



## **CARING AND SHARING IN TIMES OF CRISIS**

ACTS 16:25-34  
LESSON 3

### **MAIN POINT**

Challenging circumstances are opportunities for us to worship God and share the gospel with others.

### **INTRODUCTION**

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

**If you were free to do whatever you wanted for one day, what would you do?**

**How do you define freedom? How does our culture define freedom?**

Freedom is a loaded term in many cultures. Democratic cultures take their freedoms and liberties very seriously, and to infringe on those rights is to invite conflict. Civil freedom is great, but the biblical idea of freedom goes well beyond what we associate with civil liberties. True freedom is found in Christ and obedience to His teaching, and the challenges this kind of obedience causes give us opportunities to worship God and share the good news.

### **UNDERSTANDING**

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what God's Word says and means for us.*

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 16:25-30.**

**What does the response of Paul and Silas to their circumstances show about them? If you were the jailer, what would you think of Paul and Silas singing? Of them remaining in the prison?**

**When you face trying situations, how do you generally respond? How can Paul and Silas' example change your perspective?**

**How do you think this experience prepared the jailer to receive the gospel?**

Unjustly imprisoned and still recovering from the untreated wounds of their beating, they prayed and sang hymns of praise to God. They sang in their adversity, a powerful witness to their vibrant faith.

**If you had been the jailer, how would you have reacted after the earthquake? What indications of the jailer's fear do you see?**

Suddenly, an earthquake shook the foundations of the prison and broke loose the fetters of the prisoners. The prison doors flew open, but no one fled. The jailer was roused by the earthquake. Finding the prison doors open and supposing that the prisoners had escaped, he prepared to kill himself.

In the Roman world, guards often were executed for negligence (see 12:18-19). Paul told the jailer that no one had fled. Paul was more concerned about the life of the jailer than about his own freedom. His concern was not only for the physical well-being of the jailer, but also for his spiritual condition. The jailer must have sensed this.

**Why did the jailer's mood change after Paul's statement in verse 28? How did the jailer's heart of gratitude affect his actions?**

**What do you think caused the jailer to want to be saved?**

The jailer prostrated himself at Paul's feet, a posture of reverence. At this point, he was quite aware of the power of Paul's God. Taking Paul and Silas from the prison, he asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" The jailer had seen the power of Paul's God in the earthquake and the gracious nature of Paul's faith by his refusal to flee and put the jailer's life in jeopardy. He asked the ultimate question that everyone must ask who seeks the way of salvation.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 16:31-34.**

Paul's answer to the jailer's question was simple but profound: *Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.* Somewhere, the jailer's family entered the picture. The jailer may have called for the household to come and hear Paul's message. In any event, Paul preached to them all, and all his family (who apparently were mature enough to make a commitment) responded in faith and were baptized.

**How did the jailer show through his words and actions that he knew Jesus and had His joy in him? How did this create opportunities to tell his family about the gospel?**

**What are evidences that the jailer's faith in the Lord was genuine? Why do you think he performed specific acts of service?**

The jailer was genuinely converted. He proceeded to wash the wounds of Paul and Silas. The Roman prison system was harsh and often inhumane. It was not unusual for scourged prisoners to be thrown into jail with their wounds untreated. The jailer had shared the callousness of that society; but now he viewed life through different lenses, through the mercy and love of the Savior to whom he had just committed himself.

**Why wasn't the jailer's salvation experience sufficient for his entire family? How does this Scripture show that salvation requires individual repentance and faith in Christ?**

**The