



Personal Reflections

Just before he ascended, Jesus told his disciples, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It would not be easy for them to be witnesses. Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria were familiar, but “the ends of the earth” stretched their vision to unfamiliar territory.

At first they were witnesses in those familiar places, but when Gentiles began to believe and join their assemblies, some insisted on making Gentile converts follow Jewish laws and cultural practices.

The film, *To the Ends of the Earth*, presents a major breakthrough in spread of the gospel. God directed Paul and the little missionary team to carry the gospel into the Greek world—to Macedonia. They arrived at Philippi, a Roman colony dominated by retired Roman soldiers and without a Jewish synagogue. Perhaps it was as foreign as any place they could imagine (Acts 16). For them it might have seemed like the ends of the earth.

- What do you think made Paul and the others feel awkward in Philippi?
- You and I are not in Philippi, but I have often felt awkward when sharing Jesus. Perhaps you have too. What has made you feel awkward as a witness in your own community or neighborhood?
- What was so important about the gospel that it motivated Paul to charge ahead and share it with these people who were different?
- How can the gospel help you overcome your awkwardness and share Jesus with those outside your comfort zone?
- What promises of God can you think of that can help motivate you to be his witness even when you feel awkward or out of place?

In spite of his bold witness Paul was beaten and imprisoned. Yet God provided an opportunity to witness even in a Philippian jail. While Paul and Silas were chained in the jail, an earthquake freed them but left the jailer at the brink of his despair and trouble. The jailer had no answers so he asked, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas gave the simple and direct answer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

- What can you say as the Savior’s witness? We don’t often have such a dramatic opportunity, but the Lord will give us opportunities. Imagine talking with a friend or neighbor who does not know Jesus. A little conversation may reveal he or she too faces trouble and questions. Write down a sentence or two that you might use to share Jesus.
- If you’ve tried to witness before—and perhaps failed—write down an idea that might help you introduce Jesus into the conversation again.

A few years later Paul was imprisoned again in Rome. But he wrote to the Philippians that his troubles did not stop him or other Christians from sharing Jesus. Instead “Because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear” (Philippians 1:14).

- Why do you think that happened?
- What can give you the confidence to “proclaim the gospel without fear”?

When Paul wrote to the Philippians afterwards, he told them that they were to live as children of God in a “warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life” (Philippians 2:15-16).

- Create a list (three or more) of ways you can shine like stars?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- What message does your Christian life send to others?
- What opportunities does your Christian life give to share the gospel with others?