

### Moments before Impact

One would have to be completely obtuse to miss Pastor Glen's illustrious grip on the motto of First Baptist Church: *"Helping One Another Mature so We can Impact our World for Christ."* Surely a concrete mark of the legacy of his ministry is in orienting our congregation toward an intentional obedience to Christ that leads to living a life of spiritual impact among our colleagues, neighbors, and friends outside the faith. However, Acts 16 cautions us against thinking that such a rational, steady obedience in a godly direction might appear perpetually logical or sensible to those outside the faith.

While the consequences in this week's passage offer the evidence of lives of impact, it is the motion of Paul's and Silas' devotion, and the super-rational guidance of the Holy Spirit that arranges seemingly skew or depressing developments into a crescendo of praise to God.

In considering how God may lead us this week, I pray that like Paul and Silas, we too, will openly follow Jesus and allow him to shake your acquaintances into spiritual awakenings.

#### Monday – Unexpected Guidance

1. Please read Acts 16:6-12. What do you notice about Jesus' guidance of Paul in verses 6 and 7?

**Historical Insight** – A quick look back at modern missions reveals a similar phenomenon. Livingstone tried to go to China, but God sent him, instead, to Africa. William Carey planned to go to Polynesia, but God guided him to India. Judson went to India at first and then was driven onto Burma.

2. How do you suppose Paul and his companions concluded that "the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them" to enter Bithynia? From your experience with the Bible, what are some of the different ways that God directs us?

**Making it Personal** – If God were intent on warning you away from undertaking a seemingly spiritual task, what would he have to do to convince you that he wanted to give you unexpected guidance? Pray today about being open in new ways to the character of God and ask that the Spirit of Jesus leads you however he sees fit.

#### Tuesday – Unexpected Power Dynamics

1. Please read Acts 16:16-21. This passage is suitable for actors in a play! An important feature of human relationships on the stage is identifying which characters are powerful in a particular scene, identifying the particular nature of their power, and noticing when characters grow stronger or weaker. List all the characters involved in this drama.
2. List the type of power that each character has and who each character dominates with that power.
3. How many times does any character gain dominance over someone else in this passage?

**Making it Personal** – As you think about your own life, who is it that tries to dominate you in your extended family, at your worksite, or in your circle of friends? Ordinarily, as Americans, we instinctively seek to be free. However, as you consider who is seeking to dominate you now, how might God seek to use your imperfect relationship with that person to fulfill his redemptive plans? Pray for people today who you find irritating and bothersome. Ask God to use the situation redemptively in your life and theirs.

#### Wednesday – A Girl, God, and a Song

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...."*

1. Please read Acts 16:22-25. What do you suppose happened to the "slave girl?" What sort of bruising or lacerations do you suppose Paul and Silas received from being "severely flogged?"
2. The word *ACTS* is a familiar acronym for different forms of prayer. It stands for **a**doration, **c**onfession, **t**hanksgiving, **s**upplication. What sort of prayers do you suppose Paul and Silas might have offered in their prison cell?
3. Hymns have words. What lyrics seem to capture the spirit of believers who lie in the dark, stripped and flogged, locked in stocks, and singing at midnight?

**Praying** – Pray that God will allow you to focus your attention on him and his concerns during unexpected setbacks this week.

#### Thursday – Earthshaking Impact

*"If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him." James 1:5*

1. Please read Acts 16:25-30. Why do you suppose the prisoners did not leave the jail? Why do you suppose the jailer brought Paul and Silas out of their cell?
2. Crisis evokes many different responses from different people. What impresses you about the response of Paul and Silas to their crisis?
3. How did God use the response of Paul and Silas to redeem a bad situation and to bring people to himself?

**Making it Personal** – Do you find yourself in a difficult situation or crisis? Can God redeem it? Surely he can. Pray, asking God to give you wisdom as to how to proceed and how to develop a Christ-centered perspective.

#### Friday – A Sword, Family, and Unexpected Houseguests

1. Please read Acts 16:25-34. What was the jailer's first response to realizing that the security of the jail had been compromised? Why?

**Text Insight:** In the moment of crisis, the jailer opts for a "face-saving" Roman death by his own sword. Meanwhile, God has other plans for him. God's intension is to save not merely the jailer, but his family too.

2. What is the significance of the jailer cleansing Paul and Silas' wounds and of him feeding them in his own house? What does it tell you about his change of heart?
3. How does the jailer's response compare to Lydia's response to the Gospel (verses 14-15, 40)?

**Digging Deeper** – As you consider the impact of the Gospel on Lydia's household and the jailer's, what does that tell you about the nature of the Gospel?

**For the Weekend:** Read Acts 16:35-40. In his reply to the officers, Paul's irritated tone suggests that his body as well as his dignity is badly torn. We can easily imagine what would have happened if Paul had refused to enter the jailer's house. What kinds of choices must a person make to be able to share his or her faith despite unexpected, negative setbacks?