



cell outlines
JANUARY 2020

These Cell Outlines are written by Youth and Children's Ministries. They are available every month from our web site.
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SESSION
ONE

INFINITELY MORE

Key Passages: Colossians 3:1-3 (*MSG*) and Ephesians 3:16-19 (*NIV*)

BACKGROUND

This year's Vision and Commitment material seeks to encourage people to grasp more clearly Christ's limitless love and commitment to us and how we can encounter him afresh, seeking him in the places, people or circumstances that we perhaps never imagined.

RESOURCES

- * Names of famous people on different pieces of paper
- * The song 'Who you say I am' by Hillsong Worship
- * Bibles
- * Pens and paper

WELCOME

Welcome the group (introduce them if they don't know each other's names; names and what we call ourselves are going to be important in this session!).

• Who am I?

Ask each individual to take a piece of paper with a pre-written name on it of a famous person, without looking at it. In turn, one person holds the piece of paper with the name facing towards the rest of the group. The person holding the paper will say 'Who am I?' and the group will then describe the person or character using just one word each. For example, if the paper said 'Harry Potter', people might suggest the words 'wizard', 'glasses', 'scar'. If the guesser does not get it after each person has said one word, you can go around the group again.

• Who do you think you are?

Ask each person to share something that they think makes them who they are – it could be their hair colour, accent, favourite song or what they like to have for breakfast. Close this section by explaining that no matter how small these parts of their character might seem, they all contribute to the wonderfully unique person they are today. Some of these things may change over time. At the beginning of a new year, people often want to change something about themselves in an effort to improve their health, character or appearance. Remind the group that no matter how much they change themselves, their identity as someone loved by God will never disappear.

WORD

Ask two people to read Colossians 3:1-3 (*MSG*) and Ephesians 3:16-19 (*NIV*).

 Colossians 3:1-3 (*MSG*):

'So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ – that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life – even though invisible to spectators – is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too – the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.'

SESSION ONE

Explain that this passage is taken from a letter that Paul wrote to the Christians who lived in Colossae. At this point in time, Colossae was a relatively small town of little significance, but they were facing a big problem: they were preoccupied with listening to false teaching rather than the true gospel. People were turning away from the truth found in living with Christ, and Paul felt called to remind them that their old life – of sin, lies, and doing what they want – is gone, and they now should live in freedom, truth and service to God.

The people of Colossae needed to be led well and put in the right direction towards living 'real' lives for God. This is why Paul's letter sounds like a list of instructions: 'Pursue the things over which Christ presides', 'don't shuffle along... absorbed with the things right in front of you', 'be alert', 'see things from his perspective'.

Break into small groups to discuss the passage and its application for today.

Discussion

- 💬 What do you think about the tone of Paul's writing? Do you think he was gently offering advice to the people of Colossae, or was he giving them a good telling off?
- 💬 How would you feel if somebody wrote a letter or sent a text to the people at your church and community commenting on how they live?
- 💬 What would it mean for you to 'be alert' to Christ and 'looking up'? Would you have to give up any distractions or take up any good habits?

It's worth talking about why Paul is so set on telling these people how to live. Paul is concerned for the people of Colossae because he believes that if they concentrate on worldly things, 'absorbed with the things right in front of (them)', they will miss out on eternal, true life with Christ. Paul says that when a person does not live for God, they do not live at all! Even though they may physically exist, physical and worldly living is temporary. Instead, they should receive new life from Jesus and be in relationship with him.

The next passage explains what living with Christ is like.

📖 Ephesians 3:16-19 (NIV):

'I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.'

Although Paul is writing to a different group of people here – he's praying for the Christians at Ephesus – this is the same experience he wants for the people of Colossae and all churches. He wants them to know the life-changing truth that God loves them beyond their understanding – it surpasses their knowledge. Paul wants them to be strengthened in God's power, so that they will not grow weak as long as they keep close to Christ. More than anything, Paul wants these people to make their hearts a home for Christ.

This is some of the Bible's most beautiful poetry. Some people might like the poetic nature of it, others might find the more straight-talking verses more their kind of style. Nevertheless, this passage of Scripture is what being a Christian is all about! We can pray this over anybody that we meet: that they may love God and recognise that they are loved by him beyond comprehension and can experience daily more of his power at work in their lives! Our identity as Christians is to be a person who loves God and is loved by God.

