

BRUSHFIRES | WEEK 16

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Core Doctrine:

Effectual Calling – Irresistible Grace

Verse:

Acts 16:14 (CSB)

“A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying.”

Book Context:

Acts 16 tells the story of Paul’s missionary journey into Macedonia. As he preaches the gospel by a river in Philippi, we meet Lydia—a wealthy businesswoman who fears God but has not yet met Christ. She hears Paul preach, but the turning point is not his words—it’s that “the Lord opened her heart” to respond. This verse shows that saving faith isn’t simply the result of persuasive preaching or human decision. It is the result of a sovereign act of God. He opens hearts. He calls the dead to life.

Core Doctrine Explanation:

The doctrine of Effectual Calling, often referred to as Irresistible Grace, teaches that when God calls someone to Himself, His call is effective. It’s not merely an invitation—it’s a summons that brings the spiritually dead to life. Those whom the Father draws will come. Those whom He calls, He awakens.

Lydia’s story is not unique. Every believer has experienced the same miracle. We may have heard the gospel before, maybe many times, but it wasn’t until God opened our hearts that we truly saw Christ as beautiful and believed.

This does not mean God forces anyone against their will. It means He changes the will. He takes out hearts of stone and gives hearts of flesh. He makes rebels into worshipers. When God speaks, dead hearts beat again.

Danger of Not Holding to the Core Doctrine – Week 16: Effectual Calling – Irresistible Grace

If we believe that people can resist God’s saving call forever, we start to see salvation as dependent on human willpower. Grace becomes an offer, not a rescue. Evangelism becomes persuasion, not proclamation. And faith becomes a work rather than a gift.

The danger here is subtle. We may affirm God’s love and the power of the gospel, but if we think the final step rests on us, we strip God of His power and rob grace of its wonder. We start to think that the difference between the saved and the lost is human response—not divine mercy.

This mindset produces pressure: preachers feel like they have to be convincing enough, parents feel like they have to say the right thing at the right time, and believers feel like they must maintain their faith through effort alone. But if God is the one who opens hearts, then none of that pressure is ours to carry.

It also affects our hope. If someone we love rejects the gospel, we may despair—thinking there's nothing more God can do. But if grace is irresistible, we pray differently. We wait differently. We hope with confidence, knowing that God can break through any heart at any time.

To deny this doctrine is to preach a powerless grace. But to embrace it is to trust that when God calls, He does not fail. The voice that created light from darkness still creates faith in dead hearts.

Conversational Evangelism:

When someone says, "I'm just not ready to believe," you can respond: "That's okay. But can I pray that God would open your heart like He did for someone named Lydia in the Bible?"

This invites the Spirit into the conversation and shifts the focus from pressure to prayer—from convincing to trusting God to do what only He can do.

Call to Action:

This week, reflect on who shared the gospel with you—and remember it wasn't their words that saved you. It was the moment God opened your heart.

Thank Him for calling you with power. And if there's someone you've been praying for, don't give up. Their story isn't over. God is still in the heart-opening business.

Fire Starter Question:

Can you remember the moment when the gospel finally made sense to you—and how does knowing God opened your heart deepen your gratitude?