

CALLED TO SERVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 33:1–12

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:11–15, 40; 1 Corinthians 1:26–30

ACTS 16:11–15, 40

11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

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

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26–30

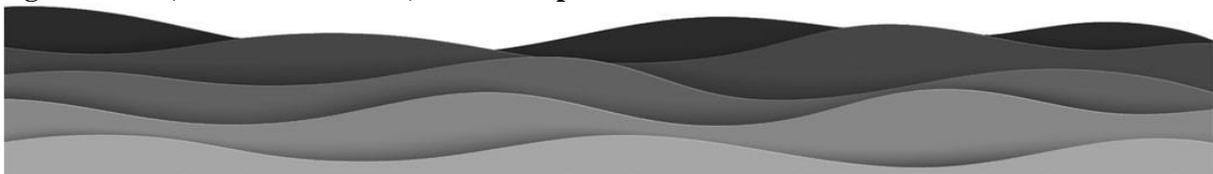
26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.



KEY VERSE

When she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.—**Acts 16:15**

CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT Unit 3: The Call of Women LESSONS 9–13

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify on a map the locations mentioned.
2. Compare and contrast the roles of Paul and Lydia in planting the church in Philippi.
3. Improve in his or her best area of service in categories of inreach, outreach, and u reach.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Career and Hospitality
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Entry to Europe (Acts 16:11–15, 40)
 - A. Philippi (vv. 11–12)
 - B. The Prayer Meeting (v. 13)
 - C. Lydia's House (vv. 14–15, 40)
Humble Hospitality Builds Churches
- II. Correction to Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:26–30)
 - A. Calling the Ordinary (v. 26)
 - B. Confounding the Wise (vv. 27–29) *All Things Are Possible*
 - C. Inclusion in Christ (v. 30)

Conclusion

- A. Serving as God Desires
- B. Glorifying in the Cross
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember **HOW TO SAY IT**

Aegean	<i>A-jee-un.</i>
Corinth	<i>Kor-inth.</i>
Corinthians	<i>Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).</i>
Derbe	<i>Der-be.</i>
Galatians	<i>Guh-lay-shunz.</i>
Gentile	<i>Jen-tile.</i>
Iconium	<i>Eye-ko-nee-um.</i>
Macedonia	<i>Mass-eh-doe-nee-uh.</i>
Neapolis	<i>Nee-ap-o-lis.</i>
omnipotent	<i>ahm-nih-poh-tent.</i>
omniscient	<i>ahm-nish-unt.</i>
Philippi	<i>Fih-lip-pie or Fil-ih-pie.</i>
Samothracia	<i>Sam-o-thray-shuh.</i>
Silas	<i>Sigh-luss.</i>
Thyatira	<i>Thy-uh-tie-ruh (th as in thin).</i>
Troas	<i>Tro-az.</i>

Introduction

A. Career and Hospitality

Hospitality can make careers. Dolley Madison (1768–1849), wife of US president James Madison, was a great political asset in her husband’s career. James certainly had merit as a great writer and political mind, being called today the Father of the Constitution. But he was a shy man, not given to promoting his own interests.

After they wed, Dolley’s parties made people feel welcome and turned guests into political supporters. As the First Lady, Dolley largely shaped what it meant to hold that position in terms of hospitality and volunteerism.

Deidre Mathis’s hospitality career began when she was a world traveler on a tight budget. She would stay in hostels to save money. Deidre’s experiences of bonding with other women travelers inspired her to open her own hostel in downtown Houston. Her hostel combines her love of connecting with people with her passion for business. Hospitality made her welcome around the world; now she welcomes the world to Houston.

Going the other direction, we might say that careers can fund hospitality as well. This direction is the focus of an individual in today’s lesson.

B. Lesson Context

Paul and his companions began their second missionary journey around AD 52. It began with revisits to some of the cities Paul had visited on the first journey. These included Derbe, Lystra, and (perhaps) Iconium ([Acts 16:1–2](#)).

From there they headed west to Troas. While in Troas, Paul had a vision of a “man of Macedonia” who entreated him to come over to Macedonia and help ([Acts 16:9](#)). The vision served as a warrant for Paul to cross the Aegean Sea and enter Europe with the gospel—his first time to do so. Paul’s initial visits to the cities of Philippi and Corinth both occurred during this trip.

