

# Acts 16:13–34 // Three Gospel Conversations

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**Well, Happy Father's Day...** to all you fathers out there who labored so hard to make us what we are today, we honor you; to those of you mourning the loss of a father (or maybe his absence), we grieve with you; and to those of you up to your armpits right now in dirty diapers and peewee soccer leagues, we salute you.

**Our God is the father to the fatherless;** he's where we learn how to be good dads, and for those who missed a good earthly dad, they can find the greatest and most tender of all Fathers in him.

**Acts 16:** By 325 A.D. Christianity had **spread like crazy**. Scholars say **over half** of the Roman Empire had become Christian. And it all started with twelve guys on a hillside with **no power, no money, no endowments, no celebrity recognition** (I'm in the process now of compiling endorsements for a new book I have coming out... you want people to take you seriously... they had none of that)—they just had an **absolute conviction** that Jesus had risen from the dead and a **strange power poured into them** called the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Let me show you this real quick... MAPS

The key was that **every person**, not just a handful of specialized apostles, carried the message.

- I've showed you that the **author of Acts, Luke**, seems to go out of his way to show you that ordinary people, not ordained Apostles, are the ones who spread the message.
- **Stephen Neill**... nothing is more notable than the anonymity of the spread of the early Christian movement
- Acts 11
- Acts 28

- *Who planted this church?* Some dudes.

*But what does evangelism by normal people look like ("evangelism just means "sharing the good news about Jesus")? Acts 16 shows you... Acts 16 gives you picture of what ordinary evangelism looks like. **We're going to begin down in vs. 13...***

- **Now, anytime I preach on subjects like this**, I always feel like if you're not a Christian, you probably say, "Oh... this is what I hate about Christians; they are always trying to convert me."
  - Yes... (no other way to say it)... but **think of it from our perspective. If we really believe that Jesus** rose from the dead, and that he was sent to bring salvation... *how could we not tell you?* Listen: **we'll not push it on you.** We'll respect you, give you space... *but if we didn't really want you to know this you should doubt whether or not we really believe this message is true!*
- I'd encourage you, especially if you're a church member, **to take out something to take notes.** Every week... especially today.
  - If your **neighbor doesn't have something out** to take notes, look at them right now and just judge them. Just kind of shake your head.
  - **No, just kidding.** Look at your neighbor and say, "I prayed all week long I'd get to sit next to you."

**Acts 16:13–34: We're going to observe three gospel conversations with three persons of interest:**

## Conversation #1:

[13] And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. [14] One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

- Write down "**Lydia.**"

- **Who was she?** A wealthy businesswoman; think, “**put together**, driven, brilliant, well-known, well respected.” **She is religious** (she was at a prayer meeting); but she’s not a Christ-follower.
- **How does she get saved?** Paul engages her, essentially, in an evangelistic Bible study, and while he is speaking to her, God opens her heart.
  - See where it says, Vs. 14: “*The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*” “Pay attention”: word used for addiction to alcohol. Craved it. Some of you are like that here...

[15] And 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.

#### Conversation #2:

[16] As we were going to the place of prayer (going back to that place—that’s where they started their evangelism), we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.

- This girl is the **opposite of Lydia**. Scholars say she is probably in her **mid-teens**. She **has a demon** and she’s a **slave**, which means she’s a spiritual and economic captive.
- She’s **busted up**; taken advantage of.
- She’s **not on her way** to the prayer meeting. First, she couldn’t go if she wanted to (she’s a slave); second, she has no interest in going.

[17] She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” But she is kind of **both attracted** to the faith and antagonistic toward it. **A lot of people in types of captivity** are like that. There is **something about the message** that draws them but they have anger and mistrust seething within them.

[18] And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become **greatly annoyed** (I love that... that lets me know the Bible is not made up. It doesn’t say, “And Paul, **full of great compassion**,” or “Paul, **tearfully and tenderly**, stroked her hair, and said, ‘Daughter of Eve,’” but, “Paul was peeved”), **turned and said to the spirit**, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

- How does this girl get saved? Paul performs an act of deliverance on her; he throws out the demon, which also removes her as a circus act her masters can make money on.

#### Conversation #3:

[19] But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers... [22] and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. [23] And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. [24] Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Here we meet person number three: the Philippian jailor.

- **Who is he?** Jailors were often **highly decorated Roman soldiers** who, as a retirement gift, were given jails to run.
- **Older.** Hardened. Part of the **ruling class**. I’m sure cynical.

#### He puts Paul and Silas

- **Into the “inner” prison.** Inner prisons were usually the lowest part of the building... disgusting. All the fecal matter ran down into it. Dark, dank.
- **Their feet in stocks:** Don’t think modern stocks like you see at Williamsburg where you and your sister put your head in them and take a picture... Romans stocks were chains suspended from the ceiling... They’d lay you on your back and hook your ankles into the clamps and pull you upside down and then strike you on the bottom of your feet. Unbelievably painful.

