to go home with her. - Acts 16:11-15



There wasn't a church or synagogue in Philippi because there weren't enough people who believed in God. So, looking for a community of believers, Paul and his friends went to the river because that's where people often went to pray.

At the river's edge, they met a lady named Lydia. The Bible points out that she had a business selling purple cloth. That may not sound like a big deal to us. In fact, if you have purple on today, stand up. Guess what, purple-wearers? Back in Bible times your purple wardrobe would mean you were super rich and important! *Have a seat*. Back then, purple dye was very rare and valuable. The only way to get it was to squeeze the ink out of a snail! **Hold up snail shell**. It took thousands of snails to dye just one strip of fabric. **Show fabric**. So what this tells us is that Lydia was undoubtedly wealthy and she had very important friends.



But none of that was as important to Lydia as the God who created her and gave her life. She worshipped Him. But until that day, she didn't know about Jesus! She didn't know that God sent His one and only Son to take away her sin. What wonderful news she heard that day! And she believed! She and her entire family were baptized. In fact, Lydia was the *first* person baptized in Europe! I bet she told all of her customers about Jesus! The church in Philippi began with Lydia. This is the church that Paul wrote to in the book of Philippians. In many ways, this church was a model for all the other churches (2 Corinthians 8: 1-5, 9: 1-5).

I have a question for you: Do you think God knew Lydia lived in Philippi? Did He know she would be worshipping by the river that day? Did He know her heart would be open to the good news about Jesus? Yes! God knew those things because He knows everything - even what's in the hearts of people. And that's why He sent Paul to Philippi instead of Asia or Bithynia. (God had a plan to reach those places too, but it would be at a different time. Everything in His perfect timing.) Following God's plan leads to great adventure and growth of the kingdom!

PPT Main Point

MORE ADVENTURES IN PHILIPPI

Say: Lydia's story was only the start of Paul's amazing adventure in Philippi. Another day, Paul and friends were headed out again, going to pray with the community of believers. Along the way, they came across a slave girl. Her life was very sad. She was controlled by an evil spirit that could tell the future. Her selfish owners loved this, because people would pay them money to have their slave girl tell their future. This is called fortune-telling, and God hates it (Deuteronomy 18: 10-12). Finally, Paul called on the powerful name of Jesus to cast the demon out of the girl. This was awesome for the girl; she was free from the evil! But her owners were furious. How would they make money if their slave could no longer tell the future? So the evil men had Paul and his friends arrested. They were whipped and thrown in jail.



You may remember this part of the story: As Paul and Silas sat in prison, they didn't cry or complain. Instead, they started praying and singing praise songs! I bet the other prisoners had never heard their cell mates singing praise songs before! Somehow our praise calls on God's power (Psalm 8:2). Who can tell me what happened next?



Suddenly there was a powerful earthquake. It shook the prison from top to bottom. All at once the prison doors flew open. Everybody's chains came loose. - Acts 16: 26

God sent an earthquake to shake off their chains! When the jailer woke up and saw the open doors, he was terrified! He thought he would be killed for letting all the prisoners escape. Suddenly he heard Paul call out to him. Paul and Silas did not run from the prison. They stayed to tell the jailer all about Jesus. The jailer fell to his knees. He believed in Jesus! He and his family were baptized and they were filled with joy.



Did God know that Paul and his friends would be arrested? Did God know that the jailer needed Jesus? It's a good thing Paul and Silas listened to and followed God's leading!

KINGDOM GROWTH

Ask: Do you see how the kingdom was spreading in Philippi? As I said, it was the first

church in all of Europe. Since then, millions upon millions of people have believed in Jesus in Europe. And it all started with Paul, listening to God's vision and obeying. Wow. Paul just listened, then put one foot in front of the other in the direction God told him to go.

PPT Main Point

Application: Could God send you on that kind of adventure? Sure He could! Will you be listening for your assignment? Following God's plan leads to great adventure and growth of the kingdom!

PPT Key Verse

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