

## ACTS 16:11–15

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### [POST-EASTER]

- Welcome!
  - We had a great celebration last week—grateful to everyone who served and helped make that happen.
  - And we're happy to be back today—the celebration continues: Jesus is still alive.
- If you're newer to Cedar Springs and wondering whether this might be your church home, we'd love to invite you to our New Member Dinner on Thursday night. I'll be there to share a bit of my own story, and you'll get the chance to learn more about who we are and what we're about—no pressure, just a good meal and an honest conversation. You can get the details and register at [cspc.net/news](http://cspc.net/news).

### [INTRODUCTION]

- There's a moment in this passage that could easily be missed.
  - It's tucked inside a single verse, almost as an aside.
  - But it's one of the most important lines in the entire book of Acts—and perhaps one of the most important lines in the whole Bible for understanding how the gospel actually works.
- We've been watching the gospel move through Acts like a row of dominoes.
  - God moves in one place, and a chain of events begins to unfold.
  - The gospel starts in Jerusalem, then spreads into Judea and Samaria, then out into the Gentile world.
  - One domino falls... and then another... and then another.
    - There is a momentum to this story.
    - A kind of holy inevitability.
- But Acts 16 shows us something just as important as the geography.
  - Because the same pattern that plays out across nations also plays out inside a single human heart.
    - God moves first.
    - And when he does—something begins to move in us.
  - In this passage, we're going to see that happen in real time—and it will show us:
    - Something profound that God does...
    - And one beautifully simple thing we do in response.

**[Transition]:** Let's start with the God who opens hearts.

## [GOD OPENS OUR HEARTS]

### [State]

- The scene begins with Paul in Troas—which is in modern-day Turkey.
  - He wants to press further into Asia, but the Spirit keeps blocking his path.
  - Then, in the night, he has a vision: a man from Macedonia, standing on the other side of the Aegean Sea, calls out to him: “Come over and help us.”
- So Paul goes.
  - He takes Silas, Timothy, and Luke—and they sail across the sea to Greece.
  - This is a massive moment in the history of the church: The gospel is entering Europe for the very first time.
- When Paul arrives in a new city, his normal habit is to go to the synagogue.
  - That’s where he’d find people who already had some spiritual framework.
  - People who might be open to hearing that Jesus is the fulfillment of everything they’d been looking for.
- But he can’t do that when he arrives in Philippi. Why? Because Philippi doesn’t have a synagogue.
  - As the mission moves further from Jerusalem, there are fewer Jewish communities in each region.
  - So Paul does something else—he goes and finds a place of prayer.
    - An informal gathering beside a river, outside the city gates.
    - Where a group of women has assembled.
- One of them is Lydia—and **V14** tells us two significant things about her.
  - First, she is a dealer in **purple cloth**.
    - Purple dye in the ancient world was extraordinarily expensive—so purple garments were the clothing of emperors and aristocrats.
    - Lydia is not selling scarves at a market stall. She is supplying luxury goods to the wealthiest clients in the region.
    - She is successful, independent, and almost certainly wealthy.
    - She is, in modern terms, an entrepreneur at the top of her industry.
  - The second thing **V14** tells us is that she is a **worshipper of God**.
    - She has already been drawn to the God of Israel—attending prayer, seeking, listening.
    - She is not far from the kingdom—but she hasn’t heard about Jesus yet.
    - Until Paul arrives and begins to speak.
- It’s at this point that we read the sentence that changes everything—the gospel nugget we need to hear:  
**V14: The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.**
- Did you catch it?
  - Not: “**Lydia** opened her heart.”
  - And not: “**Paul** was fantastically compelling.”
  - But: “The **Lord** opened her heart.”

- This is not incidental—this is the hinge of the whole story.
  - And it tells us something profound about what conversion actually is—how we actually come to faith.
  - This verse is pulling back the curtain to show us what is happening beneath the surface of this conversation.
    - **Lydia** listens.
    - **Paul** speaks the gospel message:
      - We can be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.
      - He will forgive your sins if you trust in him.
    - But behind it all, the **Lord** is at work.

**[Illustrate]**

- It's like walking into a dark room: Everything is there—the walls, the furniture, the pictures, the details—you just can't see it.
- Then someone flips the light switch.
  - The switch doesn't create anything new.
  - It simply enables you to see what was already there.
- That's what God does with the gospel.
  - The **Lord** does something Lydia could not do for herself.
    - He turns on the lights.
    - He opens her heart.
  - And suddenly:
    - What was hidden becomes visible.
    - What was abstract becomes personal.
- This is what it means to be saved by grace:
  - God does a work in Lydia that gives her ears to hear and eyes to see.
  - He opens her heart so she can receive the gospel message.
- I remember when this clicked in my life:
  - I had known the truth.
  - But suddenly it became real.
- Has that happened to you?
  - A moment that you didn't engineer.
  - A conversation that landed differently than it should have.
  - A Sunday morning where words you'd heard before suddenly felt like they were addressed to you.
  - We didn't flip the switch—God did.

**[Apply]:** This matters enormously—not just for Lydia, but for all of us.

- First, if you're a Christian this morning—this verse is an invitation to **worship**.
  - We celebrate that our faith did not begin with our own decision.
  - It began with God's movement—when he turned on the lights.
    - We didn't figure it out.

