

INTRODUCTION

Let's play a game! Complete the following sentences by saying the correct word that completes a phrase that begins with the word, "*open*."

*"Tell mother we will be late for dinner because we have to stop by our pastor's home. He and his wife are having an **open house**."

*In respect to trade, Latin American nations hope the USA will relax restrictions and follow an **open door policy**.

*In order to do e-commerce on the Internet many companies have had to change their ways and become more **open- minded**.

*In September the Virginia Fish & Wildlife Commission forbids the catching & keeping of rockfish but in October it becomes **open season**.

*Whenever I visit the dentist he asks me questions. But as soon as I try to answer he says, "Be quiet but **open your mouth**!"

*"On our way home let's stop in Hanover and pick up some corn and tomatoes. Look for one of those roadside **open-air markets**."

*Elijah was not a happy camper so he wrote a message to all the other campers in his camping club. He sent them an **open letter**.

*Ali Baba found the thieves' hide-out but the cave was sealed shut. So he tried out the universal password, "**Open Sesame**."

Very good! You must know this game since you played it so well.

We played that little game in order to help you focus attention on the word "*open*." I tried in similar fashion with the children. In today's message we meet a Bible character, **Lydia**, who is associated with the word "*open*." She is mentioned only two times in the **Book of Acts**—both times in chapter 16. But she is described as having her heart *opened* by God and then in turn *opening* her home to her fellow believers.

This life-changing experience in Lydia's life turned out to be the *opening exercise* in establishing a new church in Philippi. Paul and Silas arrived in Philippi about 50 A.D. or C.E. The two missionaries had a rather eventful first visit there. They preached, they were arrested, severely beaten, thrown in jail but miraculously delivered by a violent earthquake and the trembling Philippian jailer.

According to **Acts 16** the jailer was the third convert in Philippi—that is, the third person individually identified in Luke's Acts account. The second was a demon-possessed slave girl who told fortunes. And the first convert was Lydia. How would you like to start a new church with these three?

The full story begins with Paul and Silas leaving **Jerusalem** on what we now call Paul's *Second Missionary Journey*... They go north to **Antioch** and on to the province of **Galatia**. Twice we read references to the Spirit preventing them from going to certain provinces in **Asia** (*Holy Spirit & Spirit of Jesus*). So they by-pass **Bithynia** and travel to **Troas**. Troas was the first century successor to the ancient city of Troy. Luke joins them in **Troas** and reports that Paul had a night vision there of a “*man in Macedonia begging them to come there and help them.*”

So they enter the region of **Macedonia** (modern day Greece) and come to **Philippi**, one of the region's leading cities. Philippi was named for King Philip of Macedon who had a famous son, Alexander the Great. The city was conquered by **Rome** in 168 B.C. and became important as a stopping place on a major Roman road (the *Via Egnatia*). A famous battle took place west of the city in 42 B.C. when Octavian and Mark Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar (Octavian later ruled as Caesar Augustus).

When Paul entered a new city he usually went to the local **synagogue** on the first Sabbath after arriving and looked for opportunities to share the gospel with “*the Jew first.*” In Philippi, however, there does not seem to have been a synagogue. How do we know? Because Luke reports that “*they went outside the city gate to the river looking for a place of prayer.*” The Jewish law required “**10 men**” in order to form a synagogue. Thus, we conclude there were very few Jews in Philippi—it was a Gentile city.

Story: the de-consecrated synagogue in Osiek, Croatia.

So they go down “by the riverside” and find a few women gathered to pray.

They cannot find a *synagogue* but they do discover a *prayer meeting*. And Paul and his companions begin to share the Good News. They testify to the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. They speak about forgiveness of sins...

And they speak not only of knowing Jesus but of following Him...
And one of those listening was a woman named Lydia.

We learn three things (background) about **Lydia**:

-she is a dealer in *purple cloth*

(purple cloth dyed in Philippi. The expensive dye came from shellfish found on the Phoenician coast. Because the dye was scarce, purple represented wealth and as a trader Lydia may have been wealthy)

-she is from the city of *Thyatira* (Asia Minor—4th of 7 churches in Rev)

(as a trader-dealer she may have moved around from city to city--the city was famous for guilds w/ dyers, leather goods, etc.); modern day *Akhisar* in western Turkey.

-she is a *worshipper* of God.

Lydia was a Gentile but one who was attracted to the God of the Jews. It may have been in her native Thyatira that she became a God-fearer; a colony of Jews lived in Thyatira.

Lydia listens to Paul and believes his message. You get the sense she believed readily—that she was ready and waiting for this good news. Thus, she becomes Paul's first convert in **Europe** and the first known believer in **Philippi**. She and her household were baptized (note on household baptism; see also Philippian jailer).

