

Paul's Second Missionary Journey, Part 1

[PREPARATION]

✦ GETTING READY

How have you experienced the Holy Spirit guidance? How did you know it was the Holy Spirit and not something else?

Read Acts 16.

Ask God to use these Scriptures to help you understand how to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit even when it doesn't make sense by human logic.

[THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE]

✦ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Disciples of Jesus follow the leading of the Holy Spirit even when it doesn't seem to make sense by human logic.

✦ THEOLOGY APPLIED

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas followed the lead of the Holy Spirit closely, even when it didn't make sense. When they finished visiting the churches in Galatia, their next logical step would have been to go to Asia, but the Spirit said no. The next logical step would be Bithynia, but again the Spirit said no. Then they had a vision to go to Macedonia, and they went immediately. When they got to Philippi, they spoke first to a group of women, though that was not typical of Jewish men at all, because they were the ones at the place of prayer. When they were beaten and arrested, and their chains supernaturally fell off, they didn't escape. They stayed in place and brought the jailer to the Lord. When they could have gotten revenge on the magistrates who beat them, they didn't. They just had them publicly apologize to save the reputation of the church. Paul and Silas were prime examples of disciples who followed the lead of the Holy Spirit no matter what, including danger to themselves. This is an intense calling for us to follow today, but it is

the model the apostles set for us. To live is Christ, to die is gain.

✦ MEDITATE

“These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the lesson by identifying the main point of the passage and offering a preliminary application of it.

QUESTION *How have you experienced the Holy Spirit leading you? How can we know when it is the Spirit guiding us?*

QUESTION *Share at least one example of a time you followed the Spirit even though it didn't seem to make sense. What was the result?*

In Acts 16, we see Paul and Barnabas following the Holy Spirit explicitly, even when it didn't make sense. When the Spirit said go, they went. When the Spirit said stop, they stopped. Even when it meant going past the closest places to one much farther away. Even when it meant speaking to a group of women, which was culturally taboo. Even through very dangerous situations that caused them great physical harm. They were completely in touch with the Holy Spirit and followed Him no matter what. In our lives today, we don't often experience physical danger by following the Spirit, but many times the Spirit may ask us to go somewhere or do something that seems a little crazy by human logic. As followers of Jesus, we are commanded to listen for the Holy Spirit's leading and follow Him no matter what, trusting that He has a plan for our lives, will use us for His kingdom, and that in any difficulty or suffering, we will be “afflicted in every way, but not crushed” (2 Corinthians 4:8) and “walk through the fire” but “not be burned” (Isaiah 43:2). He will use our suffering to make us more like Jesus (Romans 5:3–5).

✦ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+In this section, Paul begins his second missionary journey, taking Silas with him instead of Barnabas because of their conflict over John Mark. In verses 1–15, they completely followed the guidance of the Spirit. When the Spirit said go, they went. When the Spirit said stop, they stopped. In Lystra, Timothy joined them, and Paul circumcised him, which may seem shocking considering the case he had just made about not requiring Gentiles to be circumcised. But Timothy was half Jewish, so it was a different situation. At Philippi, a wealthy businesswoman named Lydia was converted, and they stayed in her home. In verses 16–24, Paul and Silas were arrested because they had exorcised a demon from a young slave girl, and

her owners were upset that she could no longer practice divination for them. The crowd joined against them, and they were beaten and thrown in prison, even though being Roman citizens were protected from that kind of treatment. In verses 25–40, there was a great earthquake. All the prison doors were opened and everyone’s bonds unfastened, but the prisoners did not leave. When the jailer awoke and saw the situation, he was about to kill himself, but Paul stopped him, and the jailer asked him how to be saved. The next day, the magistrates tried to release them secretly, but Paul made them do it publicly and apologize, not for their own sake, but to save the reputation of the church in the area.

1. *Following the Spirit*
2. *Paul and Silas Imprisoned*
3. *The Jailer’s Conversion*

[GOING DEEPER]

+ This section will follow the points given above and look deeper into Acts 16.

