

THE WAY, SESSION 11

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

The Acts of the Apostles 16:1-17:34, Europe, the Household of God, and the Unknown God of Athens

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants watch the Spirit steer the Gospel onto a new continent by closing doors and sending a dream, and then meet the first European converts: a businesswoman whose heart the Lord opened, and a jailer who asks the most important question in the world and receives the full apostolic answer, faith, baptism, and his whole household with him. In Athens, they discover how the Church speaks to a culture that does not know her Scriptures: by finding the altars it has already built to the God it does not know.

Catholic Touchstone. The household of faith and the baptism of households. Three times in these chapters and their neighborhood, whole houses enter the Church together: Lydia "was baptized, with her household" (16:15); the jailer "was baptized at once, with all his family" (16:33); Crispus believed "together with all his household" (18:8). The Catechism points to exactly these texts when it teaches that infants may well have been baptized from the beginning (CCC 1252), because the covenant God has always dealt in households: the promise at Pentecost was "to you and to your children" (2:39), and Israel's male infants received the covenant sign at eight days old, carried in by the household they were born to (Genesis 17:9-14). Prepare the steelman; the credobaptist reading is serious and deserves its full strength.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 16 opens with two navigational surprises. First, Timothy: Paul, fresh from the council that freed Gentiles from circumcision, has Timothy circumcised (16:3), because his mother was Jewish and, in Luke's own words, because of the Jews in those places; an uncircumcised son of a Jewish mother would in all likelihood have found synagogue doors closed to him on the mission; while in Galatians Paul refuses to circumcise Titus, a pure Gentile, on principle (Galatians 2:3-5). Same apostle, opposite decisions, one distinction: where circumcision was demanded as necessary for salvation, Paul would not yield an inch; where it merely removed an obstacle to mission, he yielded freely. The Dig Deeper covers it; it is a masterclass in the difference between principle and pastoral strategy.

Second, the closed doors: forbidden by the Spirit to speak in Asia, not allowed into Bithynia (16:6-7), the mission is funneled to the coast at Troas, where a vision in the night, a man of Macedonia pleading "come over and help us," pulls the Gospel across the Aegean into Europe. Note the quiet grammar change at 16:10: "we sought to go on into Macedonia." The author has joined the story; the author, by the Church's constant attribution Luke himself, boards at Troas. And note the method of discernment your group should catch: the Spirit guided as much by closed doors as by open ones.

Philippi gives Luke his favorite kind of triptych: three converts who could not be less alike. Lydia, a prosperous dealer in purple goods, at a riverside prayer meeting, of whom Luke writes one of the most quietly anti-Pelagian sentences in Scripture: "The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul" (16:14). Grace precedes; even the listening is a gift. Then the slave girl with the spirit of divination, freed by an exorcism that costs her owners their revenue stream, the first time in Acts the Gospel collides with someone's business model, and not the last. Then the jailer: earthquake at midnight while Paul and Silas sing hymns, the drawn sword, Paul's shout, and the question that gives this session its title: "Men, what must I do to be saved?" Get the full answer into your group's hands: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household," followed within the hour by the word of the Lord spoken to all in his house, baptism "at once, with all his family," washed wounds, a shared table, and rejoicing "with all his household" (16:31-34). Faith and baptism arrive together, at midnight, as a household event.

Chapter 17 runs through Thessalonica and Beroea, where the noble Bereans receive the word with eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily against the apostolic preaching they are receiving, the guided reading of

Session 6 in action, and lands at Athens. The Areopagus speech (17:22-31) is the Church's founding document for engaging a culture that does not know the Bible: Paul does not open with Moses. He opens with their own altar "to an unknown god," quotes their own poets, the line "in him we live and move and have our being," traditionally attributed to Epimenides of Crete, and "for we are indeed his offspring," from Aratus, *Phaenomena* 5, and builds from creation and providence, exactly the natural theology of *Wisdom* 13, toward the one non-negotiable summit: repentance, the appointed Man, and the resurrection from the dead. At the resurrection the audience splits, some mock, some delay, and some believe, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris. Prepare your group for the realism: even a perfect sermon converts some, not all, and Paul walks on.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 17:9-14. The covenant embraced households: male infants entered by circumcision at eight days old, carried into covenant by the household they were born to. This is the ground of the Catholic covenantal argument: a Jewish convert hearing "you and your household" would most likely have assumed the children were included unless he was told otherwise, and on that reading the burden of the silence falls on exclusion rather than inclusion. Present it to your group as an argument from covenant precedent, not as something *Genesis* 17 or *Acts* 16 proves outright.

