

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Reach: Setbacks or Setups”

Dr. Jay Howell

May 19, 2024

Next week we will wrap up this “Reach” series, a walk through a pivotal stretch in the Book of Acts, chapters 15-16. It’s a section that sees the church grapple with some momentous internal decisions, getting the house in order and poised to move forward, and then how the church goes out, cross over, reaches out in mission.

But first a quick word on what will come next. Two weeks from today, as we start the first of our summer series, we will be going through the Letter of Titus. It’s a challenging letter; it’ll challenge us, because it talks about how a life following Christ and the shared life in the church and in the home should stand at once in contrast to the culture around it, but also as something compelling that those within that culture would see. Grateful to Pastor Ben for putting this series together. We’ll start that in two weeks.

Today we pick back up with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, now in the Macedonian city of Philippi. Their ministry there began with the first convert, a woman named Lydia, and now it continues, but it hits some snags. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:16-25

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Steadfast God, we pray for your continued assurance and work within our lives, no matter what obstacles or sources of discouragement may emerge. And we pray for the continued guidance and comfort of your Spirit, as we seek to follow you in service and witness. For the Word spoken and heard today may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

If it were me with Paul in that prison instead of Silas, I may have had different things to say than the prayers and hymns that they offered.

After Lydia had come to the faith, the first convert in this Macedonian, Romanized city of Philippi, Paul and Silas and all of them had to be feeling encouraged. Now they had a foothold in this new world they had crossed into. Had to have felt excited. God had shown that he was with them, at work within them, among them, through them. They were on the right track. They had momentum.

So they would keep going out to that place of prayer outside the city by the river, the place they met Lydia, and that it appears is where they would do a great deal of their ministry in these early steps. Did so for days, it says.

But they encounter a bit of fly in the ointment.

Along the way, they met a young girl, a fortune teller, who apparently turned quite the profit for her owners. She would follow Paul around, saying “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

On the surface of it, not the worst thing in the world to say, or to have said about you, someone within the community over and over publicly telling anyone who would hear that what you proclaim is a “way of salvation.”

Except she did it everyday. Every. Single. Day.

You ever hear something so many times, even something that you initially liked, that it became downright insufferable by the end? Could be a song, a good song, but after 100 listens, maybe not so much. Or could be, oh I don’t know, hearing a child say, “Daddy! Daddy!” Now I love it when my kids say “Daddy!” But after 100 times within an hour, asking for something, it gets old, and I don’t so enjoy the sound of it. (Eh, who are we kidding, they’re usually saying “Mom! Mom!”)

I think that’s something of what Paul experienced. This young girl was saying something good on the surface, but she does it every day, presumably making a show of it. Finally, Paul kind of snaps. Tells her off. Orders the “spirit of divination” within to come out, and it does.

Trouble is, there were some people whose wallets just got lighter. So things escalate quickly. They seize Paul and Silas, drag them to the authorities, rile up the whole city against them, flog them and beat them half to death, and have them thrown in prison.

And sitting there in the innermost cell with their feet in the stocks, if I were in Silas’s place, I’d be turning to Paul, saying something like, “Why’d you have to go and mouth off at that girl? Look what happened because of it! We had great momentum. We were doing what we came here to do, but now look at us. Stuck here in this prison, instead of doing Christ’s work out in the city.

And he’d have a point, right? That wasn’t what they came expecting to do. They did have momentum and excitement, and then something went awry; something went wrong. And when things go wrong, there’s an understandable, justifiable reason to get a bit frustrated.

Friends, we’re in a time of a lot of excitement as a church. We’re heading into this big thing together, an embrace of this vision for mission and ministry together. And not just everything with the REACH Campaign, today we are ordaining and installing new officers, all of them excited and called to step into these roles as deacons and elders, as spiritual leaders within our church. And not just everything with our officers, even more broadly,

today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate how the church was and is empowered and sent out by the Holy Spirit. It's exciting stuff. Lots of momentum. Lots to look forward to.

But what are we going to do when, not if, when, something goes wrong? What are we going to do when there's a snag in construction? What are we going to do when there's something unexpected with our mission partnership at Olive Tree? What are we going to do when our officers, as they lead us, encounter something challenging and chart a course forward? What are we going to do when, in following the Spirit's lead, something goes awry, and we're looking at each other, locked in the innermost cell so to speak, with our feet in the stocks? (Metaphorically, to be sure. Let's not equate Paul's flogging and imprisonment with the sort of challenges we're likely to face.) But what are we going to do?

We could do what I surely would do if I were in Silas's place. See it as a setback. See it as a chance to point a finger at Paul, saying "Why'd you have to go and do that?! You messed everything up!" Or, we could do something else.

Precisely when Paul and Silas, out of understandable frustration, could have pointed fingers and lamented everything that they should've been doing but now couldn't, they instead did something else: praying and singing hymns to the Lord. And how did the text end? It said, "the prisoners were listening to them."

My old youth pastor told me of a time he was with a group on a mission trip. I forget where, but they group was working the local ministry in digging clean water cisterns. So on a hot summer day they dig and dig, carving out from the hot, hard clay the place for the cistern foundation to be laid. All of a sudden, someone came up to the group, explaining that they had dug in the wrong place. The cistern had to be over here, about ten feet to the side of the place they had dug the foundation.

And right then would've been right for someone to get frustrated, which would've been understandable, for someone to point a finger and say, "Why didn't you know where we were supposed to dig this thing? We could've dug out almost an entire second foundation by now, but now we've wasted all that time for nothing." That's what I would've wanted to do. That's what, my youth pastor later confessed, he wanted to do. No doubt that was probably what all of the youth on the trip were leaning toward doing.

But before anyone could say anything, one of the leaders from the local ministry hopped out the cistern hole, jumping over to the place the cistern would need to be dug, and exclaimed, "Praise God! What's next?" And everyone else was listening.

Friends, no matter the obstacles or frustrations we might encounter, may we as we follow the Spirit and seek to bear witness to Christ, not see them as setbacks, but rather setups for what God would have us do next.

And you never know who may be listening.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.