- We can't take any credit.
    - We're no better than someone who hasn't believed.
  - We're simply beneficiaries of grace that enabled us to see.
    - That drives us to give great glory to God.
      - *If you hadn't worked in my life, I wouldn't even believe in you.*
      - *But you have opened my heart—I once was blind, but now I see.*
      - *Thank you for saving me.*
    - Never forget that your own salvation is a miracle of grace.
      - We believe because he turned on the lights.
      - We believe because he opened our hearts.
- Second, if you're a Christian this morning—this verse is an invitation to **witness**.
  - We don't need to have the best arguments or be the smartest person in the room.
  - We just tell people what God has done for us—and leave the rest to him.
    - He's the one who opens hearts—which takes the pressure off.
    - It's not our job to change anyone—that job belongs to the God of love.
  - We don't need to worry too much about the outcome.
    - We do our part.
    - And leave the rest to him.
- Third, if you're not a Christian yet—this verse could be your word of **welcome**:
  - Not to figure everything out...
  - But to receive what he's already doing in your life.
    - The fact that you're here this morning might not be random at all.
    - You might be here because he's already at work.
  - I wonder if that might be a beautifully unnerving truth.
    - If you feel him nudging you—that curious pull toward the things of faith, that sense that this might all be true:
      - Don't dismiss it.
      - Don't intellectualize your way past it.
      - Don't resist what's happening in you.
    - It may be evidence that God is turning on the lights.
      - If your heart is opening to Christ... don't attempt to close it.
      - Today is a great day to welcome him into your life.

### [Transition]

- Point 1: God moves first—he opens our hearts.
- Point 2: When he does, it doesn't stop there.
  - The dominoes begin to fall—our lives change in response.
  - And in Lydia's life, we see one beautifully simple example:
 

**Open hearts lead to open homes.**

## [WE OPEN OUR HOMES]

### [State]

- Do you see Lydia in **V15**?
  - **V15:** After she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.
  - As soon as she comes to faith—she opens her home.
- Notice the texture of the language.
  - We read that she **urged** them: The word carries the sense of pressing or insisting—she wouldn’t take no for an answer.
  - Then we read that she **prevailed upon** them—which is a polite way of saying she out-argued them.
    - Paul’s team hesitated—perhaps out of courtesy, perhaps not wanting to impose.
    - But Lydia gets her way.
- And it didn’t stop there:
  - By the end of the chapter—see **V40**—her home has become the gathering place not just for Paul and his companions but for all the believers in that town.
  - This is likely the beginning of the church at Philippi.
    - The church Paul later writes to with the letter we call Philippians.
    - The church he says partnered with him from the beginning (Php 1:5).
    - The church he addresses as **my joy and crown** (Php 4:1).
  - It all traces back to this:
    - The Lord opened her heart, and she then opened her home.
    - This is the pattern of the gospel:
      - When we have been welcomed by Jesus.
      - We start to welcome others in his name.
      - And he does amazing things.

### [Illustrate]

- All that got me thinking this week about gospel hospitality—and what it would look like for me to be a little bit more like Lydia.
- Wouldn’t it be great if our church was known as a place of hospitality?
  - There’s a letter written around 125 AD—just a century after Lydia opened her home—from Aristides to the Emperor Hadrian. In it, he tries to explain to the Emperor who these Christians are.<sup>1</sup>
    - One of the things he highlights is their hospitality:
      - When a stranger arrived in their city, Christians would bring him into their homes.
      - If he had no food, they would fast so that he could eat.
        - Strangers welcomed.

- Christians going hungry so strangers wouldn't have to.
- The Roman world had no category for that.
  - Hospitality for them was transactional:
    - You hosted people who could return the favor.
    - You welcomed people who were useful to you.
  - What the Christians were doing was so strange, so economically irrational, that he wrote to the Emperor to explain it.
- And where did it start? In homes like Lydia's—around tables like hers. With that same posture: *Come in—share what I have.*
- The church was born in open homes—and in some ways, it still lives there today.
- I think of one of our families who welcome a group of college students into their home every Sunday night.
  - There's nothing particularly special about it: they don't clean the house, and they just serve whatever food they have on hand.
  - But because of their hospitality, these students are different:
    - They've formed meaningful relationships with each other.
    - They've developed a solid connection to our church.
    - One of them even told me that they've been able to see a model of family life that they never had.
- Or I think of another family who issued an open invitation on Easter—*"If you don't have anywhere to go, come to ours."*
  - So a bunch of people gathered and enjoyed each other.
  - And the church became what it should be—the family we otherwise wouldn't have.

### [Apply]

- Being a Christian doesn't need to be too complicated...
  - Lydia didn't offer Paul and his team a theological concept or a stunning insight.
  - Instead, she offered them a spare room and a meal.
- And there are people in our lives who would be blessed by the same thing.
  - Don't underestimate how lonely our world is.
    - There are people all around us who are quietly starving.
    - Not just for food, but for deeper things.
  - When we open our homes, we don't just give people a meal—we meet their hunger for deeper things.
    - To be seen.
    - To belong.
    - To be part of a circle of love.

## [THE CLOSE]

- Is there someone in your life who needs that?
  - A **newcomer** to our church...
  - A **neighbor** who lives alone...
  - A **colleague** who doesn't have family in town...
  - A **friend** who doesn't know the Lord...
- Maybe you could invite them over this week:
  - Don't clean the house.
  - Don't curate the menu.
  - Just welcome them and share what you have.
- And you never know what God might do with it.
  - From Lydia's open home, a church was born—a gospel movement began.
  - God might do more than we predict—because he is still at work...
    - Opening hearts...
    - And using open homes.

## RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

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### Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.
- N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone—Part 1*.

### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See the *Apology of Aristides*, chapter 15. The full text is available [here](#).