Discussion

- 💬 Consider how your identity changes when you view yourself as 'of the world' versus 'of God'.
- 💬 Are there ways in which we are limiting God's love and power?
- 💬 If God can do 'more than we can imagine', what would that look like in our lives? How about in our places of study, with our friends and family, in our church?
- 💬 Read through Ephesians 3:16-19 again for yourself. Pick out one phrase that you want to focus on personally or silently to pray over another member of the group.

SESSION
ONE

WORSHIP

Invite the group into a time of reflection and play 'Who you say I am' by Hillsong Worship.

Tell the group to listen closely to the lyrics. Pass around pens and paper and ask them to write down some words that stand out to them from the song or from the Bible verse. If they'd like to make it more personal, they could rewrite the lyrics with their name at the centre, for example: 'Jane is chosen, not forsaken. She is who you say she is.'

When the song ends, ask the same question from the beginning of the session: 'What makes you "you"?' and invite each person to either share their writings or reflect on how their thinking might have changed since before the Bible study.

WITNESS

Challenge the group with the first line from Colossians 3:1 (MSG):

'So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it.'

Share that one part of the 'new resurrection life' is to see yourself as a child of God. Another part of living with Christ is saying goodbye to old habits and bad behaviours and experiencing more of his power in your life. It's time to start putting the belief that your identity is in Christ into action. After all, the Bible verse tells us that 'your old life is dead' and we are now living with Christ in God.

Challenge the group to make a real effort in the coming week to replace negative thinking (to themselves and to others) with the phrase(s) that they wrote down during their reflection. When they feel like they're stepping out of line, they can try to stop by asking themselves: 'Is this how a child of God would act?' Suggest that if they haven't set themselves a new years' resolution already, that this thought-process could be a good one: to be more like Jesus and 'see things from his perspective' (Colossians 3).

ENCOUNTER IN THE WILDERNESS – FEAR TO BOLDNESS

WELCOME

Be prepared!

After welcoming the group, split them into two teams for a game of dodgeball. To set up, use a bench or row of chairs to divide the room and assign each team a side of the divide. Using multiple foam balls or balloons, the teams must try to hit a member of the opposing team. The other team will try and dodge or catch the balls (if they catch them, the person who threw it is out). If they are hit, they are out. If you want an added layer of difficulty and relevance to the teaching of this session, call out names of players at random to distract and confuse.

After the game, ask the group if there was any point when they didn't feel prepared. Were they caught off guard or shocked at all? Did they hear their name being called, or could they only hear others being called?

Explain that sometimes we have encounters with God when we least expect them. If you have an example of a time you experienced God in a surprising way, then you could share it with the group at this point. If you don't have an example, then you could ask other Christians before the session for stories of their unexpected encounters with God.

WORD

One of the most remarkable encounters with God recorded in the Bible is when Moses saw the burning bush. Read **Exodus 3 (NIV)** below. You could use this clip from *The Prince of Egypt* as a visual aid if you have time: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ds9y3IJGig.

Moses and the Burning Bush

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.' When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!'

And Moses said, 'Here I am.'

'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.' Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The LORD said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.'

But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'

And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.'

Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" Then what shall I tell them?'

God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you."'

SESSION
TWO

God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, “The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you.”

‘This is my name for ever,
the name you shall call me
from generation to generation.

‘Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, “The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites – a land flowing with milk and honey.”

‘The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, “The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.” But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

‘And I will make the Egyptians favourably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbour and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.’

Discussion

Here we see Moses being asked by God to do what he feels is an impossible task – to fulfil God’s plan by leading his people out of danger and misery. Moses felt like God was asking the wrong person to do this job. After all, he’d been placed in a basket on a river as a baby but was found by Pharaoh’s daughter and raised in Pharaoh’s palace, so he was seen as an outsider by the Hebrews. Then, in a botched attempt to defend some Hebrew slaves he was accused of murder, and, in his disgrace, escaped to the wilderness to live as a shepherd. It is here – in the middle of his mess – where God calls Moses to even greater things.

- 🗨️ God called Moses while he was herding sheep. What could it look like if God were to call you in your everyday life? What might you be doing (eg, sitting an exam, taking out the bins etc)?
- 🗨️ Why shouldn’t God call you in those boring and mundane moments of your life? Have you ever experienced this?

