



Toward Bold Faithfulness



A Journey
Toward **Bold Faithfulness**

Acts 16:6-10

YOUTH BIBLE STUDY

This resource serves as a template for a Bible study to join the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as we seek a bold call for our fellowship. Larger youth groups that separate middle school and high school students for discussion may want to consider adjusting the questions for the middle school age group.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Review CBF's Toward Bold Faithfulness initiative online at www.cbf.net/tbf.
2. Go to www.cbf.net to read more about CBF and its values, purpose and attributes.
3. Familiarize yourself with Acts 16:6-10 and read the commentary included with this study.
4. Provide Bibles or print a copy of Acts 16:6-10 for each person in your group.
5. Create a poster or write on a large whiteboard the words "Toward Bold Faithfulness." Be sure to leave space for writing underneath each word.
6. Gather markers or other utensils for writing, as well as paper.

COMMENTARY

The following commentary provides background for the passage in Acts. Use this information to guide you in your preparation and leadership of your group.

Acts 16:6-10 is a remarkably succinct narrative that describes a transformation journey in the mission of the early church—nothing less than a journey toward an unimaginably bold faithfulness. At the end of this text, Paul and his companions have set out on what will become a remarkable expansion of the reach of the early church.

It is easy to rush to the end of the journey, because the writer of Acts uses such a remarkable scarcity of words. But we must not do so. Instead, we must notice that the journey described in Acts 16 immediately follows a season of intense theological controversy in the life of the early church. Acts 10-15 narrate the church's intense struggle with the question of whether Gentiles could become Christians without first becoming Jews. A difficult debate arose, in which believers appealed to Scripture, tradition and personal testimony to support vastly different positions. Finally, a gathering in Jerusalem produced enough of a resolution that the church's mission could continue even as early Christians held differing perspectives on these tense questions. Paul's letters, particularly Galatians, offer clear evidence that even after the so-called Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) debates and discussions continued about this matter among early Christians.

But Paul's journey doesn't only arise during intense theological controversy. It also followed a difficult personal conflict that led to a painful separation among church leaders. Barnabas and Paul had traveled together on the first missionary journey. Not only that, Barnabas had been Paul's mentor and sponsor both in Jerusalem and Antioch. But Acts tells us that Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement about John Mark. Paul took offense at actions of John Mark and didn't want him to continue in the missionary work. Barnabas disagreed, and the conflict was so intense that Barnabas and Paul went different ways. So, as Acts 16 begins, Paul is recruiting new leadership, building new collaborations and trying to find his way without his most constant mentor in faith.

We should also be reminded that Paul's entire ministry plays out in a time when there are no cultural or political supports for the work of the early church. The Roman Empire and Jewish authorities are committed to other religious beliefs, and either do not understand Christianity at all or view it as an obscure or laughable religious minority. Paul cannot count on any cultural prominence or political support for his work. If anything, when he left his Pharisaic past, he left all of that behind.

So, we must notice that Paul begins this journey in Acts 16 in a cultural context that is not receptive, still in a season of theological controversy and reeling from a difficult personality conflict that led to a significant leadership transition.

Paul's journey begins in an uncertain and difficult moment. The narrative of Acts 16:6-10 moves so quickly that we miss the length of this journey. Depending on the route, the journey from Phrygia to Troas is more than 1,000 miles on foot. In the course of these verses, Paul makes attempts first to return to places he has been before (Galatia), but doors once open are now closed. Notice the painful language: "they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit." "The Spirit of Jesus did not allow them." They had to "pass by" so many places. We can only imagine that the farther he went without a clear sense of direction, the more fragile and uncertain the journey with new companions must have felt. This is a journey filled with slammed doors and experiences of vulnerability. Eventually it brings Paul to Troas, which is a port city, and in many ways, it must have seemed like the end of the road.

ENGAGING THE TEXT | BIBLICAL CONNECTION (15 minutes)

Prayer Experience

Use this prayer experience as a means to invite the Holy Spirit to join you as you consider how God would call you, your congregation and your community to move toward bold faithfulness. Before this experience, be sure each person has a Bible or create and print handouts of the passage before your gathering.

Begin by sharing the following paragraphs with the group:

Following the birth of Jesus, we enter the new year as Christians with aspirations of hope and joy. Often, we set goals during the new year. These could include goals to exercise more, eat healthier, spend more time with friends and family, participate in community service projects, and the list goes on. When we set new year's resolutions, the goals come from within.