Wisdom 13:1-9. The deuterocanonical backbone of the Areopagus method: from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator, and those who studied the world yet failed to find its Author are without excuse, though they sought Him. Paul's speech in Athens, and his letter to Rome (*Romans* 1:19-20), both walk *Wisdom*'s path: creation is a book pagans can read.

Isaiah 42:5. "Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens... who gives breath to the people upon it": the creed of the Creator that Paul preaches on Mars Hill, to people who had never opened *Isaiah*, in their own philosophical dialect.

Psalms 146:6 and the songs at midnight. Paul and Silas, bleeding in the stocks, sing hymns at midnight and the prisoners listen. Israel has always sung in the dark, and the God who "gives songs in the night" (*Job* 35:10) answers this one with an earthquake that opens doors, the second divinely burst prison of our study, and this time the jailer, not the prisoner, is the one set free.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles* (4th century)

Chrysostom pauses over Lydia: the Lord opened her heart, he notes, yet she gave heed; grace did not force the door but unlocked it, and her freedom walked through. And he delights in what opened-hearted faith immediately does: she constrains the missionaries to her house, for a heart God has opened opens its home. Hospitality, for Chrysostom, is faith's first reflex.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Letter 64, to Fidus* (written AD 253)

When a country bishop asked whether baptism should wait until an infant's eighth day, after the pattern of circumcision, St. Cyprian answered with the judgment of a council of sixty-six bishops: do not wait even that long. The mercy and grace of God, they ruled, is to be denied to no one born of man, and if the worst of adult sinners may be baptized, how much more the newborn, who has not sinned at all except in Adam. For Cyprian and his sixty-six bishops in AD 253, the live question was not whether to baptize infants but whether to wait

even eight days.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr, Second Apology (2nd century)

St. Justin, the philosopher-convert, taught that seeds of the divine Word were scattered among the pagans, so that whatever has been said truly by anyone, poets and philosophers included, belongs to us Christians, since they spoke by the seed of the same Logos who became flesh. What Paul did at Athens, claiming the pagans' own altar and their own poets for Christ, Justin turned into the Church's standing method with every culture she has ever met.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1252. The practice of infant baptism is an immemorial tradition of the Church, explicitly attested from the second century; it is quite possible that from the beginning of the apostolic preaching, when whole households received baptism, infants may also have been baptized.

CCC 27-28. The desire for God is written in the human heart; in many ways throughout history, in their religions and philosophies, men have given expression to their quest for God, gropings which the Catechism describes with Paul's Areopagus words: that men should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him.

CCC 843. The Church regards whatever goodness and truth is found among the nations as a preparation for the Gospel, given by Him who enlightens all men. Paul treated Athens' gropings, altar included, as exactly such a preparation.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

Thread 2, The Map. A continent falls tonight: the vision at Troas carries the Gospel from Asia into Europe, and the Gospel's long road into Europe runs through that dream. Mark it on the map verse with the group.

Thread 1, The Name. Resting, but coiled: it returns next session with three sightings in quick succession. Say nothing.

Thread 4, The Breaking of the Bread. One session from resolution. Notice privately that the jailer's conversion ends at a table, "he set food before them" (16:34), and keep your powder dry.

Also mark: the pronoun shift at 16:10, "we sought to go," where Luke steps into his own narrative. From Troas onward, portions of Acts are eyewitness memoir. The physician has joined the Way.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain the Spirit's guidance by closed doors and the significance of the Macedonian crossing.
2. Participants can articulate what "the Lord opened her heart" teaches about grace preceding faith.
3. Participants can walk through the jailer's conversion and present the Catholic case for household and infant baptism, answering the credobaptist steelman honestly.

4. Participants can describe Paul's Areopagus method, its Wisdom 13 roots, and its non-negotiable summit.
5. Participants each commit to one household practice of faith and one Athens-style bridge into a secular relationship this week.