The city of Philippi sat in a commanding position on the fertile plain of the Gangites River, surrounded by mountains on three sides. Its site is in the northeast quadrant of modern Greece. About 400 years old when visited by Paul, Philippi was a major Macedonian city. Philippi’s name comes from King Philip II of Macedon, who conquered the city in 356 BC and renamed it for himself.

That was one of the first steps in Philip’s domination of the entire Greek peninsula. It set the stage for his successor and son, Alexander the Great, to march east and conquer territories all the way to India. The gold mines for which the city of Philippi was known provided great wealth for both leaders to fund their military campaigns. But the apostle Paul was in search of gold of a different kind, and he found it.

I. Entry to Europe **(ACTS 16:11–15, 40)**

A. Philippi (vv. 11–12)

11. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis.

Troas was a major seaport on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea. There Paul, Silas, and others were joined by Luke, for the “they” of [Acts 16:8](#) changes to “we” in [16:10](#). These missionaries boarded a ship for Macedonia, going by way of the small island-city of *Samothracia* to the western Aegean port city *Neapolis*. From Troas to Neapolis was about 150 miles, which they sailed in two days.

12. And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

Neapolis served as a seaport to the important city of *Philippi* (see [Lesson Context](#)). The journey between the two cities was about nine miles. In 168 BC, the city became a Roman *colony*, a place where veteran soldiers could retire and receive a tract of land to farm. Philippi was the easternmost point on the Via Egnatia, the great Roman highway of about 535 miles in length, that crossed the Greek peninsula. Philippi appeared to be a good city for the missionaries’ task, for they decided to stay *certain days*.

B. The Prayer Meeting (v. 13)

13. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

Paul’s usual strategy was to visit the city’s synagogue *on the sabbath* to teach fellow Jews about Jesus (example: [Acts 13:14b–15, 26–42](#)). Tradition required that a community have 10 married Jewish men to have a synagogue, but that number seems to have been unavailable in this overwhelmingly Gentile city.

Instead, a group met outside the city gates *by a river side*. This place could have been by the Gangites River, about a mile west of town, but this is uncertain. A place *where prayer was wont to be made* is a way

of describing any synagogue. Since there was no synagogue there, the phrase suggests that those who gathered intended their meetings to be similar to those that occurred in synagogues.

What Do You Think?

How would you characterize your ideal place to pray?

Digging Deeper

For you personally, how does the issue of *where* to pray interact with the issue of *how* to pray?

This prayer group seems to have consisted solely of *women*. In addition to that demographic, Paul would have encountered them in terms of one of three religious persuasions: as Jews, as proselytes (converts to Judaism; see [Acts 13:43](#)), or as God-fearing Gentiles who had not converted to Judaism ([10:2, 22](#)).

The third category is most likely, given the nature of the city of Philippi. Paul's willingness to minister to a group of Gentile women echoed Jesus' own ministry at Jacob's well ([John 4:1–42](#); see lesson [10](#)).

C. Lydia's House (vv. [14–15, 40](#))

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

Interestingly, the *certain woman named Lydia* bears the ancient name of the Kingdom of Lydia, which existed 1200–546 BC. It encompassed roughly the western half of the modern country of Turkey. So the woman Lydia was named after the area within which her town of *Thyatira* was located — an area from which Paul had just come, after having received a vision in which a “man of Macedonia” had invited him to come over ([Acts 16:9](#))! There is a certain irony in all this.

In Paul's day, Thyatira was the chief source of dyed fabric. The woman Lydia specialized in *purple* fabric. This particular work was difficult but profitable for those with skill. To sell purple cloth was to deal in luxury items, so it is likely that Lydia had prosperous business connections in her hometown and sold products in far-flung cities like Philippi.

Like the Gentile Cornelius ([Acts 10](#)), Lydia *worshipped God* and may have been drawn to the Jewish faith without converting to it (contrast [13:43](#)). Many barriers existed against full inclusion with the Jewish people. But Luke regularly recognized the faithfulness of those people who, like Lydia, worshipped and feared God ([13:16, 26](#)) or were otherwise “devout” ([10:2](#)). As Paul encountered such a one here, so he would again ([17:4, 17](#)).

Surely Lydia's prior worship of God had prepared her heart to hear Paul's message. *The Lord*, not Paul or his rhetoric, then *opened* her *heart* to Paul's presentation of the gospel. God had gone before His missionary, and God will continue after His missionary finishes. As Paul will later write to the Corinthians, one person might plant a seed and another might water, “but God [gives] the increase” ([1 Corinthians 3:6](#)).

15. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Lydia responded to Paul's message with faith. We can imagine that Lydia *and her household* were *baptized* right there at the river without delay. (The importance of baptism is seen in [Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3–5; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12–13; Titus 3:5](#); etc.).

As an outflowing of gratitude to God for accepting her into His family, Lydia invited Paul and his companions to her *house* to stay for a while. Asking the men to judge whether she was *faithful to the Lord* reveals that this was also a test. Would the Jewish men visit the home of a Gentile woman? How included in God's kingdom was she *really*? By insisting that the missionaries join her, Lydia revealed her own conviction that she and all her household were now entirely acceptable to the Lord. Nothing was lacking in her salvation.

Given Lydia's vocation, we receive the impression that hers was a generous home, both in physical size and in hospitality.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways you can help provide and promote a ministry of hospitality?

Digging Deeper

What imperatives and boundaries do [Acts 28:7; Romans 12:13; 16:23; 1 Timothy 5:10; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9; 2 John 9–11; and 3 John 8](#) establish in this regard?

40. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

While in Philippi, Paul and Silas were arrested for casting a spirit of divination out of a fortune-telling slave girl ([Acts 16:16–24](#)). Following the conversion of their guard and release from *prison* ([16:25–39](#)), Paul and Silas returned to *the house of Lydia*. The unjust treatment of the missionaries was traumatic for them and the new congregation. This became a time for all to be *comforted*.

Lydia's home in Philippi surely became the initial meeting place for this group of believers. However, the book of Philippians, written a decade or so later, contains no reference to Lydia. We can only surmise that she was no longer in Philippi, perhaps having moved to Thyatira or elsewhere — maybe even having passed away. Her legacy of hospitality, service, and faithfulness endured in this church, however, as Paul celebrated the partnership those of the church had maintained “from the first day until now” ([Philippians 1:5](#)).

HUMBLE HOSPITALITY BUILDS CHURCHES

Elijah A. Frost organized a church in Cassville, Missouri, in 1885. The church met on Elijah's front porch. Frost wasn't a preacher, but he knew how to pray. He loved Jesus, the Word of God, and his neighbors.

His great hospitality invited others to learn and grow with him. These few dedicated Christians — praying in Christ's name, praising God through spiritual songs, and trusting in God's holy Word — turned a humble porch into a sanctuary.

Similarly, Lydia met with a few women at the river. Out of her humble prayer group would spring the greatest church in all of Asia Minor. The fledgling church began with women. The church grew in large part thanks to Lydia's hospitality.

Our churches are going to grow in the same way. How can your humble home and godly hospitality bless the church as Brother Frost and Lydia did?

—C. T.

What Do You Think?

In our era of ready access to restaurants and hotels, what emphasis should you and your church place on in-home hospitality? Why?

Digging Deeper

In what ways does a need for short-term versus long-term hospitality change your answer, if at all? Why?

II. Correction to Corinth
(1 CORINTHIANS 1:26–30)

A. Calling the Ordinary (v. 26)

26. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

Paul had planted the church in Corinth in about AD 52. Now, in about AD 56, he writes a letter to that church while ministering in Ephesus. The letter is in response to troubling reports of factions and disunity ([1 Corinthians 1:11](#)).

Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians of what they had been before coming to Christ. Their church did not begin with leaders who had great educations, widespread social influence, or distinguished families. Doubly, Paul may have wanted to remind the Corinthians that their (mostly) Gentile backgrounds had prevented them from attaining any standing among God's people before.

Regarding being *wise ... after the flesh*, Paul was well acquainted with the dangers there. He himself was able to quote Greek philosophers and scholars (see [1 Corinthians 15:33](#); [Titus 1:12](#); [Acts 17:24–29](#)) while recognizing the overall defects in philosophies not grounded in Scripture ([1 Corinthians 1:20](#); [2:1–5](#); [Colossians 2:8](#)).

What Do You Think?

Without giving directive advice, how would you counsel an unbeliever who was prideful of his or her status in life?

Digging Deeper

Under what circumstances would you and would you not use Scripture as part of your discussion (contrast [Acts 17:10–12](#) with [17:16–34](#))?

B. Confounding the Wise (vv. 27–29)

27. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.

Paul sees the great irony in all of this. All human wisdom and power are finite things and miniscule when compared to the power and wisdom of God. God is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing) in ways humans barely begin to understand.



Visual for Lesson 13. Point to this visual as a way to introduce the discussion question in the bottom of the left column of page 221.

