

Unstoppable Kingdom

Globally: Kingdom Relationships

Acts 15:36-16:15

Unstoppable Kingdom marches on through the Book of Acts! The Apostle Paul's second missionary journey immediately follows the Jerusalem Council. It takes 3 years & will bring us well into Acts 18. He will revisit churches he planted on his first missionary journey in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch before heading to Troas where he would catch a boat to Macedonia. There he would preach and start churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. From there he would visit Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Jerusalem, before returning to Antioch.

As we follow Paul on this incredible journey, we should be struck by the many types of relationships that mark the Unstoppable Kingdom...

“And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” **37** *Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. **38** But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. **39** And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, **40** but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. **41** And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. **2** He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. **3** Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. **4** As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. **5** So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. **6** And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. **7** And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. **8** So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. **9** And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” **10** And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. **11** So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, **12** and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. **13** And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. **14** One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. **15** And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.”*
Acts 15:36-16:15

Main Idea: God Strategically Advances His Kingdom by Key Relationships

Four Types of Relationships in Acts 15:36-16:15

I. Collaborative Relationships like Paul, Barnabas, and Silas

Paul and Barnabas had been a dynamic duo traveling around to share the gospel and plant churches in what's known as the first missionary journey. Then the Lord brought Silas on the team, not long before there would be falling out between Paul and Barnabas. What was the issue...

“Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other.” **Acts 15:37-39a**

“Paul looked at people and asked, ‘What can they do for God’s work?’ while Barnabas looked at people and asked, ‘What can God’s work do for them?’ Both questions are important to the Lord’s work, and sometimes it is difficult to keep things balanced.” **Warren Wiersbe - Relationships Matter!**

“It simply shows once again what the gospel message itself massively demonstrates: that God can take the greatest human folly and sin and bring great good from it.” **N.T. Wright**

If the Bible were the work of men, stories like these never make it in. This is embarrassing to Paul, Barnabas, John Mark, and to the early church that they couldn't get along. There is only one hero in the Bible...it's Jesus!

Relationships are messy. But they are worth it, especially in the Unstoppable Kingdom of God. We encourage one another, sharpen one another, challenge one another, and even rebuke one another. Who's yours?

“If you want to fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” **Old Proverb**

II. Mentoring Relationships like Paul and Timothy

We are introduced to a very prominent person in our study: Timothy.

“Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him.” **Acts 16:1-3a Paul called Timothy a ‘true child in the faith, my fellow worker, beloved and faithful child in the Lord.’**

One of the greatest gifts that God has given has been the opportunity to be mentored and the opportunity to be a mentor. The word 'Mentor' comes from Homer's classic poem, *The Odyssey* (800 BCE). The King of Ithaca (Odysseus) was leaving for Troy and was concerned for his son (Telemachus), so he appointed a teacher/advisor/friend whose name was Mentor. The Bible is full of them: Jethro and Moses, Eli and Samuel, Jesus and the Disciples, Paul and Timothy!

“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” **2 Timothy 2:1-2**

Mentoring relationships in the Unstoppable Kingdom are always to be reciprocal. Meaning, everyone needs a mentor, and everyone needs to be a mentor. So, who is your Paul (mentor), and who is your Timothy (mentee)?

III. Orchestrated Relationships like Paul and Lydia

As God was moving Paul and Silas into place, he was also preparing Lydia to hear their message. She was a successful businesswoman who was a ‘worshiper of God’ who wasn’t yet a believer and hadn’t heard about Jesus.

“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” **Acts 16:14 - Lydia was waiting!**

“Here is someone who has been praying, seeking God, opening themselves to the possibility that this God might come seeking them...the word Paul preached was in Lydia’s case tapping at the window that was already open. In came the light, into her heart came the message of the Lord, and she and her household were baptized.” **N.T. Wright - Europe’s first disciple!**

Once again, a woman plays a vitally important role in the Unstoppable Kingdom. Anyone claiming or acting as though the kingdom devalues women is not being honest. Women are everywhere in kingdom work, praise God!

Do you believe that God is orchestrating events to place you and someone who needs the gospel you know at the same place at the same time? There is a Lydia to your Paul, you can be a Paul to a Lydia out there!

IV. Formative Relationships with the Father, Son, & Spirit

There is an unusual series of events tucked away in this passage.

*“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been **forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the **Spirit of Jesus did not allow them**. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, **“Come over to Macedonia and help us.”** And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”* **Acts 16:6-10**

The missionary wanted to take the gospel to Asia, but God said “no.” Then the missionary wanted to take the gospel to Bithynia, but God said “no.” God wouldn’t let them go north or south but sent a vision to call them west to Europe with the gospel message. God is in charge!

Has God ever told you ‘no’? It’s happened to me many times. When I was offered a job in Alabama at 18-years-old, I sensed God tell me ‘no.’ Ashley and I dreamed of planting a church in NYC together, but God said ‘no.’ Some

of you begged God to let you marry that girl/guy you were crazy about, but he said ‘no.’ We are not called to a MISSION, so much, as we are called to an intimate relationship with the MESSIAH who directs the mission.

Conclusion: As we’ve said, the most important of all relationships is the one we have with the King of the Unstoppable Kingdom. It’s all about relationship!

“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” **Matthew 7:22-23 - Do you know him?**

Sources and Further Reading Opportunities:

- *CSB Study Bible* – Trevin Wax, General Editor (2021)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *Word Pictures in the New Testament* – A.T. Robertson (1933)
- *The New American Commentary: Acts* – John B. Polhill (1992)
- *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* – F.F. Bruce (2017)
- *Acts for Everyone* – N.T. Wright (2008)
- *Acts: The Church Afire* – Kent Hughes (1996)
- *Acts* – K.O. Gangle (1998)
- *The Kingdom of God* – Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1992)
- *The Message of Acts* – John Stott (1994)
- *Kingdom First* – Jeff Christopherson (2015)
- *The Kingdom Agenda* – Tony Evans (1999)