

FAITH THAT FLOURISHES

Acts 15.36-16.40

What does it mean to flourish?

Beneath the visions from culture of *true flourishing* lies a common assumption: flourishing = life going our way (*freedom from constraint*).

From the “Sunday” high point of Acts 15.1-35 (gospel unity) to the “Monday” of Acts 15.36-16.40 (conflict, strangers, persecution). By worldly standards, the church is not flourishing.

Walk in faith through everyday spiritual discernment (Acts 15.36-16.10)

Spiritual discernment is more than *mere* “good judgment.” Sinclair Ferguson defines it as “learning to think God’s thoughts after Him.”

First, discernment requires knowing the end (15.36-41; “Mission-Focused”). Right after the Jerusalem Council, an unfortunate irony occurs. Conflict arises between Barnabas and Paul (v. 39).

First principle: true spiritual discernment starts with knowing the end, the mission of life – to know Jesus and make Him known (vv. 39-40).

Second, discernment requires knowing the essentials (16.1-5; “Gospel-Fixed”). Next, we see a second irony. Paul circumcises Timothy right after the council declared circumcision unnecessary (v. 3).

Second principle: Knowing the essentials enables loving flexibility in non-essentials for the mission of Christ (cf. Rom 14.1-12; 1 Cor 8.1-13; 1 Cor 10.23-33).

Third, discernment requires active hearing of God’s Word in community (16.6-10; “Spirit-led in community”). Paul, Silas, Timothy, and now Luke (v. 10) actively sought God’s guidance—they moved forward, and the Spirit directed (v. 9).

Third principle: Discernment happens in community, listening together to God’s Word and applying it (“we sought”, “God had called us”, v. 9).

Walk in faith by engaging real people with the Gospel (16.11-18, 25-34)

In Philippi, the Gospel moves toward people in unexpected places:

Moves toward Lydia (vv. 13-15, “spiritually sensitive”)

Moves toward the slave girl (vv. 16-18, “angrily oppressed”)

Moves toward the Philippian jailer (vv. 25-34; “lost everyman”)

The world's view of flourishing (*living an unconstrained life*) sees people as a means to our own self-interest. No time exists for interruptions. The Gospel sees people not as a *means* but as the end. God saves *through* imperfect people verbally proclaiming the Gospel of *the* Person of Jesus to *real people*.

The question is not so much then, “who do I *want* to evangelize, or think is ready to receive the gospel?” but “who has God placed in my path to love with the gospel?” This requires a ready faith and enduring love.

Walk in faith by joyfully persevering for the sake of the Gospel (16.19-40)

Paul and Silas were beaten, publicly humiliated, and thrown into prison (vv. 22-24). Their response? Joy. They were “praying and singing hymns” (v. 25). When God orchestrates an earthquake, Paul and Silas do not attempt to escape (v. 26). Why? Consider again, what does a flourishing life look like?

Cultural View – “Freedom from restraint... of worldly discomfort”

Ascetic View (self-denial) – “Freedom from restraint... of worldly comfort”

Gospel View – “Freedom from restraint of sin *and* freedom to follow Jesus in any circumstance” (cf. Gal 5.1, 13-14)

True flourishing is dependence on Christ—His life, death, and resurrection. Flourishing is not only what we're freed *from* (sin), but what we're freed *to* do—to love, obey, and trust.

Key Point: Since true flourishing is found in dependence on God, to flourish, we must walk in faith in all of life.

Small Group Application Questions:

What are some common notions of flourishing that you've had or encountered in life?

How do you usually make decisions—big or small? What is the role of godly discernment and how might you practice it?

Who are the “Lydias, slave girls, or jailers” in your life right now? How might you take a step toward them with the Gospel this week?

How do you normally respond when hardship comes—by grit, by escaping, or by trusting? What would it look like for you to find joy and freedom in Christ in the *middle* of trials, not just when they end?