

## One Message, Three Methods

Acts 16:11-34

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On Tuesday of this week, I put a post on the Edgewood Facebook page: “*Knowing that it is God who draws you to Himself in salvation, could you share what method or means God used to bring you to faith in Christ?*”

Here are some of the responses...

- *A beautiful Christian mother!*
- *When our second child was born with hydrocephalus, she had surgery at three days old. This made us start thinking about what happens if she doesn't survive. At the same time, one of Mike's co-workers was witnessing to him. We both were led to the Lord by this friend.*
- *Multiple volunteers with our youth ministry demonstrated unconditional love to me and that really started the process. But a sermon on Daniel 3 [was when] I decided to follow Christ.*
- *Foundations planted in me at Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and churches wherever my mother could get us to go.*
- *Pregnancy at 16 and seeds planted by an uncle who is a pastor. Five years I struggled with the thought that I was doomed. Didn't want that for my children so started attending a church when I was 21. Someone from this church shared the gospel with me.*
- *I was saved at a Campus Crusade youth rally under Billy Graham's preaching.*
- *My parents' faithful attendance in a Bible preaching church.*

I'll never get tired of hearing how God saves people! Please open your Bibles to Acts 16:11-34 where we will see how *God uses many methods to get His message out.*

### Background

Last week we learned *God uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect purposes.* In the first part of Chapter 16, Paul and his team traveled from town to town to disciple new believers. As a result, verse 5 tells us the believers “**were strengthened in the faith and grew in numbers.**”

Let's pick up the narrative in verses 11-12: ***“So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and 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 some days.”*** With smooth sailing and the wind at their back, the team made great time. Philippi was a Roman colony in Greece where many Romans had settled because of the promise of no taxes. It was known as “Rome away from Rome.”

Paul and his companions utilized three different methods with three different people.

- **A religious woman**
- **A rejected teenager**
- **A regular guy**

You probably know some religious people who don't know Jesus; chances are good you can think of a person who has felt rejected by people and is enslaved to sin; and my guess is you know a bunch of regular people who are just going through the motions. God wants to get a message to these three types of people, but He first prepares messengers, like us, to send their way.

### **1. A Religious Woman (13-15)**

First, let's consider the religious woman. Paul and his team arrived in Philippi expecting to find the man who had appeared in the vision. Verse 13 describes what happened: ***“And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.”***

According to Jewish law, a synagogue could only be established if there were ten men who could commit to the congregation. But since Philippi did not have a lot of Jews, a group of women met near a river at a “praying place” or makeshift chapel.

BTW, the Bible is filled with examples of women who were greatly used by God – Rachel, Sarah, Shiphrah, Puah, Deborah, Hannah, Esther, Ruth, Elizabeth, Mary, Martha, Priscilla, and Phoebe, just to name a few. In that culture women were treated as property or second-class citizens but Christianity elevated women to a higher status.

It was important to be near water so they could ritually wash their hands before prayer. These women gathered to recite Scripture, to read from the Law and the Prophets, to discuss what they read, and to pray. On occasion, they would listen to a traveling teacher give an exposition or exhortation. We see this in the last half of verse 13: ***“and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.”*** The word ***“spoke”*** refers to natural conversation, not preaching. I picture this like our Growth Groups which meet to informally study the Scriptures. If you’re not yet connected to one, we offer both mid-week and weekend groups.

Verse 14 introduces us to one of the worshipping women: ***“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.”*** Lydia was from a town which was famous for making purple dyes from shellfish and was probably in charge of a branch office in Philippi. Purple was the color of royalty. While she was no doubt a successful businesswoman, she was also a ***“worshiper of God,”*** which meant she was a Gentile who had not fully converted to Judaism but was sincerely seeking the one true God. She was religious but not yet redeemed. She was praying but had not yet discovered God’s purposes for her life.

As she was listening to the words of these messengers the last part of verse 14 says, ***“The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”*** I love the relationship between God’s work and human responsibility. It was God who opened her heart, but He did so as she listened to His Word. The phrase ***“pay attention”*** literally means, ***“to cup the ear”*** so as not to miss anything. BTW, I love how attentive the people of Edgewood are to the preaching and teaching of God’s Word!

Let me make the obvious point that Lydia, a busy businesswoman, did not give up meeting with others on the Sabbath. She could have slept in because this was her “only day to catch up” or she could have done paperwork in her office or headed to the lake. Instead of playing, she was committed to praying. She followed the admonition of Hebrews 10:25: ***“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*** I like how one church summarizes the importance of gathering weekly: ***“Discipleship begins by showing up.”***

God is sovereignly at work behind the scenes, even when we’re not aware of it. Think about how God put Lydia and Paul together. She was from Thyatira, in western Turkey, and God brought her to Philippi. Paul tried to go to Turkey but

was prevented from doing so and was led to Philippi by a vision of a man from Macedonia. God orchestrated an encounter by a river so Lydia could hear the message from Paul and get saved.

