

More Women Like Lydia

Acts 16:11-15, 40

A Pediatrician's office had a form which they asked their patients to fill out. Beside the blank marked "occupation" were these words: "If you devote the greater part of your time to loving, caring and making a home for your family, put a big star in this space."

There are a lot of women who should have big stars beside their names, whether they work inside the home or outside. There is a brief story here in the book of Acts which mentions one such woman, whose name was Lydia. This is the only place she is mentioned in the Bible, so we don't have much detail about her, but it does tell us enough for us to know that we need more women who display the kind of character qualities that she did. In our day, we need more women like Lydia!

Let me explain:

1 We need more women like Lydia: women who make worship and prayer a priority, v. 13

There are several facts we need to put together here. *First*, notice in verse fourteen that Lydia was "*a dealer in purple*" from the city of Thyatira. Thyatira was well-known for its purple dye and the robes which were made there; Homer in the *Iliad* wrote that the art of the women in the area was that of dyeing with purple. Today we can go to the store and pick up a blue shirt and find that it is the same price as the purple one. But not in Lydia's day. The purple dye came from a shellfish called a murex, and extracting the dye from this creature was very labor-intensive. It was also very expensive, so usually only royalty or the very rich could afford it.

That was the kind of business that Lydia was in. She either sold fabric that had been dyed in this expensive purple, or she sold the dye itself, or both. Perhaps she had moved to Philippi to open up a new market. And apparently she was very successful.

The *second* fact that we need to consider is that this happened on the Sabbath. In our day and culture, most people are off work on Sunday. There are certainly some whose occupations require them to work on Sunday, but most people are off on that day, even if they do not use that day to worship. But that wasn't the case in

Lydia's day. Remember that the Gospel had not even come to Philippi yet, and these people had no concept of a Sabbath, unless they worshipped the Lord God.

So this day was a work day just like any other. People would be scurrying about tending to their business as if it were just any other day—which it was for them. But not for Lydia and these other women who had gathered by the riverside. They had put aside every other pursuit and activity because they worshipped the Lord God, and this was the day He had designated as a day of rest and worship. Nothing else would interfere with the command God had given them. Nothing would prevent them from expressing their love for the God who meant so much to them—even if it meant inconvenience or losing business. Other days of the week were spent in making money—this day was reserved for only one thing.

Even when the culture around them may have pressured them to open shop, they maintained their priorities of worship and prayer. We are living in a day when our culture is pressing in on all sides, almost bullying us to abandon our priorities of worship. And if you knew the activities which pass for “worship” in many so-called churches in our land, it would break your heart.

The *third* fact which we need to consider is that in the middle of verse 14 we learn that Lydia was a “*worshiper of God.*” That was a term used to refer to someone who was not yet a Jew, but believed in and followed the God of Israel. Put all this together, and we get a picture of a busy, wealthy, influential woman who loved God and allowed nothing to interfere with her worship of Him.

Worship helps us to get, and keep, everything in its proper perspective. Ralph Sockman compared his life to a weaver sitting six days of the week behind his loom, “busily fingering the threads of an intricate pattern.” But on the seventh day, he wrote, “the church in its worship calls me around in front of the loom to look at the pattern on which I have been working....Some threads ... I have to cut, others, I pull more tightly, and most of all, I renew my picture of the whole plan.”

He is saying that worship is the thing that helps him regain perspective of his life. Should you take a critical look at the way you approach worship, what would you find? Do you get a better perspective on the direction your life is going? Are you able to “renew your picture of the whole plan” of your life?

Worship is the time when God calls us to “come around in front of the loom” to gain a better understanding of what's going on in our lives, and whether or not we are still in love in Jesus as Lord of our lives.

We need more women like Lydia, women who know how to give priority to things that matter most. James Dobson has said, “Sometimes we’re so concerned about giving our children what we never had growing up, we neglect to give them what we did have growing up.” And we could talk about the importance of going to worship in order to set a good example for our children.

But that doesn’t seem to be the reason Lydia was there that day. She was there at the place and time designated for prayer. She could have slept in. She could have said she needed that day to catch up. But she knew there was more to life than that! She was there for herself and her own relationship with God. She was there to commune with God. We need more women who consider the worship of God a vital practice for maintaining their own relationship with the Creator.

2 We need more women like Lydia: women responsive to the Lord, vv. 14-15

We can follow a progression of Lydia’s developing faith. She had already been drawn to this faith in the Lord God of Israel, because it was something so totally different from what she had known back home in Thyatira. In Thyatira, as in many cities of the ancient Near East, if you wanted to do business, you had to belong to a craftsman’s guild, or trade union. These trade unions would meet for a meal on a regular basis, usually in a heathen temple, and many times that meal would involve the worship of one of the erotic gods of the Greek world. If you were a Christian you had a major dilemma: do I “go along” with what others are doing in order to keep my livelihood, or do I stand strong in my faith and risk losing everything? Sounds very much like our own day.