1. Following the Spirit

✦ READ ACTS 16:1–15

QUESTION *Why did Paul circumcise Timothy? How was this different from what he had argued against, the Pharisees’ teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved?*

QUESTION *How do we see the Spirit guiding the apostles on this journey?*

At the end of the last chapter, Paul and Barnabas parted ways because of a disagreement about John Mark. Barnabas took John Mark and Paul chose Silas, one of the men who came from Jerusalem with them to deliver the letter from the Council. Barnabas and John Mark went the way they had originally gone, starting with Cyprus, where Barnabas grew up and still had family. Paul and Silas went the opposite way, to the churches they had started in Galatia, through Paul’s hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia, where his family was.

From Tarsus, Paul and Silas entered Galatia, to Derbe, then Lystra, both towns they had visited on their original journey. Lystra is where Paul had been stoned to the point of being thought dead, but the Lord healed him, so he was able to travel to Derbe (Acts 14:8–23). Now Paul was going back to the town

where he had been stoned! At Lystra, they met Timothy, who was thought highly of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, but there was a problem. Timothy's mother was a Jewish Christian, but his father was Greek, and Jews considered intermarriage a horrible sin.

Paul knew they would be witnessing to many Jews on their journey who would reject Timothy because of this. So, even though Paul had adamantly argued that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised to be saved and had even called the first church council about it, he circumcised Timothy for the sake of his witness among the non-Christian Jews they would encounter. Not because he believed Timothy needed it but because he knew the Jews wouldn't listen to Timothy otherwise. Paul believed that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters in the eyes of God (1 Corinthians 7:19); he did it because it removed a stumbling block for those he would be preaching to.

Paul said that though he was free and belonged to no one but Christ, he would become like a Jew to win the Jews and like a Gentile to win the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 9:19–23). Had Timothy been fully Gentile, Paul would not have circumcised him; he didn't circumcise Titus, who was fully Greek (Galatians 2:3). Paul hadn't changed his mind about the circumcision issue. As they went on their journey, they communicated the Jerusalem Council's decision to all the believers. To the Christian Jews, Paul would say circumcision or uncircumcision makes no difference for salvation. But he knew it was important to the Jews who had not yet become Christians that the men preaching to them were fully Jewish, not Gentile.

As they went throughout the rest of Galatia, the text tells us they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And they tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit didn't allow them. Then Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia urging them to come help them, and immediately they went to Macedonia. Asia and Bithynia were both closer to Galatia, the next logical place to go; Macedonia was beyond both of them. The text doesn't tell us why the Spirit told them not to go to Asia and Bithynia. You would think He would want them to go everywhere! Maybe it would have been dangerous at the time. Maybe God would send others there instead. Regardless, this story makes it clear they were following the leading of the Holy Spirit. They didn't know why God shut the door to Asia and Bithynia, but they soon found out He was opening another door instead.

Starting in verse 10, Luke shifted from writing "they" to "we," meaning that starting in Troas, Luke was on this journey with them. Immediately, they left Troas and went to Philippi, which was the capital of this first district of Macedonia (Thessalonica was the overall capital) and a Roman colony. This little note in the text would have reminded the readers that Paul was a Roman citizen and therefore had 1) the right to travel freely throughout the Roman world, 2) the right to a fair trial, and 3) protection against torture and

whipping, which we'll look at in the next section.¹

On the Sabbath they went to the riverside. If there was no synagogue, the Jews typically gathered there for prayer so they could use the river for their ritual handwashing. By Jewish law, a city had to have a minimum of ten Jewish men to have a synagogue; Philippi apparently didn't. But they found a group of women gathered by the river. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that tremendous numbers of Greek women were attracted to Judaism and became "God fearers," those who followed the teachings of Judaism but did not fully convert. It would have been scandalous for Jewish men in Israel to speak like this with a group of women, but in Macedonia women had more freedom. This being the first group they connected with in Macedonia shows that the kingdom of God not only shows no partiality between Jew and Gentile or between male or female (Galatians 3:28).

As Paul was preaching, the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, a God fearer and a dealer in purple cloth, a luxury good, which meant she was very wealthy. It was relatively unusual for a woman to be head of household and a wealthy businesswoman all on her own, but it was more likely in Macedonia. They baptized her and her whole household, and she invited them to stay with her while they were in Philippi. Lydia's salvation was purely a move of the Holy Spirit, reminding us that it is the Holy Spirit who draws people to Himself. We can plant and water seeds, but it is God who causes the growth. As a dealer in purple goods, Lydia interacted with traders from all over and customers from the wealthy elite. This meant their message could spread even farther and wider, particularly among the wealthy and powerful.

