

We are continuing our series on *learning from the early* and this week we are looking at the theme of *direction*.



First, I would like to remind us all of a common mistake when studying the book of Acts. We must not turn Acts into ‘object lessons’, where the message is ‘we should try to be like this’. Instead, look first for the **good news** or the **grace** in the passage.

### Read Acts 16: 9-15

Paul had a plan, preaching the word in the province of Asia. This plan, however, was frustrated by circumstances that are not elaborated in the text. We only learn that Paul “had been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia” (16:6) and when trying to enter Bithynia, the “spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (16:7)

- Have you ever been frustrated in your plans?
- How do we discern whether those frustrations are from God? (we often speak of a closed door)

In Paul’s case the breakthrough came in the form of a vision. During the night he has a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Nic Tall reminded us that a vision without action is of no use. Paul must have shared the vision with his traveling companions and they all concluded that God had called them to preach the Gospel to them. They left for Macedonia **at once** (16:10).

Throughout the book of Acts we discover that the companions of Jesus spread the Good News with a combination of strategic planning, keen sensitivity to Holy Spirit guidance, prophetic saying, inward prompting, overruling of external circumstances, etc.

Sometimes it is messy: just after our passage we read about an action Paul does that backfires and he is thrown into prison (you might want to read 16: 16-23). What looked like a setback, God used it to lead the jailer and his household to faith (16: 25-34)

- Have frustrated plans lead to a new direction?
- Can you point to God’s guidance? What action(s) did you take? (does not have to be as dramatic as Paul’s vision)

Lydia comes to faith. She and her household are baptized. The only other Philippian convert mentioned in Acts was the jailer (16:33 -34)

These two people (and their household), a distinguished and wealthy woman and a Roman soldier became the initiator of church in Philippi, the first church of Europe. From the brief letter of Paul to the Philippians years later we learn that there is still a deep affection between Paul and the Christians in Philippi, but also that women played an important role in the church, even in its leadership (See Phil 2:25; 4:2-3)

From the **30<sup>th</sup> of May to the 9<sup>th</sup> of June** we are called to pray for five people (Thy Kingdom Come initiative) – Use this time to pray for your friends, family, colleagues and neighbours. Pray that God will **open their hearts** (like he did with Lydia), or **use circumstances** (like he did with the jailer). Who knows what future your friends’ conversions will bring!