Thyatira was known for its sexual immorality. In fact, it was one of the seven churches in the book of Revelation that received a letter from Christ, and immorality was the biggest issue that He addressed. So that may have been another reason Lydia was in Philippi. Perhaps her heart was being drawn to the Lord, and she was repulsed by what was going on there. Her heart and spirit were beginning to respond, knowing that there had to be something better. So here she is in Philippi on the Sabbath, at the place of prayer.

Paul and his companions, having found this place of prayer by the riverside, sat down and began to speak to the women who were there. Verse fourteen tells us that Lydia was “*one of those listening.*” The word used there refers to the act of hearing so as to comprehend; some Bible scholars say that this word may even refer to the act of cupping a hand behind an ear to catch all the words. The tense of

the word indicates that this was something she continued to do. The message of Christ had found its way all the way to Philippi, and all the way to Lydia, and she actually heard it.

But a lot of people listen and comprehend without every doing anything about it. I can't begin to tell you the number of times that people have said to me, "I know I need to be doing right, and living better; I know I need to be more committed and faithful," but they never make any changes in their lives. Look what happened to Lydia in verse 14: *"The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."* That word "opened" means that the Lord opened her heart wide or completely, like opening up both sides of a double door.

Many people say that they have responded to the Lord, but nothing ever changes in their lives. Listen to these next words—listen the way Lydia listened—cup a hand behind your ear if you have to. Whenever the Lord speaks, He demands a response. When the Lord stirs in your heart, there must be a response. Her response was to receive Christ into her life and be baptized. Then she persuaded Paul and his companions—a total of four men—to come stay at her home.

And she continued to respond to the Lord. This was not a one-time decision made on an emotional whim. Later Paul wrote a letter to the church at Philippi, and in his opening words he said, *"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."* That "first day" was that day at the riverside when the women had gathered for prayer. The "partnership" or "fellowship" was the result not only of Lydia's initial response to the Lord, but also her continuing relationship with Him.

Obviously, there are many ways of responding to God. You can be indifferent. You can shrug off any claims you sense the Holy Spirit making on your life. You can even pretend that the Scriptures on faithfulness and moral living and commitment don't apply to you. It's your choice.

But today, we need more women like Lydia, women whose spirits have been drawn by the Holy Spirit, women whose hearts have been touched by the Lord, women whose hearts are softened and shaped, not by the culture which surrounds them, not by their own ideas or opinions, or even by family heritage, but by the Lord Himself. We need women who respond to the Lord with profound love and faithfulness and deep commitment. We need women with hearts that seek after God and follow Him without reservation.

3 We need more women like Lydia: women who are courageous, v. 40

We've already seen hints of Lydia's courage, first, in obviously standing up to the immoral culture of Thyatira. Then she demonstrated courage in setting her own priorities and worshipping on the Sabbath. But there's more evidence of her courage before we leave chapter 16.

After Paul and his companions left Lydia, they were met by a slave girl who had a demon in her. Her owners had used her to make money, so they weren't too happy about losing that source of income! Paul and Silas were accused of throwing the city into an uproar, so they were arrested, beaten and jailed. When the city officials discovered the next day that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they released them and asked them to leave the city.

Before they left, though, Paul and Silas had a stop to make. Get the picture in your minds: verse 23 says that Paul and Silas were "severely flogged," and the word used there means that this was a beating that could have potentially killed them. The only care they received was well into the night when the jailer washed their wounds.

Now, in verse 40, they show up at Lydia's house—bruised, wounded and more than likely wincing a bit. *"After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them."* By now Lydia has heard of what happened to them, and how there had been a mob trying to have Paul and Silas killed. What if the crowd hears that Paul and Silas are free, and what if they followed them to her house? Not only would her lucrative purple cloth business be in peril, but her life and the lives of those in her household might be in jeopardy as well. She would be forever linked to the men who had created such an upheaval by healing the slave girl.

But she had met the Lord Christ, and that made a huge difference in her life! She was now willing to stand up when it really mattered. She was courageous in allowing them into her house, and then by allowing them to meet with the others who had come to know Christ.

In our day, we need more women who demonstrate that kind of courage. This is a courage that stands strong and tall even if the culture is going in the opposite direction. And believe me—we do live in a day when our culture is definitely going in the opposite direction. We need women who will decide once and for all

that they will be courageous against the things that would pull us away from following Christ in every area of our lives. We need women who will say to their families and their friends, “There is such a thing as right and wrong, and I’m going to do the right.” We need women who are courageous enough to say “*as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*”

We need women in our day whose hearts have been changed by the Lord, and who never, ever forget what He has done for them. We need more women in our day who make worship and prayer a priority, women who are responsive to the Lord, and women who are filled with courage to do the right even in a world and culture determined to redefine what “right” is.

Will you be among that number?