

Ezra was given a chance to make a difference starting with himself. He resolved to find out about God's will in his life. He resolved to study and learn God's word, to practice it and then to teach it to others.

In the following exercise, reflect on the various areas of your life and character that you need to improve on. Be honest with yourselves and get into the nooks and crannies. Often we tend to neglect the small things, but it is these very things that may hinder our progress in faith. For example, we may be a person who flares up easily. Think of the reasons why we get so hot-tempered. Have we done anything about it? What does the Bible say? How are we going to apply those teachings in our daily life so that we actively remove it? If we continue to examine ourselves in this way and apply the words of God in our daily lives, we will surely see a change in ourselves and the people around us.

Things I need to change	What does the Bible say about this?	How am I going to put it into practice?	How am I going to teach others?

## REFLECTION & PRAYER



*Ezra made it his duty to study and practice the word of God. He made it his duty to teach his own generation the laws and ordinances of God. He made it his duty to lead the Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem in peace and safety and to turn their hearts back to God. Let us purify ourselves from what is ignoble, so that we can be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work (2 Tim 2:21).*

## Lesson 11

# Lydia, the Seller of Purple

### Listed Scriptures

Acts 16:1-40; Phil 1:10; 1 Pet 3:1-6

### Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn the important role of women in the service of God
- 2) To learn the importance of apportioning time for God in our busy lives

### Memory Verse

"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." (Prov 31:30)

### Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

*Isaiah 51-55*

## BIBLE BACKGROUND



Philippi was the leading city of the region of Macedonia, which is northern Greece today. Philippi was an important center of business, government, communications and culture. It sat at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, and was a good center for church planting. During his second missionary, the Holy Spirit beckoned Paul to go to Macedonia and it was at this point that the church in Philippi was founded. The church later consisted mostly of gentile (non-Jewish) believers.

### **Thyatiras**

Thyatiras was one of the Macedonian colonies and a city known for its commerce. From names discovered in monuments it is evident that the city was the melting pot of many nations and that the chief object of worship was Apollo, who was worshiped as the sun god under the name of Tyrinnus. Thyatira was conspicuous for its many guilds, which were united by common pursuits and religious rites. One of

these guilds was that of dyers. The water of the area was so well adapted for dyeing that no other place could produce the scarlet cloth out of which fezzes were so brilliantly and so permanently dyed. This unique purple dye brought the city universal renown. Lydia was a well-known seller of this product and typifies a successful businesswoman in a prosperous city.

### Purple cloth

The purple dye was a brilliant red-blue color prized by the ancients for dyeing garments (Prov 31:22; Jer 10:9). One of the chief sources for purple was a tiny mollusk. The dye taken from these shellfish came from the slimy secretion of a gland. This secretion is not red or violet but whitish at first. When exposed to the sunlight, it changes color, passing through various shades until it settles into the purple color. Great labor was required to extract the purple dye and hence only royalty and the wealthy could afford the resulting richly colored purple cloth from which garments were made.

## W A R M U P



Dear Friend,  
How are you? I just had to send you a note to tell you how much I care about you. I saw you yesterday as you were talking with friends. I waited all day, hoping you would want to talk with me too. I gave you a delightful sunset to close your day, and to rest you... I waited, but you never talked to me. It hurt me, but I still love you because you are my friend. I saw you sleeping last night and longed to touch your brow, so I spilled moonlight upon your face. Again I waited, wanting to rush down so we could talk. I have so many gifts for you! I love you! You awoke and rushed off to your daily activities. My tears were in the rain. If you would only listen to me! I love you! I try to tell you in the deep blue sky and in the stillness of the night. I whisper my love to you in the quietness of the silent snow, shout it in the mountain streams. I give the birds songs to sing to you. I clothe you in fresh, clean air filled with the scents of nature. My love for you is deeper than the ocean and bigger than the deepest need in your heart! Ask me! Talk with me! Please don't forget me! I have so much to share with you! I won't bother you any further. It is your decision. I have chosen you and I will wait. I love you.

