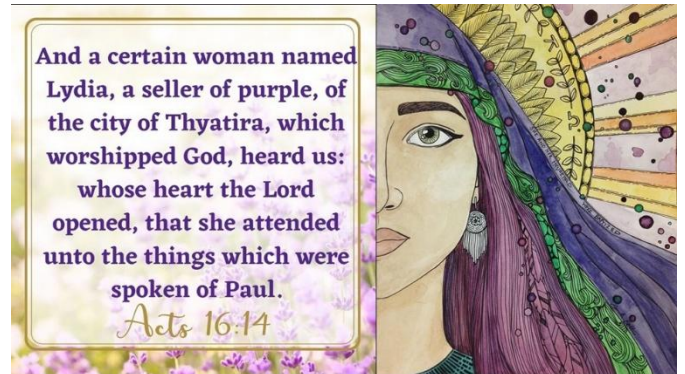# Connections "E-Devotions" with Pastor Mark Manning

"On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul." - Acts 16:13-14

Like Dorcas, from a few weeks ago, Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles shows yet another named woman: Lydia. Often the Bible is a bit short on developing female characters, but we get something here. Lydia is, first and foremost in the eyes of many of the Jewish believers, a Gentille, and possibly Greek or mixed ethnicity and race. Pointedly, she is NOT Jewish. It describes her as a "worshiper of God." From the Jewish perspective of Luke, this is not some nebulous deity, but the God of the Jews—Yahweh. On some level she already knows and understands something about the way the Jews practiced a distinctive monotheism in a world of pagan pantheism. It also states that she is a dealer in luxury goods--purple cloth, specifically--and later that she has a household that was baptized. (Note: this does not necessarily mean that she was married or had children, it could mean her slaves and extended family.) She was likely well-off, even rich compared to others.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. Acts 16:14

(click here or the image above for a short video message)

It does not state how the women came to be in that place of prayer outside the gate by the river; possibly Paul, Silas and Timothy's preaching among the few Jews there led to a meeting outside; maybe it was word-of-mouth; or maybe it was sheer divine coincidence. Her heart was opened, her family was later baptized, and she begs—even orders?—that they stay with her. Later on, after Paul and Silas are beaten and thrown in prison on trumped up charges, when they are finally released and sent away, they first stop one final time at Lydia's home. In our own church we often talk about a ministry of hospitality, and Lydia really shows us what it means to "open your doors" to the stranger. What are new and different ways we can open our own homes and our church home, beyond a cup of coffee?

Prayer: Holy Spirit of the One who gives himself up for us, for the world; bring us to the One whose eye does not begrudge or envy, whose eye is not evil. Help us to see by His Light, hope in the darkness. Amen.

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Questions for Discussion/Reflection:

1. *Keep in mind that the sabbath day for Luke is Saturday, and that worship and prayer for a practicing Jewish believer—even for one who believes in Jesus—is still Saturday. What does this tell us about Paul's self-understanding of his "Jewishness" at this point?*
2. *Speaking to (possibly) strange women outside the city was a risky proposition for these Jewish men: they were strangers in a strange land (Philippi in present day Greece). They were taking a risk, as were the women. There were cultural expectations around such behavior, and some people certainly would have questioned it. Are there any modern day "social rules" around how and to whom we might share the gospel?*
3. *Lydia is a woman of means: financially and socially. Her occupation would have brought her into an orbit of rich people who could afford her cloth, and the proceeds of their sale would have made her well-off financially. Why do you think Luke takes the time to record this information? What could it mean later on?*
4. *Lydia was from Thyatira (not Philippi), a city in western Turkey, so on one level she is also a stranger in a strange land. How is that dynamic—strangers meeting strangers in a strange land—a way for the Holy Spirit to work in a unique way among them?*
5. *Notice that it is "the Lord" who "opened her heart to listen eagerly." God is the one bringing faith by the power of Jesus. not us by ourselves. How is missionary work a constant reminder of what God is doing, not what I am doing?*