

Date : 2 August 2026
Theme : The Holy Spirit in building the Kingdom of God
Topic : Seizing God's opportunities in new situations
Passage : Acts 15:36 - Acts 16
Key Verses : During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:9-10

When ministry does not go as planned, it's easy to wonder whether we have missed God's will, or whether it's time to give up. But when we face closed doors to apparent opportunities; it may be time to wait upon the Lord to show us an open door.

Acts 15:36-16:40 tells a very interesting story.

This is what happened to Paul in his second missionary journey. Luke recorded one setback after another. Yet behind every setback stood the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, guiding God's servants and advancing God's mission. God was guiding Paul to head for Europe instead of Asia. History has shown how pivotal this move was in the fulfilment of the great commission.

From the passage, we will discover 2 important truths:

1. God uses setbacks to direct our steps and advance His mission.
2. People respond differently to the gospel, but our responsibility is to faithfully proclaim Christ.

Truth 1: God uses setbacks to direct our steps and advance His mission.

1. God turns conflict into kingdom expansion Acts 15:36–16:5

- **God directs leaders to different fields when apparent conflicts surface.** *Acts 15:39-40*
 - Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply over John Mark. They separated.
 - From a human perspective, the mission appeared to suffer a setback. But if Christians remain clustered together, the great commission will be slowed down.
 - Barnabas took John Mark to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas and continued strengthening the churches. Barnabas went west to Cyprus, his home territory. Paul went north into territory familiar to him.
 - The mission remained their priority, not staying together.
- **God advances His kingdom when leaders fan out to take their assigned tasks.** *Acts 16:3-5*
 - One missionary team became two. God continued His work through two ministry teams instead of one.
 - Neither Barnabas nor Paul continued alone. Barnabas took John Mark, while Paul chose Silas, reflecting the wisdom of serving in partnership rather than in isolation. This echoes Jesus' pattern of sending His disciples out two by two (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1), providing mutual encouragement, accountability, and complementary gifts.
 - In addition to Silas, Paul recruited Timothy, who became a key leader in the early church.
 - They equipped the churches and as a result, the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in number.

Living it out

Conflict is never something to seek or celebrate. Yet when it occurs, God is able to overrule it for His purposes. Stay faithful when relationships become difficult. Conflict may be allowed by God to redirect His servants. As it turned out, Barnabas' gift of encouragement rehabilitated Mark, while Paul's aggressive missionary drive accelerated the expansion of God's kingdom.

2. God gives vision to pioneer new gospel works *Acts 16:6-15*

- **The Holy Spirit redirected Paul's plans** *Acts 16:6-10*
 - The Holy Spirit forbade Paul and his team from preaching in Asia and Bithynia.
 - God gave Paul the Macedonian vision "*Come now to Macedonia and help us.*"
 - Together, Paul and his team discerned and concluded that God had called them to preach the gospel in Macedonia.
 - They immediately headed for the foremost city – Philippi.
- **Paul pioneered into unfamiliar territory** *Acts 16:11-15*
 - At Philippi, a city where he knew no one, Paul was a complete stranger.
 - At the riverside, there was no synagogue; they began by seeking a place of prayer.
 - He spoke to the women who met there. The Lord opened Lydia's heart to receive the gospel.
 - Lydia and her household were baptised. Her home became the first church in Philippi. This was a strategic move. Europe would later become the greatest missionary-sending nations in the world.

Living It Out

We must seek God's vision because His vision is the most strategic way to fulfil the Great Commission. Every new gospel work begins with a God-given vision.

3. How Paul caught the Kairos moment and turned his prison into a pulpit. *Acts 16:16-40*

- **When facing opposition...** *Acts 16:16-24*
 - Paul did not react impulsively. Instead, he exercised discernment, patience, and the right timing. He refused to let the gospel be associated with demonic testimony. At the right time, he cast out the evil spirit, knowing opposition would follow.
 - He showed compassion to the slave girl by setting her free from spiritual bondage.
- **When facing prison...** *Acts 16:25, 27-28*
 - a) Worship before deliverance
 - They prayed and worshipped God instead of complaining. Their worship was not a response to deliverance but an expression of trust before deliverance.
 - They showed compassion to the jailer and placed his life above their own freedom. They chose to remain in prison instead of escaping.
 - b) Turning a prison crisis into a gospel opportunity *Acts 16:26, 29-34*
 - God shook the prison with a great earthquake.
 - The prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.
 - The jailer was brought to the point of surrender. He cried out, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" Paul's quick answer was "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household", declaring Jesus was the answer.
 - The jailer believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - His entire household heard the gospel and was baptized.

