



MIND
session page

God is a Sneaky Sneak

Acts 16:9-15 | Session 17.21

Before the Session

Facilitator: In advance of the session

- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Have the Bible Background Video ready to view.
- Encourage your group to listen to the Faithelement podcast ahead of the next session (Share the link via email or social media).

Context

Start by asking:

- When have you felt like God had directly told you or someone you know something – either through some vision or some supernatural occurrence?
- With whom did you share that information and what was the result?
- When might God have been revealed to you through more subtle means, like chance encounters, conversations, or a set of circumstances?
- Why do you think God chooses to speak to us in either of these ways and why do you think people may value one way more than another?
- How do you typically respond when you think God has contacted someone, even if they don't see that in themselves, and why?
- To what degree is being "contacted" by God an important aspect of faith?

Content

Read Acts 16:9-15, then watch the Bible Background Video and ask:

- Since earlier verses, like Acts 16:6-8, say that the Spirit “prevented” or “did not allow” them to work in certain areas, how and why do you think the Spirit did this?
- What circumstances might have led them to this conclusion?
- Why do you think Paul paid closer attention to this dream and how else might he have interpreted it?
- Some scholars believe the writer of Acts, Luke, joined Paul at this point of the story, so how might this influence the way the story was told?
- Why might Paul have chosen to start his work in Philippi by looking for Jews or others who already worshiped God?
- Why, in a patriarchal culture, did Paul begin with women rather than men?
- What can we learn about Lydia from these few verses?
- Where can we sense God’s Spirit moving in this story from the more overt ways to the more subtle ways?

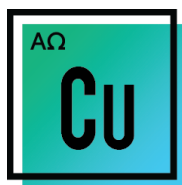
Closure

Continue by asking:

- While in this story we see the Spirit moving through interactions, chance encounters and open hearts, in what ways do you notice God's Spirit moving most often today?
- How do you think Paul, Lydia and others in the story kept themselves open to seeing and experiencing God's subtle work around them?
- What things have you done before to nurture this kind of sensitivity, and how might we work to be more sensitive to God's presence and guiding?
- How does a congregation work to promote such sensitivity among its members?
- At what points do congregations discourage this sort of sensitivity, and what sorts of messages might yours be ignoring?
- Who might most be changed in your community if congregations became better listeners to God's urging?

Close with prayer.

Writer: Jon Parks



CURRENT

session page

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Context

Tell the group: *Recently, leaders of four European countries traveled to Kyiv in the hope that their presence would pressure Russia, who invaded Ukraine over three years ago, to agree to a 30 day ceasefire. While they were not immediately successful in forcing a pause in hostilities, they demonstrated their commitment to work together to end the needless suffering of all people impacted by the war.*

Share this [short video from the prime minister of the United Kingdom](#) and ask:

- How do you feel about this video and why?
- What are the potential benefits and risks of working together with others when you face challenges?
- Which positive or negative lessons can you learn from sources outside the church about partnering with others?
- When have you been "nudged" into doing something, despite your reluctance at the time?
- To what degree is faith about working with others and being "nudged?"

Content

Read Acts 16:9-15, then watch the Bible Background Video and ask:

- What most stands out about the movement of the Spirit in this passage?
- How did Paul seem to respond to God's direction?
- What do you think of the possibility that the Spirit gave Paul a vision of a man needing help because she knew that Paul would not respond to a call to partner with those who were available in Philippi?
- Why was Lydia's whole house baptized, instead of just her?
- What do you think prompted Lydia to offer, and Paul to accept, her offer of a place from which to base his operations in that place?
- How might you describe Lydia's ministry in modern-day terms and why?

Closure

Share "We Didn't Start the Fire" and ask:

- Which parts of this song most get your attention and why?
- What unfortunate parts of history could be different if people worked together?
- At what points do you discern the Spirit calling you into partnership?
- What role, if any, is there for deception or failing to tell the whole truth in our relationships?
- To what degree is it essential for a partner in ministry to share all the same beliefs and commitments?
- What are the benefits and disadvantages of partnering with people who are very dissimilar to you?
- With whom does your congregation need to consider partnering, and how might that be brought about?

Close with a prayer like this: *O God, we thank you that you have created us to be in relationship with one another and with you, and we pray that you, through the Spirit will, give us wisdom for the ways that we can partner with you and others to participate in the work of bringing forth your new day here and now. Amen.*

Writer: Brian Harrington



CONVERSATIONS

session page

God is a Sneaky Sneak

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Before the Session

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- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
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Context

Remind the group of Daniel's introduction, focusing on the complex relationship between Paul and Lydia and how it came about. Ask the group:

- When has someone tricked you into something that was good for you?
- At what times do you do this to other people and why?
- Why does it sometimes take being "sneaky" to help people?
- In what ways does God surprise you sometimes?
- How do you catch God when God is blessing you in an unexpected way?
- In what ways do you think faith is related to surprise?