QUESTION *What does it tell us about the apostles that they stopped when the Spirit said stop, even though it would have made sense to go to Bithynia next?*

QUESTION *Why might a wealthy woman being converted help their message spread?*

APPLICATION POINT #1/ Timothy's choice to be circumcised shows us that when we are witnessing to people, we need to meet them where they are, speak their language, and connect with them on their terms, not our own. Timothy couldn't expect non-Christian Jews to understand his view on circumcision. He had to connect with them where they were. Once they became Christians, he could share that truth with them. An example of this today might be witnessing to a couple who live together outside of marriage. You don't start by telling them they're living in sin. You just love them where they are, share the gospel with them, and let the Holy Spirit convict them of that later, after they accept Christ.

¹ Tom Curley, Civitas – Why Roman Citizenship Was So Important, History Hogs, February 8, 2024 - <https://historyhogs.com/civitas-why-roman-citizenship-was-so-important/>

APPLICATION POINT #2/ In this section, Paul, Silas, and Timothy followed the leading of the Holy Spirit completely. They didn't know why the Spirit told them not to go into Asia and Bithynia, but they stopped when He said stop. They trusted His direction even when it didn't make sense to them. In our lives, we may not know why God shuts a door, but soon we will see He is opening another. Sometimes He stops us from doing what we think makes sense or what seems right because He wants to send us somewhere else or do something else in our lives. We have to trust that God knows what is best, listen for His voice, and obey.

APPLICATION POINT #3/ This story tells us that when Paul was speaking, the Lord stirred Lydia's heart to believe. The Holy Spirit is the one who draws people to Himself. When we witness to people, we are only responsible for sharing the truth, not for whether they accept it. We just plant the seeds and water the seeds; it is God who causes the growth.

QUESTION *Describe a time God closed a door and at first you didn't understand why. What was the result? What other doors did He open instead?*

QUESTION *Reflect on those you know who are far from God. How can you meet them where they are with the gospel?*

2. Paul and Silas Imprisoned

✚ READ ACTS 16:16-24

QUESTION *How did the slave girl know who Paul and Silas were?*

QUESTION *Why did the slave girl's owners get mad at Paul and Silas?*

In this story, Paul and Silas were still in Philippi, staying with Lydia and teaching the group of women God fearers at the riverside. Another Sabbath, on their way to the river, they were met by a very young slave girl with a "spirit of divination" whose owners made a lot of money using her for fortunetelling. The Greek literally says "the spirit of Python"; this was a specific demon who was giving her demonic powers of divination. Python is a character in Greek mythology; Scripture tells us that the "gods" of pagan religions are really demons (Deuteronomy 32:17). Python was not a god but a serpent monster, the son of Gaia

("Earth"), who guarded the oracle at Delphi, which Greeks considered to be the center of the earth. He was represented by a stone Python guarding there. In Greek mythology, the god Apollo slew Python and took over his oracle at Delphi, establishing a temple there where people came for guidance and divination.

The slave girl followed them, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." Demons always recognized Jesus and His apostles in Scripture. The man in Mark 5 who was possessed by "Legion" also called Jesus "Son of the Most High God." Demons know the truth about who the real God is and how to be saved, even if they don't worship Him (James 2:19). While her words were true, Paul was "annoyed" because he didn't want their message to be associated with witchcraft and false religions. The Greek word translated "annoyed" here isn't just mild irritation; it's deep distress, worry, or grief. After several days of this, he commanded the spirit to leave her, and it did so immediately.

Her owners were upset because, with the demon gone, she lost her ability to tell the future. They could no longer make money by her. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the magistrates. Magistrates were Roman officials under the consul who acted as judicial officers; there were two in Philippi. In the Roman world the marketplace was the center of all civic activity, as opposed to the Jewish world, where the temple was the center and the Sanhedrin was the judicial body. They accused Paul and Silas of teaching Jewish customs that were unlawful for Romans to practice, but it was really just about money.