[25] About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, [26] and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. [27] When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. (In those days, if you lost prisoners, you paid with your own life—kind of a motivation to not lose them.)

[28] But Paul cried with a loud voice, ("serves you right, you cruel bigot!" No...) "Do not harm yourself, for we are here."

**Here's the question: Why is Paul still there?**

- **He is innocent;** he knows he shouldn't be in prison.
- Now the **walls are down**, his chains are off. Wasn't this an **act of God**? Hadn't this just happened to **Peter in Acts 12**, and didn't Peter just walk out?

But Paul **recognizes this is part of the plan of God** to reach Philippi. **Hadn't he prayed that God would use him to reach the people of Philippi?** Well, if part of God's plan to reach Philippi was to put him in a prison so he could suffer well before a Philippian jailor and then tell him the reason he was so happy, **that was a price he was willing to pay.**

So Paul stands there with his **freedom on his right hand** (a freedom he deserves); and, on his left, a cruel man who had tortured him the night before. And Paul turns back to him. **You can see why this was so moving to the jailor!**

[29] And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. [30] Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I *do* to be saved?" [31] And they said,

Do? There's nothing you can do. Salvation is not something you *do*; but something that has been done for you. **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."**

- Simplest short statement of the gospel.
- EXPLAIN GOSPEL: CHAIR.
  - When you sit down in a chair, you make a decision that you are going to trust the chair to hold you up.
  - You can only be in 1 of 2 relationships

[32] And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. [33] And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. [34] Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

*This chapter contains STORIES OF 3 PEOPLE who get saved.*

- Now, **surely lots of people trusted Christ** during Paul's time in Philippi. **Why include the stories** of these three? (That's **always a question** you should be asking when you read the Bible. *Why include this?*)

**Why are these three stories included?**

**A. To show us something about the gospel.**

- **Namely, that the gospel is for everybody. Three COMPLETELY** different kinds of people: a rich, religious woman; a slave girl; a Philippian jailor.
- **There is no "type" for becoming a Christian.** People say that to me all the time: "Well, I'm just not the Christian 'type.'" *There's only one Creator and Father, God. We all have one problem: sin. One hope: Jesus' death in our place.*
- **And because of that, the church is a place where people of vastly different "types" find a unity in Christ they wouldn't find anywhere else.** We all have characteristics about ourselves that make us feel proud...

- **Every morning a Jewish man would pray** (this is recorded in their ancient prayer book, the **Siddur**), “Lord, I thank God I am not a woman, a slave, or a Gentile.” Jewish men felt lifted up above these kinds of people. Look who gets saved... **In the church, WOMEN, SLAVES, GENTILES, AND HEBREW RABBIS BECOME sit down together as brothers and sisters in Christ.**
- **All mankind:** rich, poor; black, white; young, old; conservative, liberal; religious, irreligious; from good families and from broken families; have one problem: SIN. And one hope of salvation. Jesus.
- **I don’t know who you are** or what you’ve done or how far you’ve fallen, **YOU believe on the Lord Jesus Christ** and YOU will be saved. For there is **no difference in the Jew or the Greek** or the black or the white or the rich or the poor or the **young** or the old or the **male** or female or the **religious** or irreligious... the **same Lord over all is rich in mercy** to all who call upon him, for **whosoever shall call upon** the name of the Lord will be saved.

*So, these stories show us something about the gospel... Second, they are recorded...*

## **B. To give us glimpses of different people in our city and show us how to reach them.**

- *Three kinds of people in our community reached in three different ways.*

### **1. Lydia: the spiritually interested**

- She thinks of herself as a religious person. **How do you engage her?** Paul engages her in a spiritual conversation and studies the Bible with her.
- There are lots of people in our community who fit this profile. **Sometimes they have a Christian background,** sometimes not... sometimes they are just spiritual people from other religions; sometimes they are active in church, a lot of times they are not. *But for whatever reason they are open to having spiritual conversations.*