God doesn’t always wait for us to ‘get our act together’ before he calls us to service. This is an important thing to take note of. He doesn’t want us to be perfect or to be the most organised person; he just wants us to respond to his call on our lives. Although the idea of following God into the unknown might fill us with fear, we shouldn’t be afraid as long as we live in God’s strength rather than our own.

- 🗨️ In your opinion, does it matter that Moses didn’t feel qualified?
- 🗨️ Should God have chosen someone with more authority and more confidence?
- 🗨️ List some issues that exist in the world and in your community today. How would you feel if God called you to be the one to tackle them? Would you feel prepared?

WORSHIP

Hand out pieces of paper with the following three excerpts (‘I have come to the rescue’, ‘I am sending you’, ‘I will be with you’) printed on them, with adequate writing space around each one. Each person will be encouraged to pray about three specific situations: one that they need rescuing from, one that they feel called to be of service in or a problem that they feel passionate about resolving, and one that they need to be reminded of God’s presence in.

God says three powerful things to Moses: ‘I have come to rescue...’ (v8), ‘I am sending you...’ (v10), and ‘I will be with you...’ (v12). Take some time to pray over these passages as you write the situations on paper privately.

Music suggestion:

- 🎵 'Take Courage' – Bethel Music, Kristene DiMarco www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJoABwNMzvM
- 🎵 'I Have Seen the Glory of the Lord' – Chris Brindley www.youtube.com/watch?v=P09ZBO8kLC4
(this song describes various encounters with God throughout the Bible – including the burning bush)

WITNESS OR ACTION

Invite people to share one or two of the situations that they have listed on their paper and ask for the other members to commit to praying for them during the week. Some may not want to share out loud, in which case offer a prayer for everyone at the end.

Challenge each member individually to look out for God in the unexpected places during the next week and to make a note of it so that they can share their experiences the following week.

SESSION
THREE

ENCOUNTER AT THE WELL – EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION

WELCOME

Hole-y Water

Game: Divide the group into two teams. Each team should have one paper cup with holes in the bottom and two buckets, one full of water and one empty. One at a time, the team should fill the paper cup with water from the full bucket and run to pour it into the empty bucket. The team with the most water in their bucket when they finish wins. (Be prepared for water on the floor!)

Explain that today the group will be looking at the well-known Bible story of the woman at the well. While this game might seem like a bit of a water-themed gimmick, it can be used to teach about the story. While, like the cups with holes in them, we may not be perfect (the woman at the well wasn't), we can still be used and have encounters with Jesus. God knows all about us – the good things and the bad – and he loves us just the same. There may be things about us that the world would use as an excuse to exclude us, and though we may go through times when we feel ostracised by the rest of the world, we are included in God's family.

WORD

One woman experienced this journey from exclusion to inclusion on a big scale – the nameless, imperfect woman at the well. Her encounter with Jesus was extraordinary! Like Moses, by the world's standards there were many reasons why this woman should not have such a close encounter with the Lord: she was a Samaritan and Jesus was a Jew (to further understand the hatred between the Samaritans and the Jews, this is a helpful article: www.gotquestions.org/Samaritans.html), but she was also cast out by her own people and was marked as immoral. We know that she was a lonely woman, because in biblical times going to the well to draw water was a communal activity and many women would use this time to socialise. But this woman chose to go to the well at midday, when no one else did.

 Read her story in John 4:1-26 (NIV):

Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptising more disciples than John – although in fact it was not Jesus who baptised, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'

'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?'

Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

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The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'

He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.'

'I have no husband,' she replied.

Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'

'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.'

'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'

The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.'

Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you – I am he.'

Discuss

This story teaches us that God loves us no matter how empty our lives are, and in spite of our past behaviours. Not only does he love us, but he also actively seeks us out and wants a close relationship with us. The woman at the well is met, spoken to, recognised and welcomed into intimacy by Jesus.

The kind of intimacy that we have when we're in a relationship with Jesus is beyond any kind of friendship or relationship that we have on Earth. God knows everything about us, and everything we've ever done. He is our ultimate companion because he created us and because he is the author of our lives. We are known inside and out. We are known by God better than we know ourselves. Although we cannot mimic this level of companionship with people in our communities, we can share with them the love and acceptance that Jesus offers us!