Living It Out

Faithful witness often brings opposition. Paul's response in a crisis was strategic in transforming suffering into a platform for God's glory.

One truth stands out across all three scenes. In every setback, Paul remained focused on God's mission. In conflict, he seized every Kairos opportunity and was strategic in his witness. He followed the Holy Spirit's vision. Paul turned every circumstance into an opportunity to advance the gospel.

Truth 2:

People respond differently to the gospel, but our responsibility is to faithfully proclaim Christ.

When we faithfully proclaim Christ, God will bring fruit in His time, even though the responses are different. To be skilful in preaching the gospel, we must learn to handle apparent setbacks.

How did Paul and Silas seize the opportunities?

Three strategies adopted by Paul with three kinds of people.

i) A Prepared Heart — Lydia Acts 16:14-15

S.O.W.

S - Seek receptive people

Paul intentionally sought people who were seeking God by going to a place where people gathered for prayer.

O- Open God's Word

He stepped out in faith, shared God's Word with complete strangers, and trusted God to open hearts.

W- Wait on God to open hearts

The Lord opened Lydia's heart to receive Paul's message.

Outcome

Lydia and her household believed and were baptized. Her home became the first meeting place of the church in Philippi. Lydia and her household were the first fruit that launched the church in Europe. Although Paul could not predict who would respond, the strategy he adopted proved effective.

ii) A Hardened Heart — The Slave Girl's Owners Acts 16:19-22

P.R.A.Y.

P – Patiently discern

Seek God's wisdom and timing before responding. *(Repeatedly harassed by the demon-possessed slave girl, Paul did not react impulsively but patiently exercised spiritual discernment before acting).*

R – Rescue the oppressed

Look beyond the problem to the person. *(Paul saw a woman in spiritual bondage, not merely an interruption to his ministry, and set her free in Jesus' name).*

A – Accept the cost of obedience

Faithful obedience may invite opposition, but obey Christ regardless of the cost. *(The owners valued their profit more than the girl's freedom and opposed the gospel. Rather than arguing or retaliating, Paul accepted the personal cost of faithfully obeying Christ).*

Y – Yield the outcome to God

Leave the consequences of your obedience in God's hands. God can turn setbacks into gospel opportunities. *(Paul entrusted the consequences of his obedience to God. What appeared to be a setback became God's next gospel opportunity).*

Outcome

Paul and Silas were dragged before the authorities and imprisoned. The owners thought they were silencing God's servants, but this was God's strategic way of reaching the jailer.

iii) An Awakened Heart — The Philippian Jailer Acts 16:27-30

4S's

S – Sing - worship and pray (Choose worship before deliverance)

Although Paul was helpless in prison, he chose to pray and sing hymns to God, trusting God before deliverance came.

S – Stay (Choose people over personal freedom)

When the earthquake opened the prison doors, Paul chose to stay, valuing the jailer's salvation more than his own freedom.

S – Show (Show practical compassion)

Respond with compassion in another person's crisis.

(God used an earthquake to bring the jailer into crisis and awaken him to his desperate need. Seeing the jailer about to take his own life, Paul stopped him and showed practical compassion, opening the way to proclaim Christ).

S – Seize (Seize opportunities to proclaim Christ)

Seize God's opportunities to proclaim Christ during a crisis. *(When the jailer asked how to be saved, Paul immediately pointed him to Jesus and shared the Word of the Lord with his entire household).*

Outcome

The jailer and his household believed, were baptized, and rejoiced in their new faith. Once again, God turned a setback into a platform for His greater purpose.

Paul entered Europe with no synagogue and no familiar network. Yet he strategically seized every opportunity God provided. Some hearts were prepared, some remained hardened, and others were awakened through crisis. Paul could not control the response—he was ready to proclaim Christ wherever God opened the door. Likewise, our calling is to be ready, recognise the open door, and preach Christ.

Applications

- 1) What setbacks are you facing today? How is God revealing the strategic response in your situation?
- 2) When you face 'closed doors', can you expect God to open another door of opportunity to preach Christ?