



## SESSION THREE: THE SEEKER DISCOVERS TRUTH

*Finding the Grace of God in a World of Self-righteousness*

### The Story of Lydia

#### RELATING TO THE WORLD'S STORY

Do you long for a return to values and morals in a world that has lost respect? What does that look like? We might associate morality and holiness with the word “righteousness”—doing what is right. But who determines what is morally right? Different cultures and individuals differ and even clash over this.

- Who are considered the moral and respectable people in your community? In the world? Why?

*“Jesus, Your Blood  
and Righteousness”*

CW 376

**Read Acts 16:13-15 (Lydia’s story)**

**Watch “To the Ends of the Earth” – segment 3 (13:32-19:38)**

*Express what most stood out for you about this part of Paul’s adventure in Philippi.*

- *What questions does it raise?*

#### LEARNING PAUL’S STORY

##### A. Avoiding the Truth – Creating our Own Standard of Righteousness

Paul’s journey to Philippi brought him into contact with Lydia from Thyatira. She had become a successful business woman. We imagine her trying hard to do good deeds. She was a “worshipper of God” —possibly a Gentile (non-Jew) who followed Jewish laws. The Pharisees in Jerusalem influenced much of those Jewish expectations. They boasted about their superior ways and even criticized Jesus for eating with “sinners.” But Jesus pointed out, “On the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness” (Matthew 23:28).

1. Reflect on ways we, like the Pharisees, are inclined to put a higher value on protecting and promoting our own ways rather than paving a way to share God’s love to others.

At times we try to control how others see us. We try to look good and cover up who we really are. We try to promote ourselves and put down others. But no matter how good we may look on the outside, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.... If we claim we have not sinned, we make him (God) out to be a liar and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8,10).

2. Read Romans 3:9-12, 19-20. Summarize the truth that levels out the playing field and puts everyone in the same category no matter what culture, social standing, moral life, or religion.
3. Explain what Paul says is the purpose of the law in this context. When does it most have this effect on you?

We may feel we are good...that our decent actions at least outweigh the bad. Think about it. Would a judge accept 51% honesty? Would you drink water that is only 51% pure (and 49% poison)? Would a spouse accept 51% or even 80% sexual faithfulness? God's holiness is the measuring line. Anything less than 100% disgraces God's honor. It defaces the dignity of God. God's holiness is an impossible target to hit so we try to hide the shame and cover our failures.

**Want to learn more?**

*Jesus tells a parable for those who were confident in their own goodness and looked down on others*  
 Luke 18:9-14

**B. Realizing the Truth – Our Need for God's Righteousness**

There was no synagogue in Philippi (not enough believing men?), so Lydia and other women met for prayer near the river on the Sabbath. Lydia seemed to have it all together, but she may have had the nagging voice inside that asks, "Have I done enough?" "Am I good enough?" Was there also some hidden pain she covered up? Paul had to learn to abandon his trust in his own ability to save himself and completely trust in "the Righteous One," Jesus his Savior. (See Acts 22:14-15.) Paul wrote how it changed what he now valued in life.

**Want to learn more?**

*Diagram these descriptions of what Jesus did for us*  
 Romans 5:5-11  
 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

1. Read Philippians 3:2-12. Describe how Paul viewed his previous achievements and status. What was now most important?
2. Retell in your own words the message Paul was explaining in Romans 3:21-31? How does that also level things off no matter who we are and give certainty about our relationship with God?

The righteousness we receive through Christ is the heart of Christianity. It is a gift, not something we worked for or achieved—earned by the merits of Jesus, not us. All this becomes ours in our relationship to him by faith.

**Want to learn more?**

*See how passionate Paul was about keeping the gospel clear*  
 Galatians 1:6-2:24; 3:1-5;  
 4:8-11; 5:1-9

**C. Responding to the Truth – God Works in a Person's Heart**

God initiated this relationship—repaired through Jesus and called to faith by the Holy Spirit.

1. “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message” (Acts 16:14). Why is this statement so significant for you to understand...about yourself...about others?
2. Compare that with Luke 24:25-27,32,44-45. Determine what it says about the power of sharing Scripture with others. (See Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7, 2 Corinthians 4:5-7.)

Lydia’s faith influenced her network of people. Paul wrote, “All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Lydia knew the value of the cloth she sold. Purple was the cloth of wealth and royalty. (See Mark 15:17-18.) Paul’s message about Jesus led Lydia to be baptized along with the members of her household—clothed with the more valuable righteousness of Christ and identified with his royal dignity and honor.

**Want to learn more?**

*God accepts people from all races and nations on the basis of their faith in Jesus*

Acts 15:5-11, 19  
Romans 4:4-16  
Galatians 3:6-14  
Titus 3:3-8

3. Read and explain how being clothed with Christ makes you look in God’s eyes.

 Isaiah 61:1-3, 10

 Romans 6:3-13

 Ephesians 5:25-27

 Revelation 7:13-14

**Want to learn more?**

*Clothing for holy living*

Psalm 51:7-10  
Titus 2:11-12  
Ephesians 2:8-10  
Ephesians 4:21-31

Paul said, God “saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace” (2 Timothy 1:9). One of Paul’s team was Silas. He was sent to tell Gentiles they are free to serve God without the burdens of the Jewish law. They still should show respect for those who cherish it. (See Acts 15:9-11, 22-29.) Living a holy life exhibits our faith relationship with God and our clothing in Christ. Lydia’s response of faith was extending hospitality to Paul and the mission team at her house. It also may have become the location for the house church that developed in Philippi—her expression of thanks for what God had done for her. (See Acts 16:40.)

**Motivation from Isaiah**

Isaiah 32:1-5, 16-17  
Isaiah 51:1-8  
Isaiah 56:1-8

Ultimately it is about **TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS**, the Righteous One who lived for us.

**MAKING IT YOUR STORY**

1. Lydia’s household was also baptized. What does it tell you about the value of the home in reaching out to others? Point out where you see its effect. (See 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:14-17.)

2. Do you know someone like Lydia—a woman (or man) who seems to have it all together, upstanding, respectable? How would you share God’s messages with them?
  - ... If they think they have no need for God or forgiveness.
  - ... If they struggle with wondering, “Have I done enough?”
3. Evaluate: People of other cultures or backgrounds who join our church need to conform to our way of doing things if they want to be part of us.

### LIVING THE STORY – PROJECT

1. Learn this Bible Story to share: ***Abraham and the blessing for all nations*** (Genesis 12–21).
2. Analyze areas of your own life where your “righteousness” creates an attitude barrier in the way you interact with others. What prejudices and “rules” still linger that need to be removed?
3. Mormonism emphasizes a life of perfection. Study how *Truth in Love Ministries* shares the gospel with them. Or study Islam and living by laws. Consider how you might understand their viewpoints and discuss Jesus with them.
4. Discover the resources and opportunities to reach out to women through the Women’s Ministry Committee or the world through the global mission support of the LWMS.

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