

February 27, 2022 by Steve Brandon



The Lord Opens Hearts

Acts 16:11-15

1. Philippi (verses 11-12)
2. Seeking Hearts (verse 13)
3. An Opened Heart (verse 14)
4. A Servant's Heart (verse 15)

I was listening to a podcast recently where Sean and Billie Jane Sears were sharing their story. They met in college in Springfield, Missouri. They were married and moved to Colorado, where they were engaged in student ministry for eight years. Then, Sean landed a job as a professor in a small Christian college in the Boston area, training students in youth ministry. So, they moved to Boston, and the Lord began working. Their heart was to do what any Christian should do: make a positive impact in their community. They developed relationships with their neighbors. Billie Jane began helping in the schools. Sean began coaching youth teams.

Then, one of their non-religious neighbors had a friend across the street who attempted to commit suicide and found herself in the hospital. While this neighbor was talking with this friend in the hospital, she said, "You need God. My neighbor knows him. I'll be right back." So she came to the Sears' home and pleaded with them, "You need to come to the hospital and visit my friend." They did. While they were at the hospital, the neighbor said to her friend, "You need to be in a Bible study. If Sean and Billie Jane started one, would you go to it?" She said, "If you and your husband will go, then I will go." So Sean and Billie Jane looked at each other and said, "I guess we are going to start this Bible study."

That Bible study began to grow. They began to study the Bible with their neighbors on Friday evenings. The Bible study grew. When it was about 20 people, it was too much for their small living room to handle. So, they went to two nights a week. They had Bible study on Friday evenings and Saturday evenings. But soon, both nights were filling up their living room. So, with 35 people, they began meeting in a Holiday Inn on Sunday mornings. Their Bible Study was quickly becoming a church, without a core team, without any strategic planning, without any outside funding. Today, the Grace Church meets on four different campuses throughout the Boston region.

Looking back, Sean said, "We are the most accidental church planters we have ever met. When your non-religious neighbors are asking you to start a Bible study and it just keeps growing, that's a God thing. If we tried to do that again, it wouldn't go."^[1]

Such is surely the case when it comes to planting a church. It must be a God thing. I'm not sure exactly what the statistics are in America, but the vast majority of churches that are planted, fail. They are no longer meeting five years down the road. I have a three personal friends who have attempted to church plant in the last five years. Their churches no longer exist today. Psalm 127:1 is true: "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." Unless the Lord builds the church, those who build it labor in vain.

The same is true of Rock Valley Bible Church. I know in the depths of my heart, that if God had not been in the work when we planted the church, some 20 years ago, we would have failed in all of our attempts. We would have worked and labored in vain. What we experience this morning would not have happened apart from the sovereign working of God. There were so many things working together in those early days that were clearly the hand of God. I know that Paul's sentiments of the church in Corinth are true for all churches: Paul wrote of the church in Corinth, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:5-7).

This is so true. Regarding Rock Valley Bible Church, "I am nothing." Sure, it was through my leadership that the church came to fruition. As Sean Sears said, "If we tried to do that again, it wouldn't go." So also with Rock Valley Bible Church. If we tried to plant a church again, I doubt that it would go. But God was in the beginning of Rock Valley Bible Church. And God was in the beginning of Grace Church in the Boston Area.

And this morning, as we look to our Bibles, we will see God in the beginning of the church in Philippi. We see this story unfold in Acts, chapter 16. So, I invite you to open in your Bibles to Acts, chapter 16. We will be looking this morning at verses 11-15, which tell the story of the conversion of Lydia in Philippi, the first convert in the city. In fact, Lydia was the first convert in Europe!

