

# Session 15

## POWER AND UNITY

*Acts 16:11-40*

### Memory Verse

*Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”  
And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and  
your household.”*

– ACTS 16:30-31, CSB




## Power and Unity

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** While ministering to the church at Philippi, Paul and Silas demonstrated how the gospel message transcends boundaries that separate and divide people. God’s people are called to live in harmony and unity without regard to social, racial, ethnic, or economic differences.

What do Harriet Tubman, Marie Curie, Gertrude Ederle, Amelia Earhart, Rita Moreno, and Patsy Mink have in common? They were all women who were the first to do something that made history. Many of them were also the first of their race or culture to achieve their specific position. These accomplishments include being the first woman—who happened to be black—to lead an armed military operation in the United States, the first female Nobel prize winner, the first female to swim the English Channel, the first woman to fly across the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean, and others.

Overcoming tremendous odds, situations, opposition, and societal restrictions, these women each persevered until they met their goals and eventually made history as the first woman to cross boundaries in a particular area. Another name that can be added to this list would be Lydia, who became the first convert to faith in Christ in Europe. Her conversion led to the gospel spreading even further.

 What is significant about a person doing something no one else has achieved before? Why does it matter that we recognize when these moments take place?

 How do new groups of people believing the gospel give opportunity for further advancement?

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## Session Summary

Paul and his missionary team left Asia and headed toward Europe in answer to the Macedonian call. They followed a strategic plan to plant churches in major cities so that the gospel would spread from these cities to the surrounding regions. As Paul and his team began teaching about Jesus, Lydia was led to faith along with others.

There was no prejudice or limit to whom Paul and his team shared the gospel with. After encountering a demon possessed girl who followed them and proclaimed about them to others, Paul cast the demon out of her. Opposition arose against Paul and Silas, and they were thrown into jail. Fellow believers prayed for their release and an earthquake occurred that could have simply meant their release but instead gave opportunity for others to hear the gospel. Through every circumstance they faced, Paul and Silas continued to evangelize and lead people to faith in Christ without regard to race, color, ethnicity, or social status.

### 1. The Gospel Without Prejudice (Acts 16:11-18)

Paul, Silas, and their team sailed for Europe to continue their efforts to spread the gospel. As noted in Acts 16:9, Paul received in a vision a request to go to Macedonia. In responding to that call, the gospel was taken to an entirely new continent. The plan was to plant churches in major cities so that the gospel message would spread from those influential places. Philippi was the foremost city in Macedonia, and that is where this missionary journey really sprouted.

 What would be the benefit of planting churches in the larger cities first?

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On the Sabbath they followed their typical practice and went to join some fellow Jews by the river for prayer. This detail is significant as the lack of a synagogue in this city points to the lower population of Jews in the area. As the group met and prayed, a woman from the city named Lydia came to faith in Jesus. Lydia is described as a seller of purple dyes and silks from Thyatira. These details signify that Lydia dealt in luxury. The dyes used for making purple were held in high regard and expensive.

Notice what happened in Lydia's life and the sequence in which these events were listed. Before Lydia was converted, we read that the Lord opened her heart to the things spoken by Paul. This is important because it this miracle is necessary for anyone to come to faith in God. A vital element of evangelism is praying for God to open the hearts of those who need Him. We should never discount the role of prayer in the work of effectively sharing the gospel.



**How have you experienced the power and importance of prayer in reaching people with the gospel?**

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Paul and Silas attracted attention as they taught and preached. They not only had an impact on some of the more affluent people like Lydia, but they also encountered some who were viewed as the bottom rung of society. In verses 16-17, we read that a slave girl who was possessed with a spirit of divination began following them and attempting to disrupt their interactions. Ironically, the demon-possessed testified to the truth of Paul and Silas's message as the evil spirit within her recognized the power of God at work through them.

After many days of her following after them and seeking to act as a disruption, Paul had enough and commanded the spirit to leave her in the name of Jesus Christ. It is of note that the spirit immediately left her. Though demonic spirits can be strong, they are nowhere near as powerful as the Lord Jesus Christ, and in His presence, they have no choice but to flee. Paul did not make any effort to cast out the demon using his own name or power but spoke to the demon only on the authority of Jesus. The culture of that day was open to worshiping and celebrating evil spirits and false gods. Our society today has some of the same tendencies, and believers should be careful to refrain from inviting evil spirits into our lives in any way, shape, or form—even through seemingly innocent practices.

**?** Application: How do you see the presence of demonic, evil, or new age type spirits in people's lives today? How can you protect your own life from giving the enemy a foothold in these areas?

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## 2. Facing Opposition (Acts 16:19-29)

Paul and Silas made enemies by casting the demon out of the slave girl. Her masters had used her for profit and were not happy when she was freed from the evil spirit and the power it brought. In short, the girl's freedom from oppression meant financial loss for her owners. The owners brought Paul and Silas before the authorities to accuse them and seek charges against them.