- Best way to reach them? Expose them to the Bible. How do you do that?
  - **Invite them to church** (partner)
  - **Invite them to read the Bible with you.** I’ve seen t good methods for this.
    - **Make a list of verses. “Taste and See.”** What does it mean? What does it mean for you?
    - **Simple Bible Study Method:** Use our weekly reading program: Questions: What does this passage teach you about God? About man? What does it mean to have faith? What command is there to obey? BOTH OF THOSE ARE ON THE BLOG
  - **Start a larger Bible study with them**
    - We have other things... RightNow media
    - If you contact our small groups team, I promise you we’ll help you
  - **Invite them to read a good book with you.**
    - *PDL*
    - *Reason for God*
    - *Gospel*
- As you do this, what you are looking for is God to “open the heart” like he did for Lydia. **I love that phrase, “the Lord opened her heart”** because it takes the pressure off of me. **God is the one** who does the convincing; I just put the word out there.
  - **A lot of people think that the only ones** who can be effective evangelists are extreme extroverts who are like vacuum cleaner salesmen... not true.
    - A friend of mine says that **someone effective in evangelism only has to believe two things:** salvation belongs to God; faith comes by hearing. Believing “salvation belongs to God” takes the pressure off of you; believing that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God puts responsibility on you.
  - **Everybody can do this.**

That's how we reach person #1. But here's the problem, for most people and most churches, evangelism stops there... but there are two other kinds of people, and they won't be reached by inviting them to church!

**That slave girl will never** show up at the place of prayer. Neither will the Roman soldier. **Physically, she can't**; and the **Roman soldier is just cynical** and has no interest in religion.

- Me in gas station when I was a 16... Invited everyone. "I don't think he'll come. It's just such a different world."

And, every year, there's just more and more people who aren't going to go to the church... **A British friend of mine**, Steve Timmis, cited a recent study in which 70% of Brits say they have no intention of ever attending a church service. For any reason. Not at Easter. Not for marriages. Not for funerals or Christmas Eve services. 70%! He says,

*That means new styles of worship will not reach them. Fresh expressions of church will not reach them.... Great first impressions will not reach them. Churches meeting in cool venues will not reach them... The vast majority of un-churched and de-churched people would not turn to the church, even if faced with difficult personal circumstances or in the event of national tragedies. It is not a question of 'improving the product' of church meetings and evangelistic events. It means reaching people apart from meetings and events.<sup>1</sup>*

**Great Britain is a few years ahead** of the United States in secularization (things like Easter Sundays and Christmas Eve services still work great for us and we have huge crowds), but where GB is, is clearly where we are headed, too. **Each year, the "pie" of people** in our communities who will come to our churches for special events just because is shrinking.

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Mission by Being Good Neighbours* (Nottingham: IVP, 2011), 15.

And so if we don't learn how to carry the gospel outside of these meetings, we're going to lose them all.

**What I think what we're going to see in the future** is a lot of new, flashy mega-churches fighting over larger pieces of a shrinking pie of bored Christians. But for those of us who want to reach the rest of the culture, we need to think about **growing the pie**. And that means you have to get good at carrying the gospel outside the church.

(You see, each year, the amount of people checking **"none" for religious affiliation** on censuses in our country increases at an astounding rate.<sup>2</sup> "Nones," as they are called, are not casually making their way into churches, really, for any reason. It's almost like you're dealing with people of a completely different religion!

- When I lived in a Muslim country for a few years, **at no point did I consider going to the mosque, regardless of how relevant or funny the imam was**. I wouldn't have gone for a special holiday. I wouldn't have gone when I was on hard times. I wouldn't have gone if the imam were doing a really helpful series on relationships. Islam was a completely foreign world, and one in which I knew I clearly didn't belong.)

*So how are we going to get these other two groups in our society engaged in the gospel?*

## **2. The physical and spiritual captive**

- How are they reached? Just like Paul, we have to get involved in their lives.
- Donald
  - Our prison ministry leads a **22-week gospel** class.
  - One of the **Christian members came with concern** and said, "One of the guys going is a Muslim." Was concerned, because some of the Muslims cause problems... They

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/09/22/life-in-post-denominational-america/>. Accessed 1/15/2014

talked about and agreed that if he would be peaceable, he could come.

- **They asked him**, Why? “I want to know what God wants me to know...”
- **After the class ended**, he wept saying that he loved the group... still not a Christian, but touched by their love for him.
- He was allowed by the prison to come here on the weekend, and a couple from SEE started to bring him.
- Let me tell you what happened next through the words of one of the ladies who is involved in this ministry:

*The second time he came to the Summit was May 18<sup>th</sup>. I was up front at the end of the service as a prayer counselor. Marcelo (his sponsor) and Donald came to me after the service weeping. Donald told me that he needed the Jesus. That he had been confronted with Scripture. I told Donald to pray and tell God what was on his heart and then I would close in prayer. Donald prayed and thanked God for pursuing him and for opening his heart up to His truth. He thanked Him for forgiving him and for paying the penalty for his sins. That he wanted to live a life to bring Him glory. **And then I prayed for him, and he looked up at me, and he shared that he felt the whole world had been lifted off his shoulders.***

*(I saw all this happening right here...)*

*At lunch Donald wanted to share with his peers his decision so he stood up and shared with everyone. All the men from Wake Correctional who attend the Summit each week gathered around him and told him that they would be there to stand with him and support him.*

*He asked me to pray for him that that afternoon could be difficult as he goes back into Wake to share with his former*

*Muslim brothers that he had accepted Christ... that God had revealed to him that Jesus was the Son of God, God incarnate and that he had to believe what God revealed to him. He did share... and is continuing to share and to stand.*

He's being baptized and going to Starting Point here next week.

