

# When Do I Know It's Time to Move On?

Managing Family Differences

Acts 16:1-5

This study explores Acts 16:1-5, where Paul makes a significant decision regarding Timothy and his cultural background. Through this passage, we will examine how to navigate family differences, discern when to compromise for the sake of unity, and recognize when it is time to move on from certain relationships or situations while staying faithful to God's call.

## I. Why This Study?

### A. Objective:

1. To examine how Acts 16:1-5 provides guidance on managing family and cultural differences while staying faithful to God's mission.
2. To explore the balance between compromise and conviction in difficult decisions.
3. To gain biblical wisdom on recognizing when it's time to move on from a place, relationship, or season of life.

### B. Relevance:

1. Paul and Timothy's story highlights the complexities of navigating differences between generations, cultures, and expectations within families and faith communities.
2. Many believers struggle with knowing when to compromise for unity and when to stand firm on their convictions.
3. This passage helps us discern how to make choices that honor God while managing relationships with wisdom and grace.

## II. Context of Acts 16:1-5

### A. The Background of Paul and Timothy:

1. Paul encounters Timothy, a young disciple whose mother was \_\_\_\_\_ and father was \_\_\_\_\_ (v.1).
2. Timothy was well-respected by believers in Lystra and Iconium, making him a \_\_\_\_\_ in ministry (v.2).
3. Despite the Jerusalem Council's ruling in Acts 15 (that Gentiles didn't need circumcision for salvation), Paul has Timothy \_\_\_\_\_ to avoid conflict with the Jews they would evangelize (v.3).

**B. Historical Insight:**

1. Jewish customs held that a child's Jewish identity was determined by the \_\_\_\_\_, making Timothy's uncircumcision a potential obstacle among Jewish audiences.
2. Paul's decision to have Timothy circumcised wasn't about \_\_\_\_\_ but about removing a cultural barrier to the gospel.
3. This decision reflects the tension between \_\_\_\_\_ freedom and \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility in ministry.

**C. Key Takeaway:**

1. Just as Paul and Timothy had to navigate cultural and family tensions, we must learn how to manage personal differences while pursuing God's calling.

**III. When Do I Know It's Time to Move On?**

**A. Recognizing When to Compromise for the Sake of Unity**

1. Paul and Timothy's decision teaches us that sometimes, making personal \_\_\_\_\_ can serve a greater \_\_\_\_\_ (v.3).
2. Compromise is acceptable when it \_\_\_\_\_ violate God's truth but helps build bridges for the gospel.
3. Example: Paul later refused to require Titus, a Gentile, to be circumcised because it would have reinforced \_\_\_\_\_ (Galatians 2:3-5).

**B. Knowing When to Stand Firm**

1. While Paul chose to have Timothy circumcised, he did not \_\_\_\_\_ on the gospel's core message (salvation by grace, not works).
2. We must distinguish between \_\_\_\_\_ that can be adjusted and biblical \_\_\_\_\_ that must remain firm.
3. Example: Jesus never compromised truth for approval but knew when to meet people where they were (John 4:1-26).

**C. Understanding When It's Time to Move On**

1. Some conflicts require \_\_\_\_\_, while others indicate it's time to step into a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Paul and Barnabas had previously separated over a disagreement (Acts 15:36-41), showing that even godly people sometimes need to part ways.
3. Moving on does not always mean \_\_\_\_\_; it can be a step toward God's greater plan.

## IV. Our Church vs. The Church

### A. Tension Between Personal Relationships and God's Mission

1. Timothy's circumcision was about removing unnecessary \_\_\_\_\_ to ministry, not about personal \_\_\_\_\_.
2. In families and church communities, differences should be navigated with \_\_\_\_\_, ensuring that they do not \_\_\_\_\_ God's work.
3. Example: Some believers hold tightly to personal traditions, but the church's \_\_\_\_\_ must take priority over cultural expectations.

### B. Case Study: Paul's Strategy in Ministry

1. Paul adapted his approach based on his audience, becoming "\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_" to win them for Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).
2. This teaches us that flexibility in \_\_\_\_\_ matters can strengthen our witness, while standing \_\_\_\_\_ on truth remains critical.