Our responsibility is to simply share the Word of God whenever we have the opportunity. It's God's job to open hearts. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7: ***"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."*** He will purposely position you and I to be with people who are spiritually searching.

Do you know any "religious" people? Tell them God is more interested in a relationship than in trying to jump through religious hoops. There are people all around who are searching for God and they're not finding Him in religious ritual. Sit down and speak to them. Serve them. Intercede for them. Invite them to church.

After Lydia's conversion, verse 15 tells us she and the members of her household were ***"baptized"*** in the river. At its most basic level, baptism is a public declaration of an inner decision. After being saved, she wasted no time in outwardly identifying herself with her Savior. The order in the Book of Acts is clear: *Believe and be baptized*. Here's just one example from Acts 2:41: ***"Those who accepted his message were baptized..."*** If you are born again, your next step is baptism. Our next opportunity will be November 27-28.

Because the Lord opened her heart to believe, she publicly identified herself as a believer through baptism *and* she opened her home for hospitality when she said in verse 15, ***"If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.*** She ***"prevailed upon them"*** to use her house as home base so she could provide rest and refreshment to the traveling team. Hospitality was a strategic ministry back then and it remains so today. How can you open your home, apartment, or dorm room to someone this week?

Have you been trying to live a "religious" life but don't have a relationship with Jesus? Listen to the Lord, and when He opens your heart, repent, and receive Him.

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## **2. A Rejected Teenager (16-18)**

After seeing how God saved a religious woman, Paul and his team are led to someone who felt rejected in verse 16: ***“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.”*** Lydia was used to making a profit, while this girl was used *for* profit. This teenager was one of more than 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire and was controlled by a spirit of Satan.

The Greek term is she had a *“Python spirit.”* This referred to how a demon enabled someone to predict the future. Historians tell us they would display their demon possession by rolling eyes, foaming mouth, and flying hair. We would say she was a psychic or a medium. This teen was rejected for who she really was and was exploited by a group of unscrupulous owners.

She got under Paul’s skin because she kept following them and shouting: ***“These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”*** While what she said was true, it was beginning to distract Paul from his mission. Likewise, Satan will do anything to sidetrack us from what we’ve been called to do.

Verse 18 tells us she kept this up for many days, ***“Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And it came out that very hour.”*** The word ***“annoyed”*** means he was, *“worn out and wearied.”* Paul appealed not to his strength but the authority of Jesus Christ. He was irked, but he relied on the power of Christ to do something that would both glorify God and deliver this enslaved teen.

Write this down. Satan often goes on the attack after we experience spiritual victory. Lydia and her household are now established in their faith and so Satan looks for a way to trip up the team. The evil one does this today as well. When things are going well, watch out! 1 Peter 5:8 reminds us, ***“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”***

Sometimes Satan will use an outright attack against believers, but his most dangerous strategy is not aggression, but alignment with truth. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:14, ***“...for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”***

We need to be on our guard, so we don’t let Satan have a foothold in our lives, or in this church. 2 Corinthians 2:11 challenges us to: ***“...not be outwitted by Satan;***

*for we are not ignorant of his designs.*” The devil was trying to derail the proclamation of God’s purposes by appearing to be in line with the truth as he attempted to form an alliance and thus gain a position to subvert the message.

While we don’t know with certainty whether this girl was converted, we do know she was released from bondage. Unfortunately, once her powers of prediction were gone, her owners immediately rejected her. She didn’t matter to them at all. Now that she was used up, they didn’t have any use for her.

Sadly, human trafficking continues today, just ask singer R. Kelly, who was convicted of sex trafficking this week. I reached out to our daughter Megan to get a better understanding of this issue. She graduated from Moody with a degree in “Ministry to Victims of Sexual Exploitation” and for six months served at a home for women who have come out of sex trafficking. Here’s what she said...

*“When we think of a woman being trapped, our minds tend to go to the image of a woman being in literal chains and physically unable to leave her trafficker. The woman described in Acts may have been under those circumstances but the women we pass by every day are under more severe manipulation. Their “master” is who they call their boyfriend. When those women are being swayed to do things, they’re convinced they do it to show how much they love their man. While the relationships are incredibly sticky and one-sided, they are trapped by the emotional chains...the chains in today’s situations are harder to see.”*

This happens right here in the QCA. If you’re in a situation like this, there is help and hope available. Have people taken advantage of you? Do you feel rejected because you can’t perform up to others’ expectations? If that describes you, allow Jesus to release you from rejection. You don’t have to stay in bondage to your past. Jesus put it this way in John 8:36: **“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”** Will you turn to Him in faith right now?