Your friend,  
Jesus



### Lydia's Life

The Bible is filled with examples of women who were greatly used by God—Deborah, Ruth, Hannah, Esther, Mary, and Priscilla to name just a few. In contrast to cultural standards where women were often treated as property or at least as second-class citizens, the Judeo-Christian ethic elevated women to a previously unheard of status. In the Bible, women are given a special position. In the Old Testament, we have women prophets and female judges and in the New Testament there were many women who followed the Lord and provided for the needs of the disciples and the Lord Jesus. Many were commended and praised by Him for their love and devotion. Even in most churches today, there is a higher percentage of fervent sisters than there are brothers. Lydia was one such example in the Bible of a fervent and God-loving woman. Lydia was converted when Paul visited Macedonia during his second missionary journey. On the Sabbath while preaching by the riverside God worked with Paul and moved Lydia to accept the truth, making her the first believer in Europe. Because of Lydia's good example, the church in Philippi became an exemplary church in Macedonia. Today, Lydia's virtues can be an example for all.



### **A** Daily Life

#### a. She was very diligent

Lydia was from the city of Thyatira. The Bible specifically mentions that she was a seller of purple goods, a valuable and expensive material often worn by the nobility or royalty. Lydia was thus a wealthy businesswoman, a person of means. Greek women in Lydia's day held elevated status and were able to conduct business and hold honorary public titles. Thyatira was a city known for its commerce, so Lydia may have brought her business to Philippi from there. It is also recorded that Lydia had a family, but there is no mention of who her family members were. Nevertheless, Lydia's conduct is reminiscent of the virtuous wife recorded in Proverbs, who looked to her household and

worked hard to support the family (Prov 31:10,13, 24,27). We too should be diligent in all that our hands find to do (Prov 10:4; 13:11; 2 Thess 3:8-12).



## **B** Spiritual Life

### **a. She was a fervent worshipper of God**

Before Lydia was converted to Christianity, she was a worshipper of God (Ac 16:14). She was a God-fearing person who prayed and attended services regularly. Her actions reflected a hunger for a deeper spiritual experience and as a result she saw the guidance of God (Ps 33:18; 25:12-14). Through Paul, she was able to hear the gospel of salvation so that she was baptized along with her family. Generally business people are so engrossed in their affairs that they have no time for God. Yet, despite all her secular obligations, Lydia balanced her career and spiritual life well and found time to worship each day. Because Lydia was willing to put aside her work, God occasioned an opportunity for her to listen to the gospel.

### **b. She observed the Sabbath**

On the Sabbath, Lydia went to the place of prayer by the riverside to pray and listen to God's law. Because of this she had a chance to hear Paul and thus believe in the Lord Jesus (Ac 16:13). Although Lydia was a businesswoman, the Sabbath meant more to her than making money. Lydia recognized the importance of the Sabbath as God's holy day and a day of rest from her worldly labors.

The Book of Isaiah 58:13-14 teaches us how we should honor the Sabbath and thus receive the blessings of God.

v.13a "If you turn back your feet from the Sabbath from doing your pleasure on my holy day... or going our own ways." This means that we should put aside our own affairs and postpone all engagements to observe the Sabbath fully. If our friends want to meet up, or if an SAT class falls on Sabbath, we should be firm about not attending or have it rescheduled. The Sabbath is God's holy day and should be spent with God and His people.

v.13b "we should refrain from talking idly"

On the Sabbath we should avoid talking about the things of the world, such as the latest movie, or the latest fashions. Instead we should encourage each other in the faith, and share how God has worked in our lives.

v.14 talks about the blessings we will receive if we do the above. God will enable us to "take delight in the Lord, ride upon the heights of the earth, feed with the heritage of Jacob your father." When we set aside this day to worship the Lord, we will receive spiritual encouragement and power from listening to His words and prayer. His words to us will be "sweeter than honey," and nourishment to our hungry souls. Through prayer we will transcend great heights and enjoy sweet communion with God. Through fellowship and sharing with the brothers and sisters, we reach a oneness in the body of Christ (Is 56:2; 58:13-14).