Let's get deeper into this story:

- * We know that Jews and Samaritans had a history of hatred, but why was the woman looked down upon by her own people? Can you think of a parallel with the woman in today's society?
- * Jesus reveals his power (by telling her about her own life) before telling her that he is the Messiah. Why do you think he does this? Would she have believed him if he hadn't told her about herself?
- * What do you think about the way the woman speaks to Jesus? How would you react if you were in her position?
- * What does the woman mean when she says, 'I know that Messiah... is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us'? What big or small questions would you have for Jesus?

Read the rest of this story in **John 4:27-42**:

The disciples rejoin Jesus (vv 27-37)

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?'

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?' They came out of the town and made their way towards him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, 'Rabbi, eat something.'

But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.'

SESSION
THREE

Then his disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought him food?'

'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, "It's still four months until harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying "One sows and another reaps" is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.'

Many Samaritans believe (vv 39-42)

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I've ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.'

Discuss

- What do you think Jesus meant by 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about'?
- What does this story teach you about salvation?
- More than anything, this passage (John 4:39-42) teaches us that our personal testimonies of Jesus can be a powerful tool in leading others to start a relationship with him. Have you ever had an experience of this or seen it in others?

WORSHIP

During this time, encourage the group to consider those who are often ostracised from church communities and wider society. Question them if there is any group specific to your area, or if something on a national or international scale has happened in recent times, which urges the Church to act?

It may be helpful to get out some pens and paper to write down these groups and issues on one large sheet of paper, or it may be more appropriate for you to hand out individual pieces of paper. After you have spent some time listening to music and writing, ask the group if they would feel comfortable sharing some of their feelings or opinions: what do they think about the treatment of these marginalised people? Do they think the Church should step in? If so, why and how? Spend this time facilitating discussion towards strategies to include and welcome people at church within your community.

Song suggestions

♪ 'Someone to Talk To' – Tenth Avenue North www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l9ij3eHrlc

♪ 'Clean' – Natalie Grant www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulf4PXuNV3w

WITNESS OR ACTION

Not every journey from exclusion to inclusion will be as ground-breaking as that of the woman at the well, but each one is important in building God's Kingdom. Using the strategies and ideas that you have discussed during the worship section of this Bible study, develop an action plan that you can present to leadership at your church (or even invite some of the leadership to attend this study). In response, you may find out about initiatives and programmes that already exist, you may be invited to volunteer or attend various groups, or you may be given the opportunity to start something at your church with the aim of including those who may otherwise be excluded.

As well as drawing up practical solutions for being an inclusive church, commit to praying for yourself and other Christians in their personal journeys to becoming more inclusive. Look for opportunities to engage with people who you may ignore or 'write off' because of their background or reputation. Pray that you might see them through God's eyes this week and embrace them as Jesus did for the woman at the well. Who knows where it may lead them!

ENCOUNTER IN PHILIPPI – INDIVIDUALS TO COMMUNITY

WELCOME

Spread the word!

Game: As one group, create a sentence or story by saying one word at a time. If you want to make it funnier and more focused, give a general topic before the first person begins. The outcome will hopefully be coherent with a given theme, but it will still be unexpected!

Just as in this game we added our voices and our words together to create something as a group, we can join our voices in praise to God or to introduce others to Jesus. Paul travelled from place to place doing just this; he spent his days travelling to share the word and love of God. Today we will be looking at the way we can build and strengthen communities by looking at Acts 16, which has many examples of reaching out and welcoming the individual.

WORD

To give this Scripture some context, these are the early accounts of the birth of the Church, when the Holy Spirit's power was shown in great miracles and rapid growth. The growth of the Church meant that it was necessary for more lands to hear of Christ – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and beyond (Acts 1:8). Paul led the life of a missionary and travelled from town to town to preach the gospel. These accounts in Acts 16 involve many people and different locations, which can get confusing, so let's break it down into smaller sections.

 Our first reading is from **Acts 16:1-5**:

Timothy joins Paul and Silas

Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Discuss

Last week we were looking at the transition from exclusion to inclusion – the woman at the well was embraced in spite of being a Samaritan – and in this passage we are looking at the background of Timothy, a disciple. It is noted that although his mother was Jewish, his father was Greek. The specifics of his ancestry were important; because Timothy was half-Jewish and half-Greek, he was not circumcised. Although Paul, as a leader of the new Church, did not require this, Timothy willingly underwent circumcision so that he would not be an obstacle to Paul's mission to reach out to unbelieving Jews. They then went on to strengthen and multiply churches. Timothy's embracing of Jewish cultural practice is an example of an individual making themselves approachable to a community so as to influence them for good.