## V. The Role of the Church Today

### A. Helping People Navigate Family and Cultural Differences

1. The church should equip believers with biblical wisdom to handle generational and cultural \_\_\_\_\_ in families.
2. Teaching on grace, forgiveness, and unity helps create \_\_\_\_\_ family dynamics.

### B. Encouraging Discerning Decision-Making

1. Believers often struggle to know when to compromise and when to stand firm.
2. The church should help members develop \_\_\_\_\_ through Scripture, prayer, and wise counsel.

### C. Creating a Culture of Grace and Adaptability

1. Just as Timothy's circumcision removed a barrier, churches should evaluate traditions that may hinder \_\_\_\_\_ from growing in Christ.
2. The gospel should always take precedence over cultural preferences.

## VI. Relevant Scholars and Theologians

1. Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, emphasized the balance between tradition and spiritual progress. “Custom is indeed a second nature, but nature itself leads us to seek the good, even if it means abandoning what is familiar.” (On the Life of Moses). His teachings highlight the challenge of maintaining cultural identity while embracing divine transformation.
2. Rabbi Hillel, a foundational figure in Jewish ethics and law, taught about the necessity of both tradition and change. “Do not separate yourself from the community, but do not be afraid to go where truth leads.” (Pirkei Avot 2:5). His wisdom speaks to Timothy’s circumcision—not as a requirement of faith, but as a means of effective ministry.
3. Origen, one of the early church fathers, spoke of discernment in shifting seasons of life. “The soul must advance; to stay in one place is to fall behind. For when God calls, delay is disobedience.” (Homilies on Genesis). His reflections align with the necessity of knowing when to move forward in ministry despite personal or cultural obstacles.
4. Gregory of Nazianzus, a Cappadocian Father, addressed balancing unity with personal conviction. “The duty of the wise is to know when to yield in matters of indifference and when to stand firm in matters of truth.” (Orations 32.7). His insight reinforces Paul’s decision regarding Timothy—compromising where necessary for the sake of the gospel while upholding core doctrine.
5. Jarena Lee, the first African American woman to be authorized to preach in the AME Church, spoke of the challenge of answering God’s call despite opposition. “When the Lord calls you to move, no chain of tradition or expectation can hold you back.” (Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee). Like Timothy, her story shows the power of navigating cultural and familial expectations while stepping into one’s divine purpose.
6. James W.C. Pennington, an abolitionist and theologian, wrestled with reconciling personal history and the mission of God. “To move forward in faith often means leaving behind that which once defined you.” (The Fugitive Blacksmith). His words mirror Timothy’s willingness to undergo

circumcision for the sake of ministry, showing that personal sacrifices may be necessary for a greater mission.

7. Delores S. Williams, a leading womanist theologian, explored the tension between tradition and spiritual freedom. “God calls us to discern the difference between what is inherited and what is essential.” (Sisters in the Wilderness). Her work reminds believers to assess when traditions serve the gospel and when they hinder it.
8. Willie James Jennings, a contemporary theologian, examines how the early church navigated cultural differences. “The Spirit calls us to move beyond the boundaries we assume are fixed.” (Acts: A Theological Commentary). His analysis of Acts 16 suggests that Paul and Timothy’s decision was about creating access to the gospel, not enforcing tradition.

## **VII. Prayer Focus**

1. Thank God for His guidance in times of transition.
2. Ask for wisdom to discern when to compromise and when to stand firm.
3. Pray for peace in managing family and cultural differences.

Acts 16:1-5 teaches us that managing differences requires discernment, wisdom, and a commitment to God’s mission. As we navigate family expectations, traditions, and personal decisions, we must seek God’s guidance on when to stay, when to adapt, and when to move on.

## **VIII. Discussion and Reflection Questions**

**Discussion Question:** How do we distinguish between necessary compromises and non-negotiable convictions?

**Reflection Question:** Have you ever had to navigate family or church expectations that conflicted with your faith? How did you respond?

**Reflection Question:** In what areas of life might God be calling you to move on from certain relationships, traditions, or situations?

**Reflection Question:** How can we handle disagreements in a way that honors both truth and love?