

Women of the Church Study Month 10 Week 1

Lydia

We find the story of Lydia in Acts 16. On their travels, Paul and Silas began proclaiming the Gospel on European soil. They came to Phillipi, the capital city of Macedonia. Here they sought people to teach and they found their first success among the praying women gathered at the river outside of Phillipi (See Acts 16:10-13). One of these women was Lydia. She is described as one who “worshiped God” and “whose heart the Lord opened”, even before she heard Paul’s message. As Paul taught, she was one who listened and attended to the things which were spoken by him (see verse 14). Lydia had been a Gentile. After listening to Paul, she and her whole household were baptized, making her the first Christian convert on the European continent. After being baptized, Lydia opened her home to Paul and Silas and other believers (See verse 15).

Lydia came from Thyatira, a city in Asia Minor (now a part of Turkey), famous for its exports of purple dye, a highly prized commodity during this time period. Lydia is known as a seller or merchant of purple dye and/or cloth. Contrary to prior assumptions, there is evidence that first century CE women enjoyed a fair amount of autonomy and authority, both within and beyond their own households. Some managed businesses or were benefactors or leaders in the public sphere. Lydia was one of these and likely a well to do woman. She is presented as being comfortably settled in Phillipi (an affluent Roman colony well situated for trade) by the time she met Paul. She not only had a home, but one large enough to accommodate a community of Christ believers (probably about 35 in number).

Although she appeared to be a successful businesswoman, Lydia apparently sought more than comfort and success. Her prior religious beliefs are not certain, but Lydia could be described as a pious woman. She appeared to be a woman of strong character. There is no mention of a husband or other male authority upon whom Lydia is dependent. It is not known if she was unmarried or widowed. Her independent decision to open her home to Paul and companions was atypical in her time. Lydia is said to even have been “forceful” in her insistence that Paul and his companions become her guests.

It is possible that Lydia and other women of the time may have been benefactors to some others and then began directing their support to Paul and his mission. Lydia partnered with Paul to ensure the success of his mission in this new European territory. She was in a position to provide both financial and material support, as well as to provide Paul with access to people and places in Phillip. Lydia’s house became the recognized seat of the believing community and Lydia became a leader in the church at Phillipi. It was in Lydia’s house that Paul gave his final exhortation to the Christian community of Phillip before leaving (See Acts 16:40). Lydia is considered a saint; her feast day in the Catholic Church is on August 3rd.

References: www.womeninthescrptures.com/2011/03/Lydia.html

www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/lydia-leader-first-house-church-philippi

Week 2

Lydia—Reflections

--Lydia’s spiritual openness allowed God to work in her life in unexpected and powerful ways. Upon hearing Paul’s preaching, she and her entire household were baptized and became believers in the Gospel; Lydia became the leader in the Christian church at Phillipi.

-How have I been open to experiencing God’s work in my life?

-What results have I seen from this?

-How can I be more open...and what might I expect?!

--Lydia appeared to be a very independent woman. She was a woman of means (financially and socially) and a successful business woman. She was also a spiritual seeker—a woman of faith and prayer, open to God and the Holy Spirit. Lydia was not content with material possessions, but sought something much deeper in her life. She appeared to “give her all” to understanding and following the Gospel.

Regardless of our means or “success” in the world, there are so many things we must attend to in our

lives as women. Sometimes these things can potentially interfere with our own “spiritual seeking”...

-What things interfere with my spiritual seeking?

-How can I balance my work/”business” life and my spiritual lives?

-How can I give more of myself to putting God first?

--Lydia opened her home to Paul and Silas and the community of believers in Phillipi. Lydia used her gifts, connections and possessions to support Paul’s mission and to start and lead the church at Phillipi. Lydia was bold and persuasive in her invitation (and insistence) that Paul and other believers stay at her home. She was a model of both hospitality and support for this group of evangelists.

-How can I use my gifts to further the mission of my faith community and church?

-How can I be open and hospitable to others in my faith community or church?

-Is there any way I can become more of a leader in my faith community or church?

Be a Lydia. Open your heart and home to the Lord Jesus.

<http://www.mycatholic.com/reflections/2017-142.html>

Lydia—Devotions and Prayers

“Today the Gangites River is located about a third of a mile west of the ruins of ancient Philippi. On the river, about a half-mile north of the archaeological site of Philippi, there is an Orthodox Church and baptismal site commemorating Lydia’s baptism. In addition to a church and chapel, there is a beautiful outdoor area on the riverbank where groups can sit. If they want, individuals can receive or reaffirm baptism in the same river where Lydia and her family were baptized. The river itself is only a couple of feet deep at this location and maybe twenty yards across. A part of the stream is diverted to a smaller stream, where people can step into the cold and swift running water or lie back in the water. It is a powerful opportunity to connect with Lydia’s story. It’s worth noting here that Paul and his companions treated the women at the river with dignity, offering Christ to them as they would have to any men gathered for prayer.”

<https://www.adamhamilton.com/blog/pauls-visit-at-philippi/#.Xkqs0P5KguE>

Pour out upon us, Lord, the spirit of knowledge and love of you, with which you filled your handmaid blessed Lydia, so that, serving you sincerely in imitation of her, we may be pleasing to you by our faith and our works. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(From The Roman Missal: Common of Holy Men and Women—For a Holy Woman)

<https://aleteia.org/daily-prayer/sunday-may-20/>

Lord Jesus, thank you for opening our hearts to your message, and for changing us so that our daily work can become a tool in your hands. Help us to use whatever we have in service to you and others. Amen.

<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/gods-people-at-work-lydia>

Dear Lord, Thank you for the wonderful role model of Lydia, a woman of faith who truly impacted the world around her. Help us to learn and imitate the lessons of prayer, worship, openness and service, as shown by her, as we go about our daily lives and our “businesses”. Amen.

Adapted from:

<https://theprayingwoman.com/putting-god-first-in-business-4-lessons-we-can-learn-from-lydia/>

Lydia—Practical Applications

-Lydia was known for her hospitality. She literally opened her home to Paul and fellow believers. We all have ways of being hospitable, whether they be small or large. This week, determine one new way you can show hospitality to another person, family or group. When possible, act on this! Journal what you did and how it went.

--Lydia and her household were baptized after hearing Paul’s teaching. Lydia became a leader in establishing the church in her community. We have probably all prayed and wished for one or more

members of our family or community to become believers, return to church or strengthen their faith. Reflect and pray about how you might be a positive influence on those around you in their faith walks. Make a list of simple ways you might become a model or “leader” in this within your own family or community. Nothing is too small to include!! When you have the opportunity, try out some of the things on your list. Journal about your experience.

--Lydia is presented as a successful business woman. Yet she was deeply spiritual and faithful. Think about your own life and the various roles you fill. Reflect on ways you may want to better balance the various aspects of your life. What is one step you can take to increase/improve your spiritual life? Write about this in your journal and make a plan of action!