Content

Read Acts 16:9-15, then watch the Bible Background Video and ask:

- How did Paul end up among the Philippians, according to the scripture?
- Why might someone see God as “tricking” Paul into going to where he would meet Lydia?
- What is significant about being the first convert in Philippi?
- While this is alluded to in the podcast, how does Lydia contribute to Paul’s ministry and the formation of the church?
- Given that many scholars believe that the last authentic letter written by Paul was to the Philippian church, what does this say about the impression that this event had on Paul and his work?

Closure

Watch this clip from “The Big Bang Theory” where Mary, Sheldon’s mother, tricks Sheldon and Amy into resuming their relationship and ask:

- What does Mary demonstrate (she says men, but I suspect that all people might be this way) about how to convince people to do what you want them to do?
- Why was Mary willing to trick them into coming back together?
- At what points do we encounter people who need to be brought together, and how do you think this could be accomplished?
- What sorts of “surprises” can congregations use to bring their members together?
- With whom in the community does your congregation need to connect, and how might you urge this connection along?

Close with a prayer.

Writer: Sara McClain



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- Encourage your group to listen to the Faithelement podcast ahead of the next session (Share the link via email or social media).

Context

Share this scene from "New Girl" and ask:

- How would you describe Prince's tone in this scene?
- Why do you think Jess listens to Prince, even though they just met?
- In what ways might someone's "outsider" status provide credibility to their advice?
- How can nudging someone to do the right thing more powerful than giving instructions?
- Who tends to "nudge" you, and how does it help?
- In what ways does your faith nudge you to do the right things?

Content

Read Acts 16:9-15, then watch the Bible Background Video and ask:

- Why might the writer include the story about the journey to Macedonia?
- Given the difficulties he was experiencing how would it have felt to Paul to have this vision?
- How easy would you be convinced by such a dream?
- What does Paul's Sabbath journey indicate about the religious practice of people in the city?
- Why is it significant that Paul was speaking with women?
- How significant is the fact that Lydia invited Paul (and company) to stay at her house?

Closure

Share the "Get Up" movie clip (Note that this is a somewhat violent scene) and ask:

- What is changed by the fact that Trinity does not give up on Neo?
- In what ways does Trinity's support encourage Neo to follow his purpose as the one?
- How important in terms of faith and God's will do you think Lydia and Paul are to each other?
- What are some things you need to keep doing (or start doing) as you continue to be faithful like Lydia?
- How can you encourage someone of their place in God's will this week?

Close with a prayer.

Writer: Devin Harris-Davis



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Before the Session

Facilitator: In advance of the session

- Have the Bible Background Video ready to view.
- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Listen to the FaithElement podcast for this session.

Context

Share this [scene from Aladdin](#) and ask:

- Why do you think the Genie's advice to Aladdin might be helpful?
- What does Aladdin believe he needs to be for Jasmine to like him?
- To whom have you given relationship advice and how did that work out?
- Why might it be a bad idea to pretend to be something you're not?
- At what points do you need to work out interpersonal difficulties on your own, and when do you need someone else's support?

Content

Read Acts 16:9-15, then watch the Bible Background Video and ask:

- Why do you think Paul had this particular vision at this particular time?
- How was Lydia able to get her whole household to go along with being baptized t the same time?
- Why do you think Paul was willing to stay with Lydia for some period of time?
- What does it say about Lydia that she was willing to use her resources to support Paul's mission?
- How do you feel about the idea that the most important part of Lydia's story is that it shows the value of being ready to listen to The Spirit and jump in to do what is needed?

Closure

Share this scene from *Akeelah and the Bee* and ask:

- How does Akeelah change over the course of this scene?
- What role does Dr. Larabee play in Akeelah's growth here?
- In what ways do others serve to support you and help you grow?
- How might being part of a congregation reflect a commitment to mutual growth?
- Which group or groups in your community needs to be encouraged to grow and how might your congregation help that?

Close with a prayer.

Writer: Devin Harris-Davis



MIX
session page

God is a Sneaky Sneak

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Context (from the Media session page)

Share this scene from "New Girl" and ask:

- How would you describe Prince's tone in this scene?
- Why do you think Jess listens to Prince, even though they just met?
- In what ways might someone's "outsider" status provide credibility to their advice?
- How can nudging someone to do the right thing more powerful than giving instructions?
- Who tends to "nudge" you, and how does it help?
- In what ways does your faith nudge you to do the right things?

Content (from the Conversations session page)

Read Acts 16:9-15, then watch the Bible Background Video and ask:

- How did Paul end up among the Philippians, according to the scripture?
- Why might someone see God as “tricking” Paul into going to where he would meet Lydia?
- What is significant about being the first convert in Philippi?
- While this is alluded to in the podcast, how does Lydia contribute to Paul’s ministry and the formation of the church?
- Given that many scholars believe that the last authentic letter written by Paul was to the Philippian church, what does this say about the impression that this event had on Paul and his work?

Closure (from the Current session page)

Share "We Didn't Start the Fire" and ask:

- Which parts of this song most get your attention and why?
- What unfortunate parts of history could be different if people worked together?
- At what points do you discern the Spirit calling you into partnership?
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