

Drawn In: Living Out the Creative Life with God, Series by Marcia McFee
“God Opens the Heart”

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The New Testament lesson for today is from Acts, chapter 16, verses 6 through 15. “They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there.

A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her

heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.’ And she prevailed upon us.” This is God’s word for God’s people.

Let’s pray. God spoke “let there be…” and creation began. Touch our hearts and minds God to open to hear the wisdom that the Spirit will use to move our hearts this day. So Jesus, “let there be…” an openness and willingness to encounter something unexpected. Amen.

The message for today is about listening. “Listening” as a part of creativity means we’re recognizing what’s going on around us. Maybe we see things happening that’re different from what we expected. Perhaps what we started isn’t ending up looking like we thought it would.

When we begin creating something, our first aim is to listen to how the Holy Spirit is directing our steps. Whatever we’re creating—a sermon, a project for the church, steps to achieve a goal that’re needed for a committee—whatever. As Christ followers, our goal is to listen and to wait for God’s guidance and voice. To stop what we’re doing, get quiet, and give space for God to speak and guide us.

And more than likely, what happens are possibilities that unfold before us that we weren’t previously aware of. If we don’t stop to listen to God for guidance, we act as if we have all the answers. And then if we’re up against something that

didn't go as we expected we perceive it as something that's negative in our lives.

But what if, those moments, which we perceive as negative, are actually God's way of inviting us to see new ways of moving forward in our lives? So instead of becoming reactive we respond. We leave the door open to God moving in new ways with what we're co-creating with him.

In our interpersonal relationships, projects, and goals we've made for ourselves and family, we can get stuck and leave out our need to collaborate with God. God is essential to the success of our goal and without that guidance we can't achieve the things God wants us to. We find these thoughts as an example in the reading for today.

The apostle Paul, Silas, and Timothy were at a loss. They didn't understand where the Holy Spirit was leading them on this missionary journey. They bumped into barriers all over the place. The Spirit kept them from going north, south and west. Sometimes we're reminded of that same thing in the church, we're not in charge of where the Spirit is leading.

God sets the boundaries of what's possible and those boundaries aren't static. God's ways aren't our ways and they have limitless and new possibilities for our spiritual growth. For Paul and his traveling companions, they surely slowed down, got quiet, and prayed for guidance; this is part of the creative process. God

is in control, not us, so the taking of time to stay open, let go of our preconceptions about our agenda, and let God do what God would do.

So what happens to Paul as he's seeking the Holy Spirit's direction? He sees a vision—a man of Macedonia pleading with him in the vision and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' So immediately Paul and the others head straight to Philippi as the Spirit has led.

Interestingly enough, the Holy Spirit who gave the urgent call and guidance to set sail and go, *now tarries* when they arrive in Philippi. Patience and trust is still needed as they follow. They responded immediately, but note that when they arrived the story says they "remained in this city for some days." Who knows how long that was?

But then on the sabbath day as they typically would have done, they went outside the city gate by the river, where they assumed there would be a place of prayer. This is where they met Lydia and her household. The Scripture states that Lydia listened eagerly, but it was the Lord that opened her heart.

From the very beginning to the end of this text, we become very aware that it's the Holy Spirit who is leading everything. It's the spirit that sets the direction of the mission, who said to set sail by word of a vision, who then tarries in Philippi, and who then does what only God can do—places the three on their

missionary journey at the right place, at the right time, and presents the gospel to a family who is then baptized. How easy it can be to think we know the way.

Immediately, Lydia's faith becomes active and she opens her home. Social and cultural barriers fall to the ground, and all that remains to see is that God changed a family by extending grace to a Gentile family in need of hearing the gospel.

This is the thing with co-creating with God as we listen for guidance. We have to pray and open our hearts to hear from the Holy Spirit. We have to purpose to not charge in and do things our way. We have to wait and be patient, because inside all of us there's a voice of doubt and disbelief and it wants to bury and drown out our prayers even at the very moment we're praying. So what should we do?

We should be persistent in prayer and be patient as we wait for the spirits leading. We should believe God and listen for guidance and know that Christ is standing right beside us. We should refuse thoughts that bring us down and that voice within that tells us to give up. We should have faith and never give up no matter our circumstances. Let's pray.

God of faithfulness and steadfastness, anchor us to all that you are within us. Pour your love and forgiveness into us so we might work with you and not think of ourselves. Become the very core of our being as you make our agenda your agenda

and purposefully move us forward in joyful obedience. To God be the glory in all things. Amen.