

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



"God Will Finish What He Started in You"

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 1:4-6; Acts 16:6-40; Phil 4:22

Have you ever looked at what God was doing in your life and thought, *I really don't understand what's happening here?* Maybe you had a plan that seemed good, even a plan you believed would honor the Lord, and suddenly the door closed. Then another door closed. And when something finally opened, it led somewhere you never expected—and perhaps somewhere much harder than you imagined. In those moments, it can be difficult to recognize the hand of God because we are standing too close to the picture. We see the individual lines, the smudges, the shadows, and the unfinished places, but we cannot yet see the finished masterpiece.

That is part of what makes the opening of Philippians so beautiful. Paul is writing from imprisonment, probably in Rome, and he begins remembering another prison—one in Philippi. He remembers how the Philippian congregation began with plans that changed, doors that closed, Lydia praying beside a river, a slave girl being delivered, a beating, a jail cell, prisoners listening in the darkness, an earthquake, and a jailer asking how he could be saved. Looking back, Paul could see something he could not have seen while he was living through it: God had been working all along. So he writes, *"always praying with joy in every prayer of mine for you all, because of your sharing in the Good News from the first day until now. I am sure of this very thing—that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the Day of Messiah Yeshua"* (Phil. 1:4–6).

1. GOD'S GOOD WORK MAY BEGIN SOMEWHERE YOU NEVER PLANNED

Paul says that he remembers the Philippians *"from the first day until now"* (Phil. 1:5). But that "first day" had not been on Paul's schedule. Philippi was not where he had intended to go. He and his companions had tried to preach in Asia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them. They attempted to enter Bithynia, but again the Spirit would not allow them. Eventually Paul received the vision of the man from Macedonia, and they made their way to Philippi. Yet when they arrived, there was not even a large enough Jewish community for a synagogue. Instead, they found a group of women praying beside a river, and the Lord opened Lydia's heart. The Master Artist had already begun painting, but the picture looked nothing like Paul might have expected.

Then another unexpected person entered the story. *"It so happened that as we were going to prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination"* (Acts 16:16). She followed Paul and the others for days until Paul, deeply distressed by what was happening, commanded the spirit in the name of Messiah Yeshua to leave her—and she was set free. The girl was not the enemy; the spirit that held her in bondage was the enemy. Suddenly the beginnings of this congregation included an upper-middle-class businesswoman familiar with the God of Israel and a formerly demonized slave girl who had been used by others for their profit. What an unlikely beginning. Yet these were some of the strokes of the Master Artist's brush. When God begins His work, He is not limited by our strategies, expectations, social categories, or plans.

2. GOD'S "YES" DOES NOT MEAN THERE WILL BE NO ADVERSITY

The liberation of the slave girl immediately created a problem for the men who had been profiting from her bondage. Once their hope of profit disappeared, they seized Paul and Silas, dragged them before the authorities, stirred up the crowd against them, had them beaten with rods, and threw them into the inner prison with their feet fastened in stocks. It is worth remembering that all of this happened *after* Paul had followed the leading of the Spirit. God had said no to Asia. He had said no to Bithynia. Macedonia was God's yes. Philippi was God's yes. Lydia receiving the Good News was God's yes. The slave girl being delivered was God's yes. And somehow, painfully, a Philippian jail was also sitting right in the middle of God's yes.

We sometimes imagine that if we are truly in the center of God's will, everything should become easier. We assume that adversity means we must have missed God somewhere along the way. But Scripture simply does not teach that. Paul and Silas were exactly where God had led them, and they were bruised, hurting, chained, and sitting in a dark prison. Yet *"about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them"* (Acts 16:25). They did not yet know how the story would turn out. They could not see the jailer's family believing. They could not see the congregation that would one day grow from these events. They simply knew that the Lord had brought them there, so they praised Him in the darkness. Faith doesn't mean understanding every circumstance. Sometimes faith means lifting your voice to the Lord when you cannot lift your hands and trusting that His work has not stopped simply because the night has become painful.

