



**SERIES: While Going - Week 2**

**By Pastor Bryan Clark**

**Message Title: Some Truths You Need to Know Pt. 1**

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The mission of the church is to *go and make disciples*. That is the mission, but as soon as we start talking about evangelism, outreach, sharing your faith, most people would say, there are emotions that come with that. There's a certain anxiety or fear. It feels like this kind of this obligation, but it's not a very comfortable experience. And so maybe we just need to back up and rethink this a little bit. If the message is actually Good News, why do we have those emotions?

What if what God was asking of us is to have a kind, compassionate, respectful conversation with someone we genuinely care about, regarding the message of Jesus, the person of Jesus that has so changed our lives? What if the goal was at the end of those conversations, the person we're talking to always feels more valued, more respected, more listened to than they felt before the conversation? Rather than thinking of it as some obligation, wouldn't that seem more like it's a gift that we can offer to the people around us we genuinely care about?

So if you have a Bible, turn to Acts chapter 16, one.

**Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily. (NASB, Acts 16:1-5)**

The first truth is one that we've talked about a lot, so I'm not going to elaborate a lot, but the truth is that we need to remove all unnecessary obstacles to having a meaningful conversation about Jesus. We don't have to argue, we don't have to debate. We don't have to get sidetracked with all kinds of discussions, that at the end of the day, aren't productive towards our desire to have a meaningful conversation about Jesus. It's just not realistic to expect people that don't know Jesus to have a Christian worldview. It's also unreasonable to expect people that don't know Jesus to live like a Christian. So, there's going to be a lot of stuff there that we just don't need to try to change and fix until somebody encounters the resurrected Christ.

Now, the way it comes out of this text is to understand that Paul and his missionary team are taking the message of the Jerusalem Council, which is Acts 15, the previous chapter. They're taking that decree, those decisions, out and about, and Paul wants to take Timothy. Timothy is a grown man. His mom is Jewish, his father was Greek. So, Paul has a concern that the Jews, where they're going, knowing that Timothy's father was a Greek, would be sidetracked by the thought as to whether or not Timothy has been circumcised. So now here's where it gets interesting. The decision that was made in Acts 15, the decree, the message that they're delivering is, according to the Jerusalem Council, you do not have to be circumcised to be a Christian. So Paul is circumcising Timothy as a grown man, in order to remove an obstacle, so they can have the conversation that the decision was, you don't have to be circumcised.

Now for a grown man in a first century culture to be circumcised was no small deal! There was a significant sacrifice to this. But in order to just simply remove an unnecessary obstacle to get to the message of the Gospel of grace, Paul has Timothy circumcised. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said to the legalist, I became a legalist, in order that they might hear the message of the Gospel. This is just a classic example of that. So we've talked about this. Don't allow unnecessary obstacles to prevent a meaningful discussion about Jesus.

Verse six,

**They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.**

(Vs. 6-10)

I think the second significant truth in this story is the need to be very sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul and company wanted to go to Asia, because there were lost people in Asia, but the Spirit of Jesus stops them and says, I don't want you to go to Asia. I want you to go to Macedonia. As the story unfolds, we find out the reason is because God had already prepared the ground for the Gospel in Macedonia. And so it was the leading of the Spirit that led Paul and his team to fruitful ground. I think there's always a risk that we can become too clever, and the more clever we become, the less dependent on the Holy Spirit we are. This is again one of the dangers of having a memorized presentation and a couple of questions to get into it and to go for it. We don't tend to be really sensitive to the Holy Spirit. We depend on the presentation. We depend on what we've practiced, and oftentimes we're not nearly sensitive enough to whether or not God is leading us to have that conversation at this moment.

Another way to think about it, most of you probably have in your head kind of a mental list of those people whom you would like to have a meaningful conversation with about Jesus. That's fine, but it's good to be aware that your list and God's list may not be the same list, so don't think

automatically, you know. God knows. So there is always the requirement to be sensitive to the Spirit leading you. I would suggest to you, it is entirely possible that if you were to imagine in your mind, the person in your world you think is the least likely to ever have interest in Jesus, may be the very person that God is preparing to hear the message. Over the years, every time I make that statement, months later, there's always somebody that comes up to me in the hall and says, you won't believe this, but that's exactly what happened to me. The person I had in mind that day when you said it, that I thought was the least likely to ever have interest in Jesus, has now come to faith in Christ. So just make sure we're always sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

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Verse 11,

**So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.**

**A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. (Vs. 11-15)**

The next truth, I think is a critical truth to understand. Only God can open a human heart to understand the message of the Gospel. The text is very clear. It wasn't the cleverness of Paul's presentation. It wasn't the power of persuasion. The text says the Lord opened her heart to the message of the Gospel. I think this takes a tremendous amount of pressure off. If I think what's required is me being able to answer all the objections, answer all the questions, to have a perfect presentation in a very persuasive fashion, and at the end of the exchange, close the deal, that is a lot of pressure. The fact is, unless God opens the heart, that person is not going to understand the message. So there's a partnership here. The partnership is, it's my responsibility to kindly, compassionately, faithfully proclaim the message, but then it's up to God and only God can open a human heart to hear and understand the message.