### **c. She opened her heart to give heed to the word of God**

It is interesting to note that out of all the women who had gathered at the meeting place, Lydia was the only person who received the truth. What made her different from the rest? Lydia attended services with a reverent heart and when she heard the word of God, God opened her heart to understand the message (Ac 16:14).

What is our attitude when we attend services? Do we have a reverent heart? Or have we grown indifferent to the sermons? We have to examine our hearts when listening to the word of God because that will determine how much we receive from the sermon. Recall a time when you were thirsty for God's words. Most likely, you received a lot from that particular message. But what about the times when you really didn't care? We find that even though the speaker may have given a great sermon, you did not receive much because your heart was not there. If this persists over a period of time our spiritual lives will be undernourished and we will stray (Eccl 5:1; Lk 10:39; 1 Thess 5:20; Heb 2:1-3).

#### **Reflection:**

1. What can we learn from the way Lydia balanced her family, career and religious life?
2. How does Lydia demonstrate her devotion to God?



## **C** Life of Service

### **a. She led her entire family to the Lord**

After Lydia understood the truth, she shared it with her family so that she and her household were baptized. Do we still have family members who are not yet believers? The Lord has chosen us so that through us the gospel can reach our loved ones. When God told Noah that He was to send a flood, he brought his entire family into the ark and was saved (Heb 11:7). After saving the spies,

Rahab made a pact with them that they would spare her life and that of her family's (Josh 2:12-14, 17-21). The Lord has commanded us to preach the gospel, and we should begin with the people that are closest to us. We need to pray for them and inspire them through our good faith and conduct (Cf 1 Pet 3:1-4).

**Testimony:**

There is a truthseeker who came to the true church and received the Holy Spirit. One night she had a dream. In her dream, she saw herself going into a bakery to buy bread. Coming out of the store, she hugged her loaf of bread and walked happily to catch the bus home. When she got on the bus, she noticed that there was no driver, and although it was a huge bus she was the only passenger. The bus began to move but very shortly, it took off into the skies. As the bus floated in the air, she saw herself enjoying the beautiful view, her heart filled with joy and contentment.

When the truthseeker awoke from her dream, she did not understand the meaning of her dream. Later, she understood that since coming to the True Jesus Church, she had received the Bread of Life— the word of God and the Holy Spirit. She cherished this with all her heart. The bus she embarked on was homeward bound, and she realized that she had begun her journey towards the heavenly home. On realizing this, the truthseeker was very joyful, but suddenly she became very sad. She thought, "Why am I the only person on this huge bus? How can I be enjoying God's grace alone when there is so much space in the bus for many more people? Where is my husband? Where are my parents and my siblings?" She realized then that although she was heaven-bound, her husband and her family were not traveling with her because they had not yet accepted Christ. Realizing this, the truthseeker spent much time praying and weeping for the salvation of her husband and family. She prayed that God would show mercy by choosing them. Thank God, that some months later, her husband believed after receiving the Holy Spirit, and both husband and wife were baptized on the same day. Today, she continues to pray that the rest of her family members will also be saved.

**Reflection:**

1. Do we have non-believing family members?
2. What have we done to bring them to the Lord?
3. What challenges are there in bringing our family members to church compared to bringing non-family members?

**b. She welcomed visitors**

After Lydia's baptism, she invited apostle Paul to stay with her and her family. Lydia practically begged for the opportunity to host Paul and Silas in her home. She said, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house

and stay" (Ac 15:16). Rather than seeing the apostles as a burden and their presence as a disruption to her family's routine, Lydia laid out the welcome mat. Because of her sincerity and warmth, Paul remained with Lydia until his departure (Ac 16:15, 40). Later, Lydia also opened her house to the saints of God and her home became a center of Christian fellowship in Philippi. We can see that Lydia's fervency and warmth rubbed off onto the Philippian church. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul mentions that after he left Macedonia, the members in Philippi again and again sent aid to Paul (Phil 1:5). This virtue of "contributing to the needs of the saints, and practicing hospitality" may have been the influence of Lydia who was the first seed of the gospel (Rom 12:13). In Matthew 10:40-42, Jesus Christ teaches us the importance of welcoming others. The Lord promises that by receiving others we will not lose out on our reward even if we offer something as minute as a cup of cold water (Heb 13:2). Jesus Christ particularly mentions receiving those who live by and preach the word of God. By receiving them we are supporting and participating in the divine ministry (3 Jn 6-10).