Lydia presses the apostolic delegation to find her an authentic convert by inviting them to meet in her home. "*If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.*" Luke concludes editorially, "*And she persuaded us.*"

And that is all we learn about Lydia except one more passing reference to Paul and Silas and the brothers meeting later (after prison) at **her house**.

What can we learn from this business-woman who went from being a God-seeker to a Christ-follower?

I. Open heart

The first thing I want to highlight is Lydia's *open heart*. Luke tells us in his **Acts** narrative that "*the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*" She needed help to believe. She did not simply make a decision for Christ—Christ revealed Himself to her through the preaching of Paul and through the preparing of her heart.

How was her heart prepared to respond? Luke does not tell us all the details. But here is a clue. She is described as a God-worshipper. We know she was down by the river to pray with other like-minded God-fearing women. In modern terms we would call her a **seeker**. Someone had told her about the God of the Jews. Maybe she had heard stories about Moses and Ruth and Abraham and David. And she was hungry for the things of the Spirit.

Ultimately, how God's Spirit and a human heart meet in faith that transforms a doubter or a seeker into a believer—is a *mystery*. But it takes both God to open your heart and you to respond to His grace. It's a marvelous and mysterious divine-human encounter when someone turns to Christ in faith.

The picture of an *open* heart is a good one. When you are *closed*...nothing can reach you. Nothing can enter or become part of you...

Example: Leah goes to college and learns to like bananas (coffee)

Sometimes when people are sick they lose their appetites. They are closed to food and water—to nourishment. The open *mouth* takes in nourishment, the open *mind* receives new ideas and information, the open *heart* receives the new birth and the new life. E.g. **open mind**...*life-long learner!*

II. Open Home

The second item we notice about Lydia is that her new faith prompts a response of service. After baptism—a public declaration of faith in NT days—she invites the evangelists to stay in her **home**.

Apparently she is a woman of means—we already sense that from her vocation. She has a home and resources to share. And she is eager to share them. She challenges Paul and Silas and Luke to find her faith authentic by receiving her hospitality. They had challenged her to receive their message of grace. Now she persuades them to receive her gracious service.

An open *heart* leads her to open her *home*. Lydia practices *hospitality*.

III. Open hands

Now I want to guess out loud what happened next with Lydia. I'm speculating because we do not have any more information in Scripture or elsewhere. But I think I have a good guess. Look at **Philippians 4:14-16**.

Paul wrote this letter at least four years after his visit. And he singles out this Philippian church for praise because of their what? Their **generosity**! How did the Philippians learn to be generous? Of all the Pauline churches they are commended for their gift-giving. Why them?

Do we know of any members of that Philippian community that had showed generosity when Paul first visited them? We do, don't we? We know of a woman named Lydia who opened her home to traveling missionaries. I wonder if Lydia's generosity lies behind Paul's grateful commendation?

When the Lord speaking through the Gospel opens your *heart* and you respond—the normal response includes you opening your *hands* in generosity. Open heart, open hands.

-God is **generous** with you bestowing his forgiving mercy upon you; *why* not in turn be generous with the work of God by funding it with your gifts?

-God is **gracious** to you giving you new life and gifts for serving; *why* not be gracious in response by serving with your gifts and talents?

-God is **kind** to you when you are needy; *why* not be kind to others when you see or hear they are needy?

On Sept 25 we will observe an **Invite-A-Friend** Sunday. For it to work one thing needs to happen. Tuckahoe members need to *invite* friends to come and join us. We cannot really claim to be an "*open heart, open house*" congregation unless we regularly invite people to join us. And then we welcome them and show them Christian hospitality... Is Lydia's example one you want to take to heart and put into practice?

ILLUSTRATIONS

A very wealthy religious little old lady was a soft touch for any panhandler she happened to meet on the street. One day she met a very shabbily dressed man and impulsively pressed a five-dollar bill into his hand, smiled warmly and whispered, "*God speed.*" The next day the shabbily dressed man knocked at the door of her house and said, "*Here's your hundred dollars. Godspeed came in first and paid twenty to one.*"

An associate of Wesley, Samuel Bradburn, was highly respected by his friends and used by God as an effective preacher. On one occasion he was in rather desperate financial need. When Wesley learned of his circumstances, he sent him a five-pound note (then worth about \$10) with the following letter: "*Dear Sammy: Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed'. Yours affectionately, John Wesley.*" Bradburn's reply was prompt. "*Rev. and Dear Sir: I have often been struck with the beauty of the passage of Scripture quoted in your letter, but I must confess that I never saw such a useful expository note on it before.*"