Now, before we get to our text, I want to set the context. I again want to remind you of how we arrived at Philippi. The story really begins in Acts 13, which begins the story of Paul's first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church for the work of spreading the gospel. They traveled throughout southern Galatia, preaching the gospel in places like Psidian Antioch, and Iconium and Lystra and Derbe. (I trust that you remember the map of where Paul traveled.) As people came to faith in Jesus, he planted churches in those cities. And then, Paul and Barnabas returned to their home church in Antioch of Syria. After some time back in Antioch, Paul wanted to return to those places where he had proclaimed the word of the Lord to see the brothers and see how they are doing (Acts 15:36). So, Paul and Silas were sent out to "visit the brothers" in those cities.

Initially, they went north through Cilicia, and visited those cities. Along the way, Paul and Silas picked up a traveling companion, Timothy, the young man who was "well-spoken of by the brothers" (Acts 16:2). This trio headed out "through the region of Phrygia and Galatia" (Acts

16:6). They wanted to go south, into Asia, but were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word” there (Acts 16:6). Then, they tried to go north into Bithynia, “but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” to go there either (Acts 16:7). But with these doors closed, Paul and Silas and Timothy went west to Troas. And while in Troas, God opened another door. The door to Macedonia. The door opened in a vision that appeared to Paul in the night. Paul saw “a man of Macedonia” standing before Paul, “urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”

This is where we are in our text this morning. We see Paul and Silas and Timothy (and Luke) traveling to Macedonia with the gospel. Their first stop is Philippi.

Now, what I love about this part of the book of Acts, is that we are going to get the back story of God’s workings to establish churches in places that most of us are all familiar with. If you look ahead in the book of Acts, you will recognize the names of some places on the map as books of the Bible: Philippi and Thessalonica and Corinth. The book of Acts is going to tell us the back story of how these churches began. Here in Acts 16, we will see the beginning of the church in Philippi. In Acts 17, we will see the beginning of the church in Thessalonica. In Acts 18, we will see the beginning of the church in Corinth.

Later, Paul will write letters to these churches. He writes one letter to Philippi, which we call, “Philippians.” He writes two letters to Thessalonica, which we call, “1 and 2 Thessalonians.” He writes two letters to Corinth, which we call, “1 and 2 Corinthians.” Knowing how the church began will often give us insight into what is written in the letters, themselves.

For instance, one of the biggest things we learn here in Acts 16 about the church in Philippi is the diversity of its members. Acts 16 tells us about three people in Philippi. It tells us about Lydia, a respectable seller of fabrics. It tells us about a “slave girl,” one abused by her masters. It tells us about a jailer, a blue-collar worker. One can hardly imagine a more diverse group of people to begin a church: a professional woman, an abused girl, and a sheriff.

This is the back drop to Philippians 2, in which Paul calls those in Philippi to humility, which will produce a unity in the church.

Philippians 2:1-4

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Such humility and unity was surely not easy among the various people who came to faith in Philippi. The call to us is simple. We are far more homogeneous than those in Philippi. Our differences, however great they may seem to you, are actually quite small when considering those in Philippi who were saved from their sins. Certainly, we, as a church body, ought to exercise humility, by living together in unity.

Well, over the next three weeks, we will be looking at these three people in Philippi. So, this morning, we will be looking at Lydia. We see the Lord working in her heart, to open it to embrace the gospel and forever be changed. The title of my message this morning is, “The Lord Opens Hearts.” because, this is what we see taking place in Philippi. We see the Lord opening the heart of Lydia. So, let’s read our text: Acts 16:11-15.

Acts 16:11-15

So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 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. 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. 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. 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.

This story begins the church in Philippi. Just as Sean Sears began that Bible study in the Boston area, and a church developed. So also, Paul and his friends, enter Philippi, and speak the word, and a church begins. Now, before we get into the details of the church, let’s look a bit into the city of Philippi. My first point this morning is ...