Then, as we read in **Acts 16:6-10**, Paul travels on from Lystra and has two experiences which show God directing his path in a powerful way: the Holy Spirit prevents him from travelling to Asia, and then he has a vision of a begging man calling him to go to Macedonia:

Paul's vision of the man of Macedonia

Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

SESSION
FOUR

Once they arrive in Philippi, they meet Lydia (**Acts 16:11-15**):

Lydia's conversion in Philippi

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded us.

Discuss

When Paul got to Philippi, the writer (probably Luke) records that he and his companions went to the riverside where Jews would gather if there was no synagogue in the district. It was mainly women who congregated there, but Paul took time to share with them, and it was here that he met Lydia, a wealthy merchant. Luke says that 'the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message', and she and her household were baptised.

Do you think Lydia's household had any choice in their baptism? Consider how she uses her influence in this situation.

Which communities has Paul's ministry reached so far in Acts 16?

Read **Acts 16:16-40**:

Paul and Silas in prison

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.' She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned round and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her.

When her owners realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, 'These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise.'

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!'

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'

They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptised. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole household.

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When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: 'Release those men.' The jailer told Paul, 'The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.'

But Paul said to the officers: 'They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.'

The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Discuss

This well-known story of Paul and Silas contains a few instances of an individual having a spiritual encounter which results in the beginning of a new community. It also contains some powerful acts of the Holy Spirit that are typical of the Early Church. The first of these encounters is with a female slave who was possessed by a spirit. She was being used by her owners as they realised they could make money from her 'powers' and exploited her for profit. Scripture says that Paul became 'annoyed' with her and called upon God to cast out the evil spirit from her. The girl is saved, but her owners send Paul and Silas to prison where they are subjected to horrible abuse.

Their stay in prison may have seemed to some like the end of the road, but they spent time in prayer and singing songs of praise to God. This example of unshakeable faith in God leads to their second miracle in Philippi. The prison is broken open by the Lord, setting all prisoners free. They could have made a run for it, but Paul stays with the jailer who is close to killing himself for failing his duty. He spends time consoling him through his distress and uses it as an opportunity to save the jailer and his household.

So, Paul has recruited an unlikely team of new members of his church: his former jailer, a slave girl and a wealthy merchant woman. Paul's Early Church was a community made up of all sorts of people – from the businesswoman to the slave and everything in between. This attitude of embracing all individuals into a community is a template of how we should be as a church today.

- 🗣️ Discuss the different employers that we have encountered in Acts 16 (Lydia, the owner of the slave, the jailer). Compare the ways they treat those they are responsible for.
- 🗣️ What do you think today's Christians can learn from Paul?
- 🗣️ Paul and his followers in the days of the Early Church were so in tune with where the Spirit was guiding them and what the Spirit wanted from them. Some people say that this is something that we have lost in the Church today. What do you think about this?

WORSHIP

🎵 'Holy Spirit, you are welcome here' (by Bryan and Katie Torwait, SoF 3080)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zEiiZi2DKk

Listen to this song as you take time to acknowledge what the power of the Holy Spirit did in Philippi. Recognise that the Spirit can transform your life just as took place in the lives of the people in these stories. Reflect on what being part of a Christian community means to you. If there are ways that you feel you have ignored the Spirit, consider how you could spend more time trying to connect.

Take time to focus on these lyrics:

**Holy Spirit, you are welcome here,
 Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere.
 Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for,
 To be overcome by your presence, Lord.**

Offer space for people to share their testimonies or thoughts from this time.

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WITNESS OR ACTION

Following your time in worship, continue in prayer for yourselves and for your community. Go around each member in the group as you did in the opening game and ask them to say one word, but this time it does not need to make a sentence. The first time you go around the group, ask each person to pray for one thing for themselves as individuals (eg, peace, strength). The second time around, you should ask each person to pray for one thing for the community (it could be for their school, their church, or even your cell group). Assure them that it doesn't matter if people repeat words or if the word seems too abstract. Once everyone has shared their two words, assign someone else's prayers to another member of the group. Ask the group to commit to praying these two prayers throughout the week by simply raising the words to God, or by forming them into longer sentences. Encourage each member also to take time to remember that their prayers are being spoken by other voices and to recognise what a blessing it is to be prayed for.