3. WHAT GOD BEGINS, HE WILL CARRY TO COMPLETION

Then the foundations began to shake. *"Suddenly there was such a great earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. Immediately all the doors were unlocked, and everyone's chains came loose"* (Acts 16:26). The jailer assumed the prisoners had escaped and was preparing to kill himself when Paul cried out, *"Don't harm yourself! We're all here!"* (Acts 16:28). That little statement is one of the fascinating parts of the story: *We're all here*. The prisoners had been listening to Paul and Silas worship. Their chains were suddenly loose. The doors were open. Yet nobody ran. Something happened in that prison that night that caused society's throwaways, prisoners and criminals, to stay. Scripture does not tell us exactly why, but I love to think that perhaps some of those same prisoners became part of the Philippian congregation to whom Paul was now writing in his letter.

The jailer rushed in trembling and asked, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* Paul and Silas answered, *"Put your trust in the Lord Yeshua and you will be saved—you and your household!"* (Acts 16:30–31). Before the night was over, the jailer and his household had heard the Word, washed Paul and Silas's wounds, been immersed, shared a meal, and rejoiced because they had put their trust in God. Years later, Paul could sit in another prison and remember that night. He could remember Lydia. He could remember the young woman who had been delivered. He could remember the jailer and his family. Perhaps he could picture some of those prisoners. And now he understood something he could not have understood when the rods were striking his back: the Lord had been creating something beautiful. That is why Paul could say with such confidence, *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the Day of Messiah Yeshua"* (Phil. 1:6).

CONCLUSION

God is the Master Artist and the Master Storyteller. Imagine an artist beginning a picture while you watch from only inches away. At first, you cannot identify what he is creating. There is a line here, a strange mark there, a shadow, a smudge, perhaps even what looks like a mistake. But the artist knows exactly where the picture is going. In the same way, the Lord knew what every closed door, every unexpected encounter, every painful moment, and every miraculous deliverance was forming in Philippi. When Paul looked backward, he could see the beauty of something that had looked confusing while it was happening. What he once experienced as disappointment, interruption, and suffering had become part of the masterpiece.

And He is still working in you. Maybe you are living in one of those unfinished places right now. Maybe God has said no where you expected yes. Maybe His yes has led into circumstances that are far more difficult than you imagined. Maybe you cannot yet recognize what He is painting. Do not crumble up the page because you cannot discern the picture. Do not give up on the Master Artist in the middle of the story. Praise Him even in the dark. Trust Him with the strokes you do not understand. The same God who was working beside the river, through the deliverance of a slave girl, in the middle of a beating, and inside a Philippian jail is still at work today. And like Paul, we can be confident of this: *“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the Day of Messiah Yeshua”* (Phil. 1:6).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Paul remembered the “first day” in Philippi, what unexpected people and circumstances could he now recognize as part of God’s plan?
2. What does Acts 16 teach us about the difference between being in God’s will and having an easy or trouble-free life?
3. Why do you think Paul and Silas were able to worship God at midnight before they knew how their situation would turn out?
4. **Personal Reflection:** Is there an area of your life where God’s “no,” “not yet,” or a closed door has been difficult for you to understand? How might this passage encourage you to trust Him differently?
5. **Personal Reflection:** Where are you tempted to “crumble up the page” because you cannot yet see what God is doing? What would it look like for you to trust that He is still working?

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that You see the finished picture when we can only see a few unfinished lines. Thank You that Your work does not stop when circumstances become difficult and that even our darkest nights can become places where Your purposes are revealed. Help us to trust Your no, follow Your yes, and praise You when we cannot yet understand what You are doing. Give us the faith to place every unfinished part of our lives into Your hands. Set people free, open hearts as You opened Lydia’s heart, and use even our difficult circumstances to bring others to the saving knowledge of Messiah Yeshua. We are confident that You who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the Day of Messiah Yeshua.

B’Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.