

Lydia's leadership

By [Emlyn A. Ott](#)

April 28, 2016

*To receive these posts by e-mail each Monday, [sign up](#).*

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Ott's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and online-only content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

I have always been intrigued by Lydia. Acts describes her as a worshiper of God, one whose heart has been opened, a dealer in purple cloth, and a woman willing to offer her home for others to stay. She is often associated with images of hospitality in the church.

My parents owned and ran a manufacturing business called "Ottco." My mother served as vice president, secretary, and treasurer. She was the person who took care of the books and managed the details of the finances and operations while my father dealt with the day-to-day operations in "the shop." It was clear to all who entered the office that she knew what was going on in the business and who was in charge.

A few thoughts about Lydia's story:

- She is likely a wealthy and well-known person in the city of Thyatira. As a businesswoman she likely has not only education and skill but also strength and determination. Acts says that the members of her household are baptized along with her. She probably is an influential person in her family.
- In those days, purple cloth was valuable and expensive. Its value was equated with that of silver. It was usually a sign of nobility or royalty.

- Lydia persuades Paul and the team of missionaries to come to her home. She is mentioned again in Acts 16:40: "After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left."

What do you see as the current challenges for women in leadership, whether in business or ministry? What capacities do you see in yourself or in others that contribute toward what people experience as competency, excellence, and the use of gifts? How have mentors contributed toward providing you or others with perspectives on what it takes to provide leadership as a woman?

Lydia provides a glimpse of the Christian view of gifts and leadership--of a countercultural movement within the first century. Throughout the New Testament we see brief examples of women providing very important leadership. Their stories are never extensive, but their impact on the life of the church is long reaching.