**c. She used her wealth for the Lord**

Lydia used her business, the money she earned and all her possessions to help God's servants in their ministry. God desires that we be good managers of the material possessions He has entrusted to us. Lydia's earnings were used to further the gospel. Lydia sold purple to honor God. She used her connections to spread the gospel throughout the civilized world. Therefore, regardless of what we do by profession, our goal should be to offer our wealth and our talents to promote the gospel and to help our brothers and sisters.

**Reflection:**

1. What kind of jobs can women take on in the church?
2. What is the Bible's teaching on showing hospitality?
3. How have we utilized the wealth, talents and wisdom that God has bestowed upon us?

**C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G**



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".



### Time Management

From our lesson today, we learned that although Lydia was a busy career woman with responsibilities toward her family and her business, she was able to maintain a close relationship with God and support the ministry.

Today we all lead very busy lives. The most common complaint is that there is not enough time to fit everything in let alone pray and read the Bible. However, each day, God hands us 24 hours to live life to the fullest. That's 1,440 minutes. How we manage and prioritize our time is up to us but the outcomes are drastically different. Some people can spend more than an hour a day dressing and grooming, but can't find a small amount of time to spend with God. Some can spend hours in front of the television, but spend no time with God. How we invest our time will be what we get in return. The result of spending time with God each day is a meaningful and abundant life on earth as well as a future eternal life. Thus in Ephesians 5:15-17, apostle Paul reminds us to "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:15-17).

In the following exercise, ask students to follow the directions and then discuss the questions below:

#### Instructions:

1. Fill in your typical weekly schedule, Version A (see Student Workbook).
2. Categorize the time spent into the six major categories (to the nearest hour or fifteen minutes, depending on the students' ages— See categories below).
3. Rank the six categories and calculate the percentage by category.
4. Fill in the time pie using the calculated percentage (use the visual to stress the point that we spend very little for God).
5. Set a goal in terms of how much time (in percentages) you would like to dedicate to God (use ten percent as the minimal goal for everyone; for students who already spend more than ten percent, ask them to identify the next level they would like to achieve...like fifteen or twenty percent).
6. Based on your newly identified goal, fill in what your weekly schedule would be like with the improvement, Version B (see Student Workbook).
7. Put up your Version B schedule at some place very visible (such as on your computer, on your mirror, in your organizer/notebook) for a few weeks to

remind yourself of the change you need to make.

#### Categories:

1. Sleep & Daily Living Routine
2. School & Studying
3. Work
4. Church, Cultivation & Holy Work
5. Leisure
6. Other

#### Discussion Questions:

1. From the exercise what did you discover about the way you use your time? (Students will probably find that they normally spend less than 10% of their time on or for God and the rest of the time on themselves. If we are to apply the concept of offering tithe to our time, we should all aim to dedicate at least 10% of our time for God's use).
2. How does your time management reflect your priorities in life?
3. Why is it difficult for most people to have a consistent time with God each day?
4. Suggest some ways that can ensure quality time with God.  
(Do not let excuses or interruptions dictate your time with God  
Set aside a specific time where you can give your fullest attention  
Find a quiet place without interruptions  
Determine what you hope to accomplish).

Suggested Reading: "Making Time for God," *Manna* Issue 35 Apr-Jun 2001, "Made for Me," *Higher Ground*, Summer 1997, "How to apportion your time for God," *Manna* Issue 23, November 1994

## REFLECTION & PRAYER



*May our prayers be as Moses who said, The years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reasons of strength fourscore; yet their span is but toil and trouble they are soon gone and we fly away teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom (Ps 90:10, 12).*