1. Philippi (verses 11-12)

Again, I want to take us on a brief geography tour so we know where we are. Verse 11 tells us, “So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis.” It’s really simple. They travel across the Aegean Sea, make an overnight stop on the island of Samothrace, “a rocky island whose peak rises to 5,000 feet.”^[2]

The next day, they land in Macedonia, at the port city of Neapolis. From there it was a 10 mile walk inland to Philippi. Verse 12 takes us to Philippi, “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.” Philippi is in Macedonia.^[3] Philippi is identified as a “leading city.” That is, it was an important city in Macedonia. Probably one of the larger cities in Macedonia. Further, Philippi is identified as a Roman colony (which will be significant later in the chapter, just tuck that away in your mind).

I trust that you see the subtle point: the Bible is history. These are real places. You can visit them today. You can see their ruins. The Bible isn’t merely some story. It’s history. It records what really happened. In this case, it records what happened in Philippi. It records what happens down by the riverside.

Acts 16:13

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.

This is my second point.

2. Seeking Hearts (verse 13)

This is what Paul found at the “place of prayer.” He found hearts that were seeking the Lord. This is always what you find where people are praying. You find people seeking the Lord.

I find this true of us at Rock Valley Bible Church. When we gather for prayer on Sunday mornings at 9am in the basement, those who come are seeking the Lord. They aren't seeking entertainment in the music, because we have no music. They aren't seeking the crowds, because our group is often small. They aren't seeking some great teacher, because we don't spend much time teaching. We simply read a portion of Scripture, discuss it for a few minutes to stir our hearts to the Lord, and then we seek the Lord in prayer. This is what Paul experienced down by the riverside. He found “Seeking Hearts.”

Those who were seeking the Lord were all women. Now, surprisingly, in this verse, we learn a bit more about Philippi. We learn that the number of Jews in the town were probably small. If you remember, Paul's custom (Acts 17:2) in bringing the gospel to a city was to enter first into the synagogues. to speak to the Jews first about Jesus, the Messiah. Only then, did he turn and speak with the Gentiles. But here in Philippi, he doesn't go to the synagogue, probably because there was no synagogue. This means that the number of Jewish families in the city of Philippi was probably less than ten. Because, according to the rabbis, ten Jewish heads of families were needed to establish a synagogue. So, Paul went to the next best place, to the place of prayer, a place where those interested in spiritual things might gather.

We read in verse 13 that this place was “outside the gate to the riverside.” that is by the Gangitis River, about a mile outside the city gates. Perhaps they went there to seek their freedom in worship. Perhaps they went there to find a quiet place.

Now, when Paul arrived, he discovered a group of women. Perhaps Paul was confused, because he was looking for a man. he was looking for the “man of Macedonia,” whom he saw in his vision (Acts 16:9). and he comes upon this group of women. Yet, this was the door that God had opened. So, he began to speak “to the women who had come together” (verse 13).

And what do you think Paul talked about with these women? Surely, He talked about the gospel. He talked about Jesus. He talked about his manner of life. how he was empowered by the Holy Spirit, how he healed the sick and cast out demons. and preached the good news of the kingdom. Paul talked about how Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures, by dying upon the cross, just as Isaiah 53 had foretold. Yet, Jesus was raised from the dead, just as Psalm 16 had prophesied. And now, through him forgiveness of sins is offered to all who believe. That every who believes can come to the Lord through Jesus, the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

What Paul did here is the great application of the book of Acts. We have been repeating it over and over and over again every week. In the book of Acts, Jesus is saying to us, “Be My Witnesses.” We see Paul doing that very thing. He finds himself among some women at a “place of prayer.” He begins talking with them, witnessing for Jesus. And this is what we are called to do, wherever we are. In whatever sort of group of people we find ourselves to be in, we are called to be witnesses for Jesus.

Obviously, that can take a bunch of different forms. In Philippi, the table was all set for Paul, because those who had come were seeking spiritual things. They were seeking the Lord in prayer. So, Paul was able to transition easily to speak about spiritual matters.

