

Happy Mother's Day! I found a little story which seems fitting for today...

My husband and I had been happily married (most of the time) for five years when God blessed us with a son. The next year God blessed us with another son. Then we were blessed with a daughter. My husband thought we'd been blessed right into poverty. I was delighted (most of the time) to be a Mom.

I tried to be a patient Mom the day the children smashed two dozen eggs on the kitchen floor searching for baby chicks.

I tried to be understanding when they started a hotel for homeless frogs in the spare bedroom.

When my daughter poured ketchup all over herself and rolled up in a blanket to see how it felt to be a hot dog, I tried to see the humor rather than the mess.

In spite of changing over twenty thousand diapers, never eating a hot meal and never sleeping for more than thirty minutes at a time, I still thank God daily for my children.

"My children are my pride and my joy and my greatest blessing," I say as I dig through my purse looking for an aspirin.

We pray that if your Mom is still with you in this life, that you might have a great day celebrating with her. And if your Mom has gone home to be with the Lord, then may God bless your memories. Happy Mother's Day.

Let us pray: Lord, bless our time as we look at the story of Lydia. Help us to see how you were in the center of this Bible story. Help us to see how you are in the midst of our lives today. Amen.

This is a good day to think about what we are grateful for. I want to remind us of what we can be thankful for to God through looking at the Bible story of Lydia.

Lydia. What a wonderful name. But not too popular. In the United States in the last 100 years "Lydia" has never ranked higher in girl's name popularity than number 75. It is not a most fashionable girl's name like Emily, which ranks up near number 1 every year.

Lydia is a more unique name with a class and style all its own. We have one “Lydia” in our congregation. She is a junior at Oak Grove High School. She has class and style.

I contacted our “Lydia” to see if she could read today’s lesson about the Bible’s “Lydia.” But unfortunately our Oak Grove “Lydia” had another commitment this morning. Wouldn’t that have been great, though? Lydia reading about Lydia?!

The name Lydia is Greek and it means offspring. This is fitting because you need to know these things about Lydia:

- Lydia was the first recorded Gentile convert in Europe. This is pretty significant! There have been millions and millions and millions of European believers since her, but she was the first European we know of who bent the knee to Jesus.
- Lydia was the charter member for the Philippian church. This is pretty significant as well! Paul called the church at Philippi his crown. He loved this church. And the very first member was Lydia.

So it is appropriate that the first named European Christian and the charter member the European church should be named *Offspring*. She was the first of many who came after her professing faith in Jesus.

Now, before we look at Lydia’s story in the Bible, I want to ask: what things need to come together this week for us to grow in faith?

In the Bible story of Lydia we see the things that come together for Lydia. What needs to come together in our lives?

- *God needs to be working in our life.*

Now, the good news is this: God is working in our lives. This is not at all dependent on us. God works where God wants to work.

God owns the whole world – “*the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof*” – and if God wants to work in your backyard – or in your heart – then God will do that.

God chooses to work in our lives. We are like a diamond in the ruff: hard and coarse and dirty. God is like a Master Jeweler...

A well-known pastor from many decades ago – Charles Spurgeon – tells of visiting the city of Amsterdam and the diamond district. He writes:

“I must confess that it seemed odd that all that great array of apparatus should be brought to bear upon a tiny bit of crystal. Was that diamond worth so much that a whole factory should be set to work to cut its facets, and cause it to sparkle? So the diamond cutter believed...”¹

Know that in God’s eye you are worth it. You are a diamond that should be given the chance to sparkle. You are a person who is worth the blood of the Father’s Son. You are worthy of the Father’s tears when you fall or fail. He loves you.

So God is working today for us:

- Working to make us family members.
 - Working to make us holy.
 - Working to make our life rich in significance.
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Here is what God was doing in Lydia’s life:

- God brought Paul to the city of Philippi.
- God brought Lydia to the city of Philippi.

In large and small ways God works in our lives every week. We cannot always see what God is up to, but God is always up to something. So first: we are grateful for God working in our lives.

What else needs to come together in our lives?

■ *We need to open our life to God.*

The story of Lydia is the story of someone who invites God to work in her life. Look at the things Lydia was doing on the day her life changed:

1. Lydia was giving God time.

Time is often considered something we own and fully control. It is: my time. We might fill up every moment of my time with my things: my plans, my pet projects, my interests, my hobbies.

Remember this commandment: “Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy.” It is God’s time. Lydia’s example is in giving God some time to work in her.

2. Lydia was giving God a place.

Lydia and others had gone outside the city gates to pray. They were a small group who believed in the God of the OT. Since they were so small they had no building to worship in; no synagogue or Temple.

So Lydia on that Sabbath morning went outside the city walls to pray by a riverbank. She stepped away from all other distractions to give God space to work. Which is what we are doing this morning.

Giving God time and place in my life:

- there are times when I attend church, but do not worship;
 - when I say the confession, without confessing;
 - when I proclaim the creed, without expressing faith
 - when I hear the Word of God, without hearing God speak to me;
 - When I pray, without opening my heart to my Lord.
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Do you know what I mean? Jesus described me when he said one day: *“For they look, but they don’t really see. They hear, but they don’t really listen or understand.”*
[Matthew 13:13]

The second thing we need for things to come together is to be open to God’s work. Lydia is an example for us of that truth. And we thank God that he allows us to open our time and our space to his presence.

What else, from the story of Lydia, needs to come together in our lives?

- *We need to respond to the presence of God.*

I once made a terrible relationship mistake. It happened years ago, but it still comes to my mind on occasion. It concerns not responding to a friend.

I graduated from high school with a good friend named Kevin. Through 12 years of school we shared many things. As so often happens after graduation, we each went our own way and lost touch.

Six years after high school I was driving by the University of Minnesota campus – through Dinkytown, for those who know the area.

At a red light, a crowd of people crossed the intersection in front of my car. Kevin was in that crowd! I yelled at him, he saw me... We shouted that shout of amazement at having not seen each other for years.

The light turned, and with a hundred cars behind me honking off I went. I went on to the next thing on my agenda. I never gave that encounter another thought, until a couple years later.

I saw Kevin again at the funeral for a classmate. In the midst of the sadness of our friend’s death, it was like a class reunion. We all visited – except Kevin and I. Every time I approached Kevin he would turn his back. He would have nothing to do with me. I tried several times, but I could not approach him.

Later from another classmate I found out why. On that day we saw each other in Dinkytown, Kevin thought I was going around the block to park and would return so we could catch up on old times. That was what friends do.

He waited and waited. We had much in common. Surely it meant something that we had come together again after all those years. Surely, he thought, I would take the time to come back and connect. But I never came back... That was my mistake. I never came back...

This week God will be in our life. But sometimes we are so busy with the next thing on our agenda that we ignore our meeting times with Jesus; our working times with Jesus.

Unlike my high school friend, Jesus will never turn his back on us. He will always extend an invitation to come to him and respond.

That is what Lydia did. The Bible says, *"The Lord opened Lydia's heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She was baptized along with other members of her household, and she asked us to be her guests."* [Acts 16:14-15]

Lydia shows us what needs to come together for us to grow.

- God needs to begin and end the work.
- We need to open our lives by giving time and space to God.
- We are called to respond what God does.

May God bless your tomatoes as they grow this week. May God bless your life as your grow this week. Amen.

¹ Spurgeon Sermon, "Lydia, the First European Convert." September 20, 1891.