But God does not often choose to dazzle people into belief by displays of might and intelligence. God prefers to use *the foolish* and *the weak things of the world* to communicate His loving concern and His plan for humankind (see [1 Corinthians 1:28](#), below). In so doing, God is able to *confound* the world's expectations. In [1 Corinthians 1:23](#), Paul referred to the crucifixion of Christ as a “stumbling block.” Christ's atoning death on the cross was scandalous, not what the Jews expected from their Messiah (compare [Galatians 3:13–14](#)).

We are reminded of Peter, who, when told that Jesus would accomplish the Father's will by Jesus' humiliation, suffering, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem, exclaimed, “Be it far from thee, Lord” ([Matthew 16:22](#)). Peter did not expect the Messiah to bring victory through death.

28. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.

The word translated *base* is the antonym of the word for “noble” in [1 Corinthians 1:26](#) — literally, “ignoble.” In the Roman world, there was nothing more ignoble than a cross, the torture-execution for the worst criminals. It was especially problematic to Jews because of the curse of hanging on a tree ([Deuteronomy 21:23](#)).

Christians today see the cross as a comforting and victorious symbol. Churches display it. We wear it on necklaces and other jewelry. We even tattoo it on our bodies. Not so in Paul’s day. The cross was shameful; nothing could be more despised among polite society. But God does not play by society’s rules or expectations. A Christian seeing a cross in the first century would be struck by the completely unexpected and humbling circumstances of Jesus’ sacrifice. What is scandalous for us may be glorious for God.

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

My 7-year-old grandson Alex: “I’m hungry!”

My daughter, Sarah: “That’s impossible! You just ate lunch!”

Alex: “Mom, all things are possible with God. You might want to jot that down!”

My grandson is absorbing some important truths in his Sunday school class! While a silly example, his words are a great reminder that all things really *are* possible with God.

Lydia’s story seems impossible. A man invited Paul to come to Macedonia ([Acts 16:9](#)), but Paul didn’t find a man. He found Lydia, an independent, apparently single, wealthy woman. She was already the leader of a women’s prayer group. She became a charter member of what would become one of the most influential churches in the area. Again, we think, “Impossible!”

Indeed, “with God, all things are possible” ([Mark 10:27](#)). What impossible task is God calling you to undertake for Him?

—C. T.

29. That no flesh should glory in his presence.

God’s upside-down plan ensures that no one can claim credit for their own salvation. *No flesh* would think of the plan God enacted as the solution to human sinfulness. The paradoxical nature of the gospel does not allow for anyone to receive self-created *glory* in God’s *presence*.

Paul’s example is instructive. His miracles did not speak to his own power, but to God’s ([1 Corinthians 2:4–5](#)). And his preaching of the gospel was persuasive not because of his own eloquence. The Corinthians prided themselves as discerning, intelligent people—they could be impressed by a well-reasoned speech of no substance. But Paul had instead presented a message of the utmost importance. The truth of the gospel, not human skill, had convinced the Corinthian Christians.

C. Inclusion in Christ (v. 30)

30. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

God’s *wisdom*, unlike the world’s, finds fulfillment *in Christ Jesus*. *Righteousness* invokes a legal term that means even though we are guilty of our sins, “no penalty” is the sentence. The prophets often took this word further, defining it not in terms of a lack of wrong actions but as the presence of right actions (examples: [Isaiah 33:15](#); [Ezekiel 3:20–21](#); [Hosea 10:12](#)).

The Holy Spirit works *sanctification* in us, teaching us to identify sin and empowering us to overcome it ([Galatians 5:13–21](#)) and produce the fruit of the Spirit ([5:22–26](#)). This allows us to live holy lives that would be impossible without God’s power ([Romans 8:1–16](#)).

Redemption is a term associated with being freed from slavery. In the Roman Empire, a slave could purchase his or her own freedom. But sinners have no way to pay for our own freedom. We have not only been bought by the blood of Jesus—we have been set free from our slavery to sin ([Romans 6:17](#)). Instead we serve righteousness ([6:18](#)).

Put together, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption describe the reality of being in Christ ([Ephesians 1:11](#)). Through the cross God has made a way for us to be restored to fellowship with Him. This is our salvation in Jesus Christ.

What Do You Think?

What are some practical ways for you to live more fully as a witness that you have righteousness, sanctification (holiness), and redemption in Christ?

Digging Deeper

What specific, personal weakness in this regard does [1 Corinthians 1:31](#) challenge you on?
What other passages apply?