The crowd joined in the attack, and the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped and beaten with rods. This was regular practice for anyone accused of a crime if they were not a Roman citizen, which Paul and Silas were. Even before a trial was held to determine whether a person was guilty, the accused would be beaten as a way to secure evidence against them, humiliate them publicly, and discourage their followers. The Roman world was brutal for lower-class, non-citizens. There were no Miranda rights, no "innocent until proven guilty," no right to a fair trial for all. Those protections existed only for Roman citizens. Paul and Silas were Roman citizens but also Jews. Their accusers introduced them to the magistrates as Jews. They didn't check their citizenship. After they were beaten, they were thrown into prison.

QUESTION *What does this story teach us about the power of the Holy Spirit over the demonic?*

QUESTION *Imagine you were falsely accused of a crime and then beaten even though you were a citizen and were supposed to be protected against that kind of treatment. How would you be feeling if you were Paul and Silas?*

APPLICATION POINT #1 / Magic can be just fantasy, pretend stories like Disney movies and Harry Potter books. But there is a real witchcraft practiced by people in the real world, and it is always powered by the demonic. There is a real supernatural world of angels and demons. These demons have some supernatural power to do things, but their power is much less than God's. For example, demons cannot truly know the future as God does, since only He perfectly knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:9–10). As created beings, demons have finite knowledge but possess vast experience, perfect recall of history, keen observation of present events, and deep understanding of human behavior, enabling them to make highly accurate predictions that can appear supernatural. Scripture shows they may recognize spiritual realities (Mark 1:23–24) or manipulate circumstances (Acts 16:16–18), but any apparent foretelling is really an educated guess, intentional influence to bring events about, or something God permits—never genuine divine foreknowledge. Remember the story of the plagues in Exodus. Pharaoh's magicians could copy the first few plagues with their own demonic power, but they couldn't replicate the plague of gnats, and they exclaimed, "This is the finger of God!" Throughout the Gospels, Jesus demonstrated His power over the demonic, and the disciples did so here by the power of the Holy Spirit as well. Paul had only to tell that demon to leave her and it did. This teaches us that though the demonic world is real and has some power, we don't need to be afraid of it, because "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The demonic is no match for Jesus. We may not have experienced overt demon possession like this, but we all experience spiritual warfare whether we realize it or not. There is a battle raging in the spiritual realm all around us every day (Ephesians 6:10–18).

APPLICATION POINT #2 / Paul and Silas were not only falsely accused, they were also treated as if they were non-citizens. Their Roman citizenship didn't protect them from abuse even though it should have. All because of lost a business venture, not even because of religious reasons. People may persecute us for all kinds of reasons, and it will often be extremely unfair. Regardless, we are called to continue to preach the gospel no matter what.

QUESTION *How have you experienced spiritual warfare? How have you seen God be stronger than the demonic powers in the world around you?*

QUESTION *How have you been treated unfairly because of your faith? How did you respond?*

3. The Jailer's Conversion

✚ READ ACTS 16:24-40

QUESTION *Why did the jailer try to kill himself? Why did Paul tell him to stop?*

QUESTION *How did Paul respond when the magistrates wanted to let them go quietly?*

The text makes sure to tell us that when Paul and Silas were in prison, they were in the “inner prison,” and their feet were fastened in stocks. The jailer was making sure they couldn’t get out. Stocks were not only used to keep prisoners contained but were also used for torture because the prisoner could be forced into painful positions. Though they had been beaten and were in chains, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns well into the night. Their behavior was consistent with their theology, rejoicing in their sufferings. They didn’t just say it, they lived it. At midnight, there was a violent earthquake. All the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. The text makes it clear that it wasn’t just Paul and Silas in the prison; other prisoners were listening to them pray and sing, and all their doors were open and chains unfasted. You could say this was just a random natural occurrence if it had just been the doors coming open, but the stocks coming loose couldn’t have happened from an earthquake.