Time Note

Planned for 90 minutes: Win 15, Build 55, Send 15, prayer and memory verse 5. If running long, cut in this order: (1) the second Win question, (2) the Dig Deeper on Timothy's circumcision, (3) compress question 3 (the slave girl) into a bridge sentence. Do not cut the jailer sequence with its steelman, or the Areopagus questions.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord of open doors and closed ones, you steered your apostles by both, and you have steered every one of us to this table tonight. Open our hearts as you opened Lydia's, teach our households your praise, and give us songs for our midnights. And when we stand before the altars our neighbors have built to gods they do not know, give us Paul's courage and Paul's courtesy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Tell us about a door that closed in your life that you later thanked God for. When did you realize the closed door was guidance?
2. What faith practices, if any, did you inherit from your household growing up, and which ones do you most want to pass on?

Build (55 minutes)

1. Read Acts 16:6-10. How does the Spirit guide the mission in these verses, and what changes in Luke's grammar at verse 10? What do both details teach about discernment?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Twice the guidance is negative: forbidden to speak in Asia, not allowed into Bithynia, until the missionaries are funneled to the coast, and only then comes the positive sign, the night vision of the Macedonian pleading, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." God steers by closed doors as truly as by open ones, and the team concludes, seeking confirmation together, that God has called them. And at verse 10 the pronouns change: "we sought to go." the author, whom the Church has always known as Luke, has joined the company at Troas; from here, stretches of Acts read as eyewitness memoir. The crossing that follows carries the Gospel onto the continent of Europe, and the Gospel's long road into Europe runs through that one night's dream.

2. Read Acts 16:11-15, the first convert on European soil. Who is Lydia, where is she found, and, most important, read verse 14 word for word: what happens before she gives heed to Paul, and who does it? What does her response to baptism immediately look like?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

A dealer in purple goods from Thyatira, a woman of means, found at a riverside place of prayer on the sabbath, a worshiper of God already. And the sentence to underline for life: "The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul." Grace comes first: as she listens, God opens her heart, and the opened heart freely gives heed. This is the Church's whole teaching on grace in one clause, no one argues, studies, or wills their way to God without God first unlocking the door from the inside (CCC 2670 and the ancient prayer, no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit). And note her baptism: "she was baptized, with her household," the first of tonight's household formulas, and her opened heart immediately opens her home, constraining the missionaries to stay. Grace makes hosts.

3. Read Acts 16:16-24. What ends Paul and Silas in prison, and be precise: what exactly did the exorcism cost, and whom? What pattern does this begin in Acts?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

A slave girl with a spirit of divination, whose owners profit from her fortune-telling, follows the missionaries for days; Paul, annoyed, commands the spirit out in the name of Jesus Christ. Her deliverance is her owners' loss: "when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone," they drag Paul and Silas to the magistrates on trumped-up charges, and the apostles are beaten with rods and locked in the inner prison, feet in stocks. This is the first time in Acts the Gospel collides head-on with somebody's business model, and it will not be the last; watch for Ephesus. When Christ frees people, the industries built on their bondage do not send thank-you notes.

4. Read Acts 16:25-34 slowly; it may be the most beautiful conversion scene in Acts. Set the stage at midnight, then walk the sequence: the question, the answer, and everything that happens "at once." List each element of the jailer's conversion in order.

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Midnight: Paul and Silas, backs raw, singing hymns while the prisoners listen, and God answers the song with an earthquake that opens every door and looses every chain. The jailer, facing execution for escaped prisoners, draws his sword; Paul's shout saves the man's life before saving his soul: "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." Trembling, he asks the question every evangelist prays for: "Men, what must I do to be saved?" And the full apostolic answer unfolds in sequence: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household"; then the word of the Lord is spoken to him *with all that were in his house*; then, the same hour of the night, he washes their wounds "and he was baptized at once, with all his family"; then a table is set, food before them, "and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God." Faith, catechesis, baptism, mercy given and received, a shared table, and joy, an entire household passing from death to life between midnight and dawn. Notice that no one in this scene treats baptism as a follow-up to salvation to be scheduled later; the question was "what must I do to be saved," and the water arrived the same hour.