Now, it's more difficult to speak of spiritual things when you are out for a walk and encounter your neighbor out walking her dog. It's more difficult to speak of spiritual things when you are coaching your son's basketball team, and have a few moments with the parents after the game. It's more difficult to speak of spiritual things when you are eating lunch at your workplace. Yet, the great application of the book of Acts, is that speaking about spiritual things ought to be on our minds, ready to speak as a willing witness when given the opportunity.

This is what Paul did at that place of prayer. And God was working! In verse 14, we see, ...

3. An Opened Heart (verse 14)

Acts 16:14

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.

Verse 14 introduces us to Lydia. Three things we find out about her. She is from Thyatira. She is a seller of purple goods. She is a worshiper of God. Now, when you think of Lydia, what do you think of? how do you picture her? what does she look like in your mind? She might look like a little girl that you know whose name is “Lydia.”

But when I think of Lydia, I think of a professional woman, who is in the business of buying and selling. I think of a woman in a suit, who presents herself well. She is respectable and trustworthy. I picture a woman who is strong and hard-working. I think of a woman at the airport, who is accustomed to travel. This is what comes to my mind when I think of Lydia.

Verse 14 tells us that she is from Thyatira. To place that on the map, that's across the Aegean Sea, in Asia. Which means that Lydia was in Philippi as an outsider, one from another place.

Verse 14 says that she was a “a seller of purple goods.” Many translations say that she was a seller of “purple fabrics.” The text itself simply says that she was a seller of “purple.”

Now, we our day and age, we hardly think about colors. We have figured out how to manufacture colors of every kind. Yet, in Bible times, not

all colors were easy to fabricate. The most difficult color was purple, that's why it was the color of kings because it was the most expensive color to make. Therefore, it was the most rare. The purple color was made from "the secretion of shellfish that live in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea."^[4] So, wearing purple became a status symbol in those days.^[5]

Now, regarding Lydia, we also read that she was a "worshiper of God." That's why she was at this place of prayer. She was a worshiper of the Lord. She feared the Lord. In fact, Lydia is a Proverbs 31 woman! Here are a few verses that describe her well:

Proverbs 31:14-18

14 She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar.
15 And she rises while it is still night And gives food to her household, And portions to her attendants.
16 She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard.
17 She surrounds her waist with strength And makes her arms strong.
18 She senses that her profit is good; Her lamp does not go out at night.

Here is a diligent business woman, providing for her family. Verse 16 says that she "considers a field and buys it." In Lydia's case, it is purple fabrics that she considers. She thinks of where she can buy low and sell high.

Proverbs 31:24-27

24 She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies belts to the tradesmen.
25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future.
26 She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
27 She watches over the activities of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.

From best we can tell, this describes Lydia perfectly. She was probably a seller of "linen garments" (verse 24). Later, her "household" will be mentioned (verse 15). Known as a "seller," she was certainly providing well for her household.

Proverbs 31:22

22 She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.

She has nice clothes because her work has been profitable and she is able to purchase the expensive clothing.

But the most important thing about Lydia is that the Lord "opened her heart." Look at the end of verse 14, ...

Acts 16:14

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

In some sense, this means that her heart was still closed until God opened her heart. It's not that she was closed to the Lord, but closed to hearing Paul's strange teaching of the Messiah. Yet, God opened Lydia's heart to believe and accept and embrace the things spoken of by Paul.

Here we see the Lord's activity here. It was the Lord who opened her heart. It wasn't Lydia who heard Paul and thought about it and with all of her expertise, intelligence and savvy, concluded that Paul was speaking the truth. No. It was the Lord who opened her heart "to believe and accept and embrace" Paul's message.

In reality, our words cannot change anyone's hearts. Our words are important when sharing the gospel. But our words, themselves won't change anybody apart from the Spirit of God working in the hearts of a soul. Romans 1:16 says that "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation." As we speak, it is the power of God unto salvation that works. It's not us that changes people. It is God who saves. "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). God is the one that saves. Of course, he does so through human agency. But God is the one who opens heart.

