

"From Rejection to a Riverbank"

Acts 16:6-15

Small Group Discussion Guide

(Note to Facilitators: We encourage you to have a significant time of prayer after this study, so you may want to watch the time as you go through the questions. Feel free to make some optional.)

1. Warmup: What was the clearest leading that you've ever received from God? If you can't recall such leading, what was the easiest "big" decision you've ever made? Describe.
2. Let's read about one example of how the Holy Spirit leads. **Take turns reading Acts 16:6-11.**
 - a. How many times does the Holy Spirit say "no" here? Considering that God called Paul specifically to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15) in order to fulfill His great commission of reaching the whole earth (Acts 1:8), why might God have said "no" to Paul in these specific situations?
 - b. Have you ever had a general leading from God, but then encountered a "no" or closed door along the way? What did you do?
 - c. Pastor Josh concluded from Paul's actions that we are to "***act on what God has already shown us until he gives us further information.***" What do you think of this suggestion? What has he already shown us? (Josh specifically referenced Acts 1:8 and our role in this mission). What would it look like in real life? Have you ever proceeded in this way in a major decision?
 - d. Josh pointed out that there is something freeing about operating in this way: even in the absence of new, clear guidance, we can move forward confidently, knowing that the Holy Spirit will graciously re-direct us if necessary. How do you see that in this Acts 16 story? Have you ever experienced this freedom?
 - e. Josh gave us another way of discerning God's guidance. Develop "a trusted, small group of friends who know you and know Jesus, with whom you can process God's leading in your life." Do any of you have that? Give an example of how they have helped you discern God's leading.
 - f. This community of believers is especially important when we are interpreting the supernatural guidance that we sometimes receive (see Joel 2:28). Have you ever had the experience of God leading you through something like a dream, or vision, or other intervention? How did trusted Christian friends help you in this (or how could you have benefitted from them if you didn't have them)?
3. Josh also pointed out that in this story, we see something about our strategy wherever God has taken us. **Read Acts 16:12-15.**
 - a. Josh's answer to this question, based on Paul's actions, is that we should "***Go where the fish are biting.***" What is the point of this analogy?
 - b. Why would Paul and his companions expect to find receptive people down by the river?
 - c. Where in your spheres of influence would you be likely to find people who are receptive to the gospel today? [We need to be experts on receptive people, the same way a fisherman is an expert on where and when fish are most likely to bite!] After some answers have surfaced, discuss Rick Warren's observation, below:

"From Rejection to a Riverbank"

Acts 16:6-15

Small Group Discussion Guide

“God uses all kinds of sovereign things like divorce, crises, death, economic problems, government shutdowns, losing a job, a new baby or a new job to prepare the soil.... I’ve found that people experiencing change or transition and people under some sort of tension are generally more open. [They are] usually searching for answers, for hope and for truth. We should constantly ask God, “Who are you preparing right now for me to talk to?”

- d. What relationships does God have you in so that you can seek an opportunity to speak of the good news of Jesus? What places has he uniquely placed you where you are the messenger of the gospel? Are there people who you need to invite to Alpha so that they can ask their honest questions?
4. Josh’s third question was, “Why do we stay on mission in the face of rejection, or setbacks?”
- a. Much of this week’s message was predicated on the common experience of rejection. Have you ever been discouraged in your walk with God because of some rejection that you experienced?
 - b. The answer that we see to this question in Acts 16 is that ***“We stay on mission because there are ‘Lydias,’ in every place that God will take you, who need the good news of Jesus.”*** In other words, although we are part of a global mission, this mission will often play out in conversations by a river with individual people who matter to God. Who is a “Lydia” in your life, someone who might be ready to hear the gospel?
 - c. Who seems to have a “slow heart” for the Gospel, but God has called you to witness or be a consistent example to them?
 - d. What do we see in v. 14 about God’s role in Lydia’s response to the gospel? How is this observation freeing to us in the relationships we’ve mentioned?
 - e. This is a tough one to discern: Who in your life might be a person who has a hardened heart and is absorbing a lot of your time and effort, but is still resistant? Is there a person, like Lydia in the Acts 16 passage, who may be more receptive?

Sharing/Prayer

Among our prayer requests, let’s pray by name for those we know with soft hearts, slow hearts, and hardened hearts.