Build the steelman. The credobaptist case is serious and deserves its strongest form: baptism in the New Testament always follows personal, professed faith. "Believe in the Lord Jesus" is the command; every named baptized individual in Acts is a believer; there is not one explicit infant baptism recorded in all of Scripture; and "household" texts prove nothing, since Luke says the word was spoken "to all in his house" and the whole household "rejoiced," activities infants cannot do, so these households may simply have contained no small children. Baptizing those who cannot believe empties baptism of the very faith it signifies. An honest Catholic should feel the force of this before answering.

5. Press the steelman. First, ask what a first-century Jewish hearer would have assumed when told "you and your household" would be saved, given how God's covenant had included children for two thousand years. Then weigh the silence: which reading actually bears the burden of proof? And what does the earliest traceable practice of the Church show?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Start where the first hearers stood: for two millennia, God's covenant had dealt in households, with male infants entering by circumcision at eight days old, within the household's covenant (Genesis 17); Peter's Pentecost promise ran "to you and to your children" (2:39); and Paul calls baptism "the circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2:11-12). A Jewish convert told "you and your household" would assume the children in, unless explicitly told otherwise, so, the Catholic covenantal argument runs, the silence cuts against exclusion: Scripture never records an infant baptized, but never records one refused or deferred either, and in a covenant people who had always included their babies, shutting them out is the innovation that would have needed

announcing. Concede honestly what must be conceded: no verse says "and they baptized the infants," and the Church does not pretend otherwise; the Catechism itself says only that infants "may also have been baptized" in those households (CCC 1252). What settles the question is the same thing that settled Acts 15: Scripture read within the living Tradition, and here the Tradition speaks early and without a dissenting voice: by AD 253, the only question sixty-six bishops in council could find to debate was whether baptism must wait until day eight, and St. Cyprian's answer was not to wait at all. If the apostles' churches had practiced believers-only baptism, someone, somewhere, would have protested its abandonment; the nearest thing on record, Tertullian's counsel around AD 200 to delay baptizing little children, presupposes the very practice he wanted slowed. And the deepest reason is the Gospel itself: baptizing an infant, who can offer God nothing, not even a profession, is the purest possible display of what tonight's riverside taught us, that the Lord opens hearts before they can even give heed. Grace goes first. Infant baptism is Lydia's verse in liturgical form.

6. Read Acts 17:10-12 on the Bereans, briefly, with Session 6 in mind. What made them "more noble," exactly, and what was the setting of their daily Scripture examination?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so, and many believed. Their nobility was eagerness joined to diligence, not independence: they examined the Scriptures daily against the apostle's preaching, testing his claims by the prophets while sitting under his instruction, guided reading exactly as the Ethiopian practiced it. The Berean is the patron of the Catholic in the pew with a study Bible open, checking the readings, hungry and teachable at once.

7. Read Acts 17:22-28, the opening of the Areopagus address. Where does Paul begin with an audience that has never read Moses, what does he quote, and what is he assuming about pagan culture? For the roots of this method, read Wisdom 13:1-5.

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He begins with their own city: "I perceive that in every way you are very religious," and their own altar, "to an unknown god. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." Then creation and providence, the Lord of heaven and earth who needs no temples and gives all men life and breath, who made every nation from one man and set the times and boundaries "that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him." And then, astonishingly, he quotes their own poets as witnesses: "in him we live and move and have our being," a line the tradition assigns to Epimenides of Crete, and "for we are indeed his offspring," from Aratus. Luke himself says only "some of your poets" (17:28). The method is Wisdom 13 made missionary: creation is a book the nations can read, and their gropings toward God, altars, poems, philosophies, are preparations for the Gospel, not merely errors to be bulldozed (CCC 27-28, 843). Paul treats Athens the way St. Justin later formalized it: whatever has been said truly by anyone belongs to Christ, because every seed of truth was sown by the Word who became flesh. The Church has planted her missions, culture after culture, with exactly this trowel.