Think with me about the Biblical images of salvation. Jesus spoke about being "born again" or "born from above." We were born the first time physically. But for those who believe, they experience a "new birth," a spiritual birth. And God causes this to come about. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). Just as a child doesn't have much initiative in the matter of being born by his mother, so likewise, it is God's initiative that comes upon a soul and causes us to be born again.

A few weeks ago, Jake preached from Ephesians 2. Verses 4 and 5 say, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved." We don't choose to be alive. We are dead. We are a corpse. He brings us to life.

Another Biblical imagery of salvation is that we are blind. This morning, we sang a song entitled, "O Great God."^[6] The lyrics to the second stanza are below.

I was blinded by my sin
Had no ears to hear Your voice
Did not know Your love within
Had no taste for heaven's joys
Then Your Spirit gave me life
Opened up Your Word to me
Through the gospel of Your Son
Gave me endless hope and peace

This is a song that Lydia could have sung! God's Spirit came in to give her life! God's Spirit opened up God's word to her! As a result, she will have "endless hope and peace."

The Bible tells us that our hearts are hard. Romans 3:11 says that "no one seeks for God." In 1 Corinthians 2:14, we read that "the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God." It is God who changes our hearts so that we can receive the spiritual things of his word and accept them and believe in him. This is God opening a heart.

Some families are so hard toward the things of God, that they can't even talk about religion. It stirs up so much passion and hostility that it's a topic best left unspoken. That's simply a demonstration of the hardness of so many hearts. People can't tolerate the things of God, until God opens up the heart.

God worked in Lydia's heart. God changed her. Do you know this in your own experience? Has God opened your heart to believe and trust in Christ? Do you believe that the things we celebrate here every week are true? They are true! They are history. Jesus actually existed in flesh and blood. He actually rose from the dead! This is what Lydia believed!

Now, it is interesting here to note that the text doesn't explicitly say that Lydia believed. She simply has her heart was opened "to pay attention" to what Paul said. But it is safe to assume that she did, indeed believe. We see this in the way that she responded to Paul and his friends. This is my last point this morning.

4. A Servant's Heart (verse 15)

Acts 16:15

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.

We see Lydia responding in two ways. First of all, she was baptized. Second, she opened her home.

She was baptized according to the Biblical pattern. You see this throughout the book of Acts. When people believe, they respond in baptism. In some regards, this falls under the category of "service." My point is that she had a "Servant's Heart." Baptism is a way to indicate your service to God. It's an opportunity to declare your salvation and submission to the Lord in all things.

But it wasn't only Lydia who was baptized. We also see her whole household baptized as well. The passage is one of several "household baptisms." The only assumption that we can make is that Lydia's entire household believed in the gospel as well. We don't know exactly of the composition of this household, whether Lydia was married and whether or not she had children. Perhaps the household contains some servants, who helped her in her business. But we do know that they were united with her in her faith.

This was that beginning of the church in Philippi.

We see a second demonstration of Lydia's servant's heart in that she opened her home. She said "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." Again, it's difficult to understand the full timing of Lydia's statement. She may have said this on the Sabbath day, the very first day that she heard the gospel. Or, it may have been a few days later. However, in some way, enough time had elapsed in seeing the fruit of Lydia's life that Paul (and Silas and Timothy and Luke) were able to discern her faithfulness. She wanted them to say with her.

Such an invitation may have been awkward a little bit for Paul and his companions to stay with her, especially if she were a single women. It seems as if they initially resisted her invitation. But "she prevailed upon us." That is, she insisted and insisted enough that Paul and his company were no longer able to refuse her any longer. Such is the heart of a servant.

Servants will often press their way into service. When such people see a need and know that they can meet the need, they pull whatever persuasive power if available to them to help others. Lydia thought that her home was better than the inn in Philippi.