- We're not reaching guys like that by having better music or because I tell some funny stories. We'll get there by being in the prisons; in the communities; among the homeless; in the pregnancy clinics.
- Why HOPUD... They can't come to us... we have to go to them.
- *(Some of you need to check this ministry out:*  
[summitrdu.com/prison](http://summitrdu.com/prison)

### **3. The Philippian jailor: the skeptic**

- **This guy got saved because of two things:** he observed Paul and Silas' joy in the midst of pain; and he was the recipient of their extravagant grace.

**Paul recognized that God had appointed this suffering** to reach this jailor, which is why he didn't run from it when the earthquake occurred. Instead, he chose to do two things in the midst of it: keep giving praise to God; show extraordinary grace.

**What if, in the midst of pain, the first thought was NOT**, “God, what have I done wrong?” BUT “God, whose life are you trying to use me in?”

**Here's a wild thought: Maybe sometimes we should quit asking God to take away this week what we asked him in prayer to give us last week!**

- “God use me.” And so God does this and we say, “God, you hate me!” Just answering your prayer.

- **Some of you, when you suffer, are like, “Oh God, what have I done wrong?”** And you are looking for some promise of God to give you comfort, so you flip open your Bible and say, “God speak to me!” doing the Bible-lottery thing and you land in Leviticus and say, “See, God I knew you hated me!”
- Why not turn to **John 16:33** and read, *“In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I’ve overcome the world,”* and realize that your pain is part of how Jesus is overcoming the world, because he’s using it to help someone else see the hope and joy you have in God... and then choose to do exactly what he said, “Be of good cheer!”

**2 things about your pain:** see it coming; see it through.

**See it coming:** don’t be surprised by it. God had told Paul, “I’m appointing you to make my name famous among Gentiles and part of that involves your suffering.”

- **Psalm 112:7**, “The righteous have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast; trusting the Lord.” Does that describe you?
- It will if you know that God has appointed you to overcome the world, and the way that he does that is not just by delivering you from adversity, but in adversity, so that you can show others you have a hope that goes beyond the world.

**See it through:** Make a choice to never cease praising God.

**You’ve got to choose...** You’re not always going to feel like it... You’re going to have to say with Habakkuk... (though there be no herd); or with David...

**...And do it exuberantly....** Talk about the goodness of God. Declare it. Sing about it. Put a smile on your face when you do. **Why? The prisoners are listening!**

- Why do I encourage you so much worship exuberantly in this place?

- Because how we worship puts on display our belief in the promises of God.
- I know we’re not all the same personality... but some of you shouting your heads off right now during these NBA finals: Lebron. Bosh. D. Wade. Duncan. Ain’t no basketball player going to be by your hospitable bedside during the trial saying, “When I walk through the fire I will be with you; these waters will not overcome you.” **When Lebron gets hot, he just walks off the court. Jesus said, When you walk through the fire... He deserves louder praise and greater exuberance.**
- “I feel weird worshipping exuberantly...” I did too. How to start... **Sing.** Put a **smile** on your face. **Clap** a little. Eventually you can do the **worship Frisbees; carry the TV;** soon enough you’ll be doing VARITY WORSHIP: **washing heaven’s windows** and **giving Jesus high 5’s.**
- Pain and unfortunate circumstances are your chance to put your hope and joy in God on display. ***Pain and tragedy are our best chances to be a witness!***
  - I for one am **tired of seeing the worst of Christians** come out in suffering! (Tragedy, CNN finds some Christian... this is terrible; cause of all them sinners that moved in our city I’m going out to my rapture bus-stop...) )
  - How about we resolve that in the **worst of the worst, the best of the best** is going to come out of us so our world can see the greatest of the greatest of Saviors.

**Some of you are in the prison of a bad marriage....** Tough job situation. (That’s for someone out there.) Chronic health problems. Victim of injustice. I’m not telling you to not do what you can to remedy it. In the next few verses (vv. 35–40) Paul would protest it. I’m saying as you do that... never lose the joy of your possession of Christ!

*Others are watching!*

*And show extravagant grace.*

- Nothing puts the gospel on display like grace in the midst of injustice.
  - *Les Mis*
  - *Me at restaurants*
  - *What if that was God's purpose? To give you a chance to put his grace on display?*

## **Conclusion:**

- MAPS again. This is why. This is what I want the gospel to look like in RDU