8. Read Acts 17:29-34, the speech's summit and its results. Where does Paul stop building bridges, what does he refuse to soften, and how does the audience split? What does this teach about faithful evangelization and its scorecard?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The bridge-building ends at repentance and resurrection: God "commands all men everywhere to repent," for He has fixed a day of judgment by a Man He appointed, "and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead." To Greek ears, the resurrection of a body was an absurdity much of philosophy refused to digest, and Paul preaches it anyway, undiluted, because a Gospel adapted all the way down is no longer the Gospel. The audience splits three ways: some mocked, some said "we will hear you again," and some joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a member of the court itself, and a woman named Damaris. There is the honest scorecard of even perfect evangelization: mockery, delay, and faith, side by side. Paul's method bends everything to the audience except the message's summit, and his peace does not depend on the percentage. Neither should ours.

DIG DEEPER: WHY CIRCUMCISE TIMOTHY AFTER THE COUNCIL?

Acts 16:3 startles careful readers: Paul, carrying the very decree that freed Gentiles from circumcision, circumcises Timothy. The key is Timothy's mother: Jewish, which by the reckoning of the day made Timothy a Jew living uncircumcised, a standing obstacle that, in all likelihood, would have barred synagogue doors on the mission. Titus, a pure Gentile, Paul refused to circumcise even under pressure (Galatians 2:3-5), because there it was demanded as necessary for salvation. Same apostle, opposite calls, one razor-sharp distinction: where a practice is imposed as required for salvation, resist to the last inch; where it is merely a bridge for the Gospel, become all things to all men (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Knowing which situation you are in is half of pastoral wisdom.

DIG DEEPER: ROMAN CITIZEN, PUBLIC APOLOGY

After the illegal beating, Paul refuses to slip quietly out of Philippi: "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens... let them come themselves and take us out" (16:37), and the alarmed magistrates do. This is not wounded pride. Paul is establishing, on the public record, that the Church in Philippi was founded by men vindicated under Roman law, plausibly a deliberate shield for the fragile congregation he is leaving behind, including Lydia's household and the jailer's. Prudent use of one's rights in defense of the vulnerable is not worldliness; it is shepherding.

Send (15 minutes)

1. The jailer's household was converted through the head of the house asking one honest question. What is the current spiritual temperature of your household, and what one practice, grace before meals, a blessing at bedtime, a weekly rosary decade, could you realistically institute this week?
2. Name the most secular person you genuinely like. What is their "altar to an unknown god," the true thing they already love, justice, beauty, honesty, wonder, that could be your Areopagus bridge?

Live It This Week

Two assignments, one for your house and one for your city. First, the household practice: institute the one practice you named in the Send question, and hold it every day this week, however brief; households are converted by rhythms more than by arguments, and yours is the first Macedonia you have been called to. Second, the Athens bridge: with the secular friend you named, have one conversation this week that begins where Paul began, on their altar, asking sincerely about the true thing they love, and listening for the unknown God behind it. Do not force the summit; just walk partway up the hill together. The Spirit finished the sermon for Paul, and He has not retired.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, you opened Lydia's heart, you sang through your servants at midnight, and Athens worshiped, without knowing it, the God you have made known. Open our households to your praise and our neighbors to your name. Give us the jailer's honest question and the jailer's speed to the water, and let every closed door in our lives be your steering hand. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'" (Acts 16:31)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 11, in order of appearance. Flag these before the session.

PRIMARY TEXT

1. Acts 16:1-5 (Timothy); 16:6-10 (closed doors; the vision; the we-passages begin)
2. Acts 16:11-15 (Lydia)
3. Acts 16:16-24 (the slave girl; prison)
4. Acts 16:25-34 (the jailer's household)
5. Acts 16:35-40 (the citizens' apology)
6. Acts 17:10-12 (the Bereans)
7. Acts 17:22-34 (the Areopagus)

OLD TESTAMENT DISCOVERY PASSAGES

8. Genesis 17:9-14 (households in covenant)
9. Wisdom 13:1-9 (knowing God from creation)
10. Isaiah 42:5 (the Creator's creed)
11. Job 35:10 (songs in the night)

NEW TESTAMENT CROSS REFERENCES

12. Acts 2:39 (to you and your children); Acts 18:8 (Crispus's household); 1 Corinthians 1:16 (Stephanas's household)
13. Colossians 2:11-12 (the circumcision of Christ)
14. Galatians 2:3-5; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (Titus; all things to all men)
15. Romans 1:19-20 (creation's witness)

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

16. CCC 1252; CCC 27-28; CCC 843; CCC 2670