So here's something to keep in mind: The moment you find yourself exuding some level of pressure to close the deal, you've crossed the line. Now you've misunderstood what's your part and what's God's part, and now you're trying to do God's part. You be faithful with your part and trust God with His part. As long as you understand the message by which you were saved. In other words, if you have trusted Christ as Savior, you are well equipped to have the conversation.

It doesn't have to be more complicated than that. Just share with someone the message that has so transformed your life - the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. You don't have to be able to answer all the questions and the objections. There are hundreds of resources out there for people who genuinely have questions and want those questions answered, but at the end of the day, it still must be a God thing to open a human heart to understand.

Verse 16,

**It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.**

**But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."**

**The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order *them* to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. (Vs. 16-24)**

Now, the last part of that paragraph, it's worth noting that the idea is that they were thrown into the most secure part of the prison, what we might call maximum security, the inner prison into the stocks, into the chains. The truth that I think comes out of that section of the story is basically to remember, always expect conflict. Always expect conflict. It doesn't mean there will always be conflict, but I would expect that. Why? Because it is spiritual warfare. What is at stake is the eternal destiny of a human soul and there's no way the enemy's rolling over without a fight. So just because there's conflict doesn't mean I did something wrong. Doesn't mean I should have done something differently. I would just expect it.

But often the conflict is not with the person that you're conversing with. As a matter of fact, if you do it the way we've talked about it, there may not be any conflict with that person. It typically is with family members, friends, outer circle, churches, other people somehow involved in the process begin to stir up the conflict, and you find yourself wondering, what did I do wrong? Should I have done this differently? What we fail to realize sometimes is this is all out

spiritual war. We should expect that, which is the reminder, we need to be very diligent to pray. Whenever we are engaged in sharing the Gospel with others, there is a bigger war at play.

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Cara: So Bryan, you've reminded us we're in a spiritual battle. So what lessons do we need to remember from Acts 16?

Bryan: Yeah, so I love Acts 16 for just thinking through these steps and reaching lost people. So it starts with a reminder that we need to be really sensitive to God's leading. You know, they wanted to go to Asia and God said, no, I want you to go to Macedonia. And so it's like, I may think I'm going to reach this person next door or at work. And God says, no, actually today I want you to reach out to this person. So, it's that sensitivity to His leading. I think then the reminder that the text says God opened Lydia's heart. So it's that there's God's part and there's my part. And if I start trying to do God's part, then things are going to go negatively pretty quickly. So, I can't save anyone. I can't open anyone's heart. I can't remove the blinders. I can't make them believe. I can't do any of that. So I'm a steward of the Gospel. I need to lovingly, caringly share the Gospel. But most of what needs to happen is up to God. And that text is a really good reminder of that.

Bryan: And then it moves into the reminder, this is a spiritual warfare and that's often going to be the case. And so prayer is needed. And then they ended up in jail, which is the reminder that there's often consequences, but God wins [Right]. Acts 16 ends with this wonderful moment where, nice try, but God wins and the missions team is headed to the next city. And it's good to remember that.

Cara: So many of us are probably planted where God wants us to be. That sounds about right. So when it comes to sharing the Gospel, it seems like you're not asking us to do something different as much as you're asking us to think differently about what we're already doing.

Bryan: Yeah, so people are busy and the last thing we want them to hear is, here's one more thing to add to their busy schedule. The truth is you're already in a neighborhood, you're already going to work, you're already involved in your hobbies, your kids are going to school or you're going to school. So all these opportunities are already there. It's just a matter of thinking differently about what you're already doing. And as we've talked a lot in this series, you have to remove the barriers that are preventing you from moving forward with necessary conversations and just think differently about, what if I'm just kind today? What if I'm caring? What if I'm just going to listen? What if I just want to value this person? Kind of push through some of the barriers that prevent us from doing that. And I think we'd be surprised how often those conversations turn to spiritual things.

Cara: Well, as an introvert myself, I kind of broker my time, my time is my thing. And I have to say that every time I've been prompted to go, it just seems like such a pain. It's actually physically exhausting. But I will say every time I've shown up, I've never regretted it. I've always grown spiritually from it. So this is all really great advice, Bryan. You've reminded us that our mission includes God's part and our part. So why is it so important to remember that?

Bryan: So I mentioned this before, when we get confused and we start trying to do God's part, then I'm trying to make them believe; I'm trying to close the deal. That's just not going to end

well. And that's usually what turns negative. And then it's a very unpleasant experience for everybody involved. So to me, it takes the pressure off. I can't save them. I can't make them believe; I can't lift the blinders. I just need to do my part and the rest is up to God. I also remind us from an earlier message that the goal is to make disciples not just converts. So, this is a long-term process and it's helpful to think that way.

Cara: Take some time. We hear the phrase power of prayer a lot, but prayer really is the key when it comes to sharing. Can you talk more about that?

Bryan: Yeah. So, prayer reminds us of the importance of this and capturing those moments. But there is a warfare dimension to this that has to be taken seriously. I tend to think of it more like a conversation. So it's not like I just get up in the morning and pray for Bob. It's more of a conversation as I'm in situations where there's opportunities and I'm a fellow introvert. I'm not a real social butterfly, but I do want to recognize the moments that God has prepared and step into those. And so it's more like a conversation with God. He knows; I don't.