Brothers and sisters look around and see religious people like Lydia and others who feel rejected like this teenager. They need someone to love them just the way they are, and they need a place to belong that is safe and secure. Will you tell them the Good News?

They may look tough on the outside; they may swear and cuss and act in ways that make you angry, but they are not your enemy. Satan is your adversary and he’s

holding people hostage today. Don't be surprised when lost people act like lost people.

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### **3. A Regular Guy (19-34)**

When the Adversary realized he couldn't align himself with Paul, he went into attack mode and awakened some serious opposition. Through some extraordinary circumstances, Paul and Silas are about to have some contact with an ordinary kind of guy. The religious woman needed a relationship with Jesus; the rejected girl needed to be released from bondage; and this regular guy needed to be redeemed.

When the owners of this slave girl realized their source of income had dried up, they went ballistic. They riled everyone up and went straight to the magistrates who ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped, which would have been very humiliating. Verse 23 tells us Paul and Silas were beaten and scourged. BTW, the Romans called these magistrates "*lictors*," which is where we get the term, "*getting your licks in*." This barbaric scourging would have left their backs bloody and raw, their skin shredded, and their muscles like hamburger.

The magistrates were so wound up they ordered Paul and Silas to be thrown into prison, with a special command for the jailer to guard them carefully. We see this in verse 24: "***Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.***"

The inner prison was like a dark and dank dungeon, filled with human excrement and no ventilation. It was normally reserved for the worst of criminals. The jailer, not one to be moved by human suffering, also fastened their feet and wrists to stocks. These stocks held their legs so tightly that it was impossible for them to stand. In fact, they were probably forced to lay on rough stone, with their bleeding backs rubbing against gravel and sharp protrusions.

This looked like the end of their witness in Philippi, but God had other plans. Notice what Paul and Silas do next. Instead of screaming obscenities like the other prisoners or complaining or calling on God to judge their enemies, verse 25 reads, "***About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.***" These "*hymns*" were likely from Psalms 113-118.

This is unbelievable! If I were Paul, I'd still be wondering where the ***“man from Macedonia”*** was who needed help! The word for ***“praying”*** refers to praising, not asking. And the tense in Greek is continuous, meaning they kept praying and praising. Some of you can give testimony to how the Lord has helped you to pray and praise during deep darkness. Job experienced this in Job 35:10 when he refers to God giving him ***“songs in the night.”***

While Paul and Silas prayed and praised, the other prisoners listened, which means, ***“they listened intently.”*** Brothers and sisters, never forget the world watches when we suffer. It's at these times our faith is often noticed for the first time.

As if this alone doesn't get their attention, verse 26 says, ***“And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.”*** This praise concert brought the house down! The word ***“great”*** is *me gas*, meaning “huge.” The earth quaked, the prison shook, the doors opened, and their chains fell off.

This caused the jailer to wake up and when he saw what happened, he was ready to off himself. He knew he would be executed by the authorities for letting the prisoners escape so he decided to take his life. In verse 28, Paul shouts out, ***“Don't harm yourself, for we are all here.”*** When the lights were turned on, the jailer fell trembling before Paul and Silas, realizing for the first time *he* was a prisoner when he asked a life-changing question in verse 30: ***“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”***

### The Ultimate Question

The most important question in life is not, ***“How can I get a better job”*** or, ***“How can I deal with my marriage,”*** or, ***“How badly are the Bears going to get beat this weekend?”*** The ultimate question of life is this: ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** The word ***“must”*** speaks of urgency because apart from Jesus Christ, whether you are religious, rejected, or a regular kind of person, you are lost. Perhaps he had heard what the teenager had shouted about salvation. He no doubt heard the praising and the praying and was alarmed about the state of his soul.

The little word ***“I”*** makes it clear this question must be answered *personally*. ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** And the word ***“do”*** reveals this regular guy believed he had to do something in order to be saved. The most important, urgent,

and personal question of all time has a very simple answer which has nothing to do with “doing” and everything to do with “believing.”

The answer in Acts 16:31 is brief, simple, and profound: **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”** I like how the Amplified Bible renders this verse: *“Believe in and on the Lord Jesus Christ – that is, give yourself up to Him, take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into His keeping, and you will be saved.”*

To believe is to do more than just give intellectual agreement, it’s more than just emotional assent, it must also involve the will. The word **“believe”** means, *“to cling to, rely on, and trust in.”*

Salvation is not a DIY project. If you want to go to heaven, the first step is to stop trying to earn your way there. “Stop trying” and “start trusting” if you want to be saved from your sins. Write it in big letters. When it comes to saving your soul, **WORKS DON'T WORK! BEING GOOD IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH!**

If God doesn’t want our “works,” what does he want from us? He wants us to trust Him. In the New Testament, faith, trust, and belief all come from the same general root word meaning *“to lean wholly upon,”* as when you lie down on a bed, resting your whole weight upon it. Commitment refers to the action part of faith.