We are a group of believers seeking a bold call for our community together. Calling is discovered in community. We discover calling by listening generously, speaking honestly and seeking faithfully. We discover calling when we invite God to join us in our space.

We will read our passage in Acts, but we are going to do it using an ancient practice of the Church called *Lectio Divina* or divine reading. We will encounter the passage three different times, and I will instruct you before each reading. Listen to the passage, and use these next few moments to give space to God to speak to you and to us.

1st Reading – Invite the group to sit in a comfortable position, uncrossing their arms and legs. Invite them to close their eyes and let go of any distractions. Invite the group to take three deep breaths (breathing in for a 1-2-3 count, holding for 1-2-3, and exhaling for a 1-2-3 count). After the breathing exercise, ask the group to listen generously.

Say: For the first reading, listen generously to the text. What sticks out? Is it a word or a phrase? How does this text speak to you in this moment? Hear these Words: (read text)

2nd Reading – After about one minute of silence, ask the group to open their Bibles to Acts 16:6-10 or give each person a handout of the Scripture.

Say: We will listen to the passage read a second time. This time I invite you to follow along as we listen. How do you hear the passage this time? Perhaps a different word or phrase catches your attention. As you follow along, underline or write down the word or phrase that speaks to you. Hear these words: (read text)

After reading, pause for 15-30 seconds, then ask for a few volunteers to share the word or phrase that speaks to them. Ask them to only share the word rather than offer any explanation.

3rd Reading – After the group members have shared their responses, invite them to once again sit in a comfortable position and close their eyes.

Say: We will listen to the text read a third and final time. After listening to the passage, get in groups of two or three. Share the word or phrase that speaks to you (it can be the same one or a different one). What about the word or phrase caught your attention? What might that signal to you as you listen for God's call in your life? Here these words: (read text)

After a time of sharing in their small groups, interrupt them and ask that they quietly pray for one another in their groups. Once everyone is finished praying, offer a spoken prayer thanking God for speaking to the group through Scripture. Ask God to help each person listen to God's call on their lives and to use their unique gifts in response.

TRANSITION TO DISCUSSION OF BOLD FAITH (25 minutes)

Part 1 (10 Minutes)

Say: There are many ways to describe Paul's response in the Acts 16 passage. After receiving the vision of the man in Macedonia pleading, Paul is convinced and immediately sets a new path toward an unknown future. His response can be described as risky, as courageous, as bold. Paul's actions lead to the expansion of the church in Europe. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a global organization that is composed of churches like ours to walk alongside and help support other churches and God's ministry around the world, is seeking a similar call from God. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, or CBF for short, has invited us to walk alongside it and discover our own calling as individuals and as a group.

The name of the CBF discovery initiative is Toward Bold Faithfulness. On the board you will see each word written with space underneath. We will divide into three groups and each group will be assigned one of the words. Each group will work with their word and come up with synonyms or words that remind you of "Toward," "Bold," or "Faithfulness."

Consider how you would define your word and explain its meaning to someone else. We will come back together and share our responses.

Allow about five minutes for the groups to work or until each group seems finished. Call the group back together asking each to share their responses. Questions you may ask: What stands out to you? Look at the synonyms for "bold," ask what is bold faith?

Ask: Can you think of other stories in the Bible that could be described as bold (insert other synonyms that the group named)?

List the Bible stories on large paper or on the board.

Part 2 (15 Minutes)

Hand out paper to write on. Ask these two questions for the group to answer as individuals.

1. Define “bold faith” in your own words.
2. Where have you experienced bold faith? (Maybe it is someone you know or have met. Perhaps it was an experience on a mission trip or at camp.)

Allow about five minutes for the individuals to work. Call the group back together and ask for a few people to share their definitions of bold faith. Then ask for people to share their experiences of bold faith. Allow for one to four examples.

Ask: Considering our definitions of bold faith, what would have to be true for our youth group to live out a bold faith? What would we have to do, and how would we have to live to embody bold faith?

Pray (5 minutes)

Conclude your time together as a group with prayer. If it is your group’s practice to share concerns, do so at this time. Then offer the following prayer:

God, you have called each of us into being. You have called us to be partners in this world. And you have called our church and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to share in this work as well. Give us the willingness to seek the Holy Spirit as we continually discover what you would have us to be and would have us to do. Give us the courage to follow you with bold faith. Thank you for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, for our church, for the community we serve, and for the life you have given to us. In the bold name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.