**?** How might we relate the situation of this girl to the human trafficking we see today?

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Paul and Silas's act of freeing the girl from demonic oppression made a statement that the gospel is for all people no matter who they are or where they come from. They also paid a price for setting the girl free, being accused of vague charges designed to get them imprisoned. It did not take much for the crowd and the magistrates to turn against them.


**?** The magistrates and crowd turned against Paul and Silas quickly. How do you see the world acting biased against Christians today?

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They assumed Paul and Silas were Jews and not Roman citizens, which has significant implications. Roman citizens had specific, well-guarded civil rights while non-citizens had no rights and were subject to any treatment the crowd or magistrates chose to enact. After being beaten severely, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. To ensure further security, Paul and Silas's feet were bound in stocks in the inner prison. In this situation, they had little hope for escape.

But these men of God did not give in to the temptation that might overcome many who are mistreated and beaten for their faith. Instead, they held an impromptu praise and worship service in the prison. Imagine how it affected the other prisoners to see two men, who should be moaning in pain, singing praises and being joyful. Paul and Silas are a beautiful example of the fact that joy is not based on circumstances but on a real relationship with Jesus.

The prison praise service went to another level when a supernatural earthquake occurred. The earthquake not only opened the prison doors, but it also loosened the chains bunding the prisoners. Upon realizing what had happened, the jailor in charge moved to kill himself in desperation, recognizing the punishment he would face for letting these prisoners escape. But Paul and Silas called out and stopped him in his tracks when they told him no one had escaped.

 **Application:** How would you have responded if you were in Paul and Silas's position when the earthquake came? How did their focus on obedience to Jesus lead them to act in an unnatural way?

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### 3. The Power of the Gospel (Acts 16:30-40)

The Philippian jailer was so shocked by how Paul and Silas conducted themselves that he recognized their message as the truth. He saw something very different about these men and asked for help. That Paul and Silas were more concerned for this one man's soul and salvation over their own freedom spoke volumes, and the jailer asked how he could be saved.

Seeing the evidence of God at work in people's daily lives is one of the most powerful tools of evangelism. Paul responded to the jailer with the simple truth that he needed to trust in Jesus to be saved. Paul called for the jailer to believe in Jesus, along with his whole household. Here is another reminder that the salvation of individuals always gives opportunity for influence to spread the truth to others.

**?** Who has God given you influence with? How might you seek to share the truth of Jesus with them?

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The same jailer who had punished and mistreated Paul and Silas was changed completely. That he cared for their wounds and fed them gave evidence of the jailer's life change. In response to the truth of the gospel, the jailer and his family were baptized that very night. What started as an unfair beating that transitioned into a midnight worship service in chains ended with a man and his entire family being baptized into the family of God.

After ministering to the jailer's family, Paul and Silas returned to the prison so there would be no problems for their new brother in Christ. The next day, the magistrates sent word to free Paul and Silas from the prison. Though it appeared that the earthquake could be the means of Paul and Silas's escape, the earthquake was actually meant to setting the jailer and his family free from their sins to give them new life in Christ.

**?** When was a time God used circumstances in your life to bring about an unexpected outcome? Why is it important that we look for God's activity in these moments?

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When word was sent for Paul and Silas to be released, Paul spoke up and revealed that they were actually Roman citizens whose rights had been violated. He asked why, as Roman citizens, they would be mistreated publicly then secretly set free. Even though they had rights, according to the systems of the day, Paul and Silas did not immediately speak up about those rights because there was a bigger plan at work. More than our rights according to people, what matters most is obeying God's plan and doing His will. Although the magistrates tried to sweep their mistake under the rug by encouraging Paul and Silas to slip out of town, Paul and Silas chose to go to Lydia's house and spend time with the believers there before leaving.

**?** Application: What from today's passage encourages you to overcome obstacles that separate and divide so that the gospel is shared with all people?

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## Conclusion

Taking in all that happened with Paul, Silas, and the church at Philippi gives us a powerful picture of the power of God at work in all circumstances. It is also a reminder that we are called to reach every person we can with the gospel. There is no room for divisions and barriers if we are going to fulfill God's call on our lives. Paul and Silas shared with the elite of society as freely as they shared with lowest of society.

They also demonstrated that it is more important to follow God's plan than to demand easier times for ourselves when they stayed imprisoned for the sake of reaching a man who had mistreated them severely. This kind of love does not come from human sources but is only found in the power of God at work in the lives of people sold out to and committed to Him. The gospel brings people from all walks of life together with a common purpose in Christ.

**?** Why is it important for believers to be connected and unified across racial, ethnic, and social boundaries? What are the obstacles to this kind of unity today?

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**?** How can you be part of connecting people from different places, stations, and cultures through the gospel? How can we seek this together as a group?

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**?** Who is God calling you to share the gospel with through conversation this week? How will you respond in obedience?

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## Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

*Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"*

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

## Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## Unhindered

### Main Passages

- Acts 23:11; 25:9-12; 28:23-31

### Session Outline

1. Comfort for Paul (Acts 23:11)
2. Paul Takes a Stand (Acts 25:9-12)
3. The Gospel Keeps Going (Acts 28:23-31)

### Memorize

*Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”  
And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and  
your household.”*

- Acts 16:30-31, CSB