Once you rely fully upon Jesus Christ you *will* be saved. It’s not a “maybe” or a “hope so.” It’s a done deal, and it happens instantly the moment you believe in, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ.

After being saved, his whole family came to faith, he was baptized and opened his home for hospitality, just like Lydia did.

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Let me circle back around to how these three individuals represent the religious, the rejected, and the regular. I’ll offer a suggested method for each one, followed by a brief testimony from an Edgewood member.

- **Reaching the religious.** *Focus on spiritual conversations and call for conversion.*

A longtime member posted: *“My family line goes back to Edgewood. I was taught by some godly ladies...in my younger years. I was given the plan of salvation and accepted Christ as my Savior at eight years old.”*

- **Reaching the rejected.** *Figure out a way to get close and provide care.*

One person wrote, *“I had gotten in some trouble...I lost my job and was arrested. Pastor Tim reached out to me...I was saved with him in his office.”*

- **Reaching the regular.** *Live out your faith with joy, especially when going through trials.*

Listen to how one person was saved while watching someone at work: *“I worked at [a bank] for several years. My personal life was a mess. God stuck me in the drive up for two hours every afternoon with [a guy], who just happened to be a Christian. He witnessed to me every day, telling me all about God and Edgewood. One day he asked me if I knew where I would go if I died that day. I began to cry because I knew. He told me how to accept Christ and I did it that very hour in the bathroom at the bank!”*

If you want God to give you gospel conversations, may I suggest each of us pray this prayer every day this week? *“Lord, give me the means and the method to share the message of the gospel with one person today.”*

On Tuesday, I asked the staff and deacon teams to share what methods God used to bring each of them to Christ. By the time we were finished, I had tears in my eyes: *“A co-worker, a sergeant in the Army, a pretty young woman who is now my wife, men who lived out their faith, a Sunday School teacher, a college friend, church, my brother’s conversion, my grandpa and family camps, a sermon on Revelation, a praying wife, a church service, kids church, Awana, bus ministry, family influence, a Christian illusionist, my Christian school teacher, my mom, and an invitation at the end of a church service.”* God reached me through my college roommate on October 3, 1979.

Here are seven recurring themes I wrote down. We would do well to cultivate them in our lives: *relationship, hospitality, intentionality, faith in the home, children’s ministry, worship services, and invitations.*

I want to give an invitation right now for you to repent and receive Christ if you have never done so.

*“Lord Jesus, for too long I’ve kept you out of my life. I admit I am a sinner and cannot save myself. I don’t want to just go through the religious motions anymore, I’m tired of feeling rejected, and I recognize being a regular-kind-of person isn’t good enough. I repent of my sins by changing my mind about the way I’ve been living. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth. With all my heart I believe you are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank you for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe your words are true. I repent of my sins and receive you as my Savior. I surrender to your leadership in my life. Make me into the person you want me to be. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”*

As we prepare to celebrate communion, I think of two words: “*common-union*.” We’ve all come to Christ in different ways, but what we have in common is our union with Christ. Think of those who made up the church in Philippi...

- The religious woman was a professional from Asia who was seeking Christ.
- The rejected girl was a trafficked teenager from Greece who had been controlled by Satan.
- The regular man was a blue-collar worker from Rome who had been secular in his outlook.

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Don’t you love how God reaches people from different places, classes, backgrounds, genders, races, and ages; and enfolds them into the church? Paul declares this strongly in Galatians 3:28: ***“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”***

## **Communion**

As we prepare to participate in what we have in common, let’s consider these truths:

**1. Look back – “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,<sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do**

*this in remembrance of me.”<sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”* (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

**2. Look in** – *“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”* (1 Corinthians 11:28)

**3. Look up** – *“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* (Hebrews 1:3)

**4. Look around** – *“This is my body, which is for you.”* (1 Corinthians 11:24)  
The *“you”* is plural. We’re reminded we are members of the international, intergenerational, multi-ethnic, global body of Christ.

**5. Look Forward** – *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”* (1 Corinthians 11:26)

We practice open communion here. You don’t need to be a member of Edgewood to participate, but you do need to be born again.

### **Directions for Opening Cup**

1. Hold the cup with one hand and with the other find the clear tab and pull gently to open to take the bread.
2. Continue to hold the cup and now find the foil tab and pull carefully to open the juice cup. Be careful while pulling – you don’t have to pull it completely off.