Perhaps Lydia had another motive in bringing these godly men into the home. She knew that she would be greatly encouraged by them. She could learn more about the faith. As a pastor family, I know that this is one of the great privileges of my life, that I have the opportunity to have missionaries in my home from time to time. They are tremendously encouraging to me and to my entire household. Surely, Lydia was blessed to be around these men, exercising her gift of hospitality.

This is how God works in the heart of every believer. We are saved to serve. God saves us so that we can serve others.

Consider the church in Philippi. Paul wrote this in Philippians 4 about this church in Philippi, describing the time when he left Philippi for the first time.

Philippians 4:15-16

And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.

The church in Philippi was the only church that gave to support his missionary team as they went on to Thessalonica and on to Berea and Athens and Corinth. This church in Philippi was especially generous, sending gifts, not once, but twice. Who do you think was the driving force behind that support? We don't know if Lydia was behind it or not. But it's totally consistent with what we know of Lydia's heart that she would press those in Philippi to support Paul's mission. Consider the following Proverb:

Proverbs 31:20

She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy.

No one was more needy than this missionary band, as they were going out trusting the Lord to provide in all things. Lydia was certainly sensitive to their needs as God had given her a servant's heart in these things.

Such is the beginning of God's work in the church in Philippi. Of this church Paul writes, ...

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Essentially, Paul was saying, "I was there at the beginning of the church. The one who began that working in you by opening Lydia's heart to believe and trust in Christ the Messiah, will surely complete his work." As God has started Rock Valley Bible Church some twenty years ago, the same promise is true of us as well. He will bring this work to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Similarly, what God began in the work of Sean Sears, taking his Bible study into a multi-campus church, he will bring to completion.

God will finish his work. God is the one who begins his work. God is the one who sustains his work. God will bring his work to completion.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 27, 2022 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] I gathered all of this information from a few websites:

<https://thatsgrace.org/messages/refocusing-on-the-mission/>

<http://www.tribune.org/get-to-know-sean-sears/>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-18-boundaries-in-ministry-with-sean-and/id1584356771?i=1000551754493>

[2] John Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 262. Wikipedia helps give a little insight onto this unique island: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samothrace>.

[3] This website gives a great map of Paul's second missionary journey. You can trace through to see Philippi in Macedonia (<https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/10-pauls-journey-to-phrygia-macedonia/paul-starts-his-2nd-missionary-journey/>).

[4] Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 590.

[5] At this point in my sermon, I made mention of the purple shirt that I was wearing that day as I preached. I also pointed out that the photo on the overhead that I displayed of a "Lydia" was wearing a purple suit. Further, I asked a child named Lydia in our congregation what her favorite color was. She didn't say, "purple." However, I told during the message, that her favorite color might change to purple after this sermon. I also gave her a vision for evangelism if she wore purple often. People might recognize it and ask her about it. I told her that she could respond with something like, "I wear purple often because of a woman in the Bible named Lydia. She sold purple fabrics. So I wear purple to remember her. The Bible says that the Lord opened her heart to the gospel. The Lord has also opened my heart to the gospel that Jesus Christ died for my sins upon the cross. Are you interested in hearing more?"

I then exhorted the congregation to have such conversation starters in their lives that will stir people to ask questions about you. I told of how our license plates on our cars do this. They have somewhat mysterious messages upon them that have often stirred people to ask about them. They have given me many, many opportunities to give testimony to the Lord.

When I was in the business world, I used to place items upon my desk that would stir conversations with others. These included pictures and nicely framed Bible verses and mugs with messages. I used props as well, like a plastic baby about the size of cookie, which represented the actual size of a 12 week old baby. It was great to remind me to pray and to bring up the tragedies of abortion to those in the office. Other items you might consider include nails (to represent what was used to nail Jesus to the cross) or small crosses or a Gideon New Testament (which you could give away). The ideas are endless, but are helpful for being a witness for Jesus.

Is there anything like this in your life?

[6] Bob Kauflin, "O Great God." (See <https://sovereigngracemusic.org/music/songs/o-great-god/>).