When the jailer awoke, he drew his sword to kill himself because he knew he would be executed for letting the prisoners escape. But Paul cried out to stop him, saying they were all there—not just him and Silas but all the prisoners, even those who weren’t believers. The text doesn’t tell us this, but the Spirit must have somehow told them to stay. When a similar thing happened to Peter in Jerusalem, the Spirit told him to leave (Acts 12). It would have been logical for them to leave; they would have only stayed if the Spirit told them to. It would have been pretty unbelievable for Paul and Silas to have convinced the other prisoners to stay too. If you were in prison and the doors magically flew open and your chains fell off, what would you do? The other prisoners must have also heard a supernatural command to stay.

The jailer fell at Paul and Silas's feet and asked them how to be saved. This may seem an unusual thing to ask, but he would have heard them singing and praying in the jail, perhaps even preaching the gospel to the other prisoners. They told him to believe in the Lord Jesus and "spoke the word of the Lord" to him and his whole household. He brought them "up" into his house; many prison cells were in underground catacomb-type rooms of the jailer's house, and his family lived above it. The jailer washed their wounds, and they baptized him and his whole family. Then he set food before them, showing them proper hospitality. This was now another influential person who had become a believer and could spread the gospel far and wide in Macedonia.

But the story doesn't end there. The next day the magistrates sent a message to the jailer to let Paul and Silas go. We don't know why. They could have seen the earthquake as a sign from the gods, Lydia could have argued on their behalf, or maybe they thought the public beating was enough to silence them. Paul had a bold response. He could have taken this as a gift and left in peace, as the jailer said, but instead he demanded that the magistrates come themselves to let them go. Because they had beaten them publicly, they should release them publicly.

The magistrates hadn't known they were Roman citizens when they beat them; it's unclear whether Paul tried to tell them or not. Perhaps he tried and they didn't listen, or he purposely didn't tell them and endured the beating so they would have leverage over the magistrates to ensure the future safety of the rest of their church community. Because they had been beaten illegally, the magistrates would be in an awkward legal position. They could be disqualified from office and even deprive Philippi of its status as a Roman colony. The magistrates were now afraid of Paul and Silas. They apologized to them publicly and asked them to leave. This was a posture of humility, because they couldn't make them leave.

Paul and Silas could have demanded a trial and publicly humiliated the magistrates further or even brought legal action against them, but for the sake of the peace of the church in that area, they simply visited the church at Lydia's house to encourage them and left. At first it may seem like they wanted justice for themselves, but if that had been what they were after, they would have reported the magistrates for what they had done. Instead, they demanded a public apology so the church's reputation in the community wouldn't be stained. But they didn't demand that the magistrates be punished for beating them, as they could have. Like Jesus, their attitude was to forgive them, for they knew not what they did.

QUESTION *How did Paul and Silas's unjust beating and false accusations mirror what happened to Jesus?*

QUESTION *How did Paul and Silas listen to the leading of the Spirit against human logic in this story?*

APPLICATION POINT / Paul and Silas again listened to the leading of the Holy Spirit in this story, in a way that was contrary to human logic. They allowed themselves to be beaten even though that was illegal for Roman citizens. When the chains supernaturally fell off them, they didn't escape but stayed to protect the jailer from being punished for letting them escape. Then when the magistrates realized what they had done, Paul and Silas demanded a public apology for the sake of the church's reputation, but they didn't demand punishment for the magistrates, which they could have. This was all because their hearts were focused on spreading the gospel, not on anything for themselves, including their own safety! They weren't worried about their reputation for their own sakes but for the sake of Christ and the gospel message. As believers, our mission is to advance the gospel, regardless of the personal consequences. We are to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit even when it doesn't make sense to us. Because we are living for Christ, no longer for ourselves.

QUESTION *Describe times you have followed the leading of the Holy Spirit contrary to human logic. What was the result?*

QUESTION *How can we attune ourselves more closely to the Holy Spirit so we can know where He is leading us?*

[NEXT STEPS]

This section shows us that disciples follow the leading of the Holy Spirit regardless of the cost to themselves. This week, seek the voice of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to show you where He is calling you to go and what He is calling you to do, even if it doesn't make sense to you. Then submit to that leading.

[PRAY]

+As you pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you, use the words of Psalm 23 as a prayer to remind yourself that the Lord is our shepherd. And even though He may lead us through the valley of the shadow of death, following Him is the best and safest way we can go.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul.

*He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.*

*4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

*5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.*

—Amen