Conclusion

A. Serving as God Desires

Our last four weeks have explored the examples of Anna, the prophetess daughters of Philip, the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene, and Priscilla. In Lydia’s case, she made use of her status and wealth to serve God. Her influence brought her household to Christ and had a ripple effect in Philippi. Her prosperous business allowed her to host Paul and his companions in her house, as well as the church that would grow from their efforts. These efforts were not accomplished for the glory of Lydia or Paul. Both sought only to follow Christ and lead others to Him.

We might summarize the accounts from this unit and say that each woman served where God gave her opportunity and gifting. The same holds true today. When a woman senses God’s calling on her to use her job, her social connections, and/or the spiritual gifts He gave her for His glory, she can and will find a way to serve. While the same is true for men, the nature of women’s ministries has often been less visible and sometimes considered less critical in spreading the gospel.

B. Glorifying in the Cross

As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, God chose the cross to show His wisdom instead of using what was already honored and revered in *any* human society. And the foolishness of the world became the wisdom of God. God still uses people following the way of the cross to show His wisdom to the world. Let us all continue to seek His wisdom and remain open to other “foolish” things God may choose in place of the “wise.” In this way, we seek only God’s glory.

C. Prayer

Lord God, all Christians need places to serve! May we answer You as You call us to the right place at the right time and gift us in the right way to do Your will. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Seek the wisdom of the cross. Serve in its shadow.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Option. Before class begins, place on chairs copies of the “Places of Transition” word-search puzzle. Learners can begin working on this as they arrive.

Begin with a one-minute individual exercise as you distribute slips of paper (you prepare) on which you have printed the following question:

By yourself, estimate how many total ‘person hours’ it took to edit and fit the copy of the lesson we’re now studying. Make your estimate for the teacher guide only, not for the student book. Don’t include time for proofreading, contract management, visuals, etc.

After the minute is up, call for responses and jot them on the board. After each response, ask, “What is your basis for that estimate?” (Expect that most will be in the category of wild guesses.)

Then inform learners that you are going to work together to prepare a more precise estimate. Ask each learner to give an estimate for each lesson’s elements individually: (1) the discussion questions in the five boxes, (2) the two verbal illustrations together (segments headed with ✎), (3) the verse by verse commentary itself, and (4) this Involvement Learning page. After getting a tally for a section, compute the average. Then add all tallies together for the overall average. (*Actual averages* for the four sections in a single lesson are 2.9, 1.5, 12.4, and 1.9 hours respectively—a total of 18.7 hours.)

Regardless of the final tally, ask your learners about their levels of confidence during the two tries: Was it better to work as a team or individually? Why? Use responses to lead into today’s lesson on partnerships in teamwork.

Into the Word

Summarize the Lesson Context. Then ask a volunteer to read [Acts 16:11–15, 40](#). Distribute handouts (you prepare) with the following task (same task for all groups): *Compare and contrast the roles of Paul and Lydia in planting the church in Philippi. [Compare means how they were similar; contrast means how they were different.]*

Call time after a few minutes for whole-class discussion of discoveries.

Read [1 Corinthians 1:26–30](#) to the class. Share with students a hand drawn picture of yourself that depicts who you were before Jesus. Give a perspective on how your relationship with Jesus has changed you. Allow a minute for learners to sketch their own “before” and “after” self-portraits.

Discuss results. Reread [1 Corinthians 1:26–30](#) without commenting; just let the text speak for itself.

Into Life

Divide the class in half. Have one of the halves brainstorm all the types of gatherings that happen at the church building. Instruct the other half to brainstorm all types of gatherings that could occur in homes.

After five minutes, have each group share its list. Then create a table on the board with three columns intersected by three rows. Label the columns *Inreach Events* / *Upreach Events* / *Outreach Events* (one label per column). Label the three intersecting rows as follows: *Better in Homes* / *Better at the Church Building* / *OK at Either* (one label per row).

Using the lists from both groups, as well as further discussion, have the class help you fill out the chart. *Teacher Tip:* If anyone asks what *inreach*, *upreach*, and *outreach events* are, don't answer. Instead, turn the question over to the class to answer—force them to think. Provide these responses as a last resort: *inreach* deals with teaching fellow Christians for greater spiritual maturity, bearing one another's burdens, etc.; *upreach* deals with worship and prayer; *outreach* concerns evangelism and benevolence. *Option.* Distribute copies of the “Church Planting” exercise on the activity page as a take-home for private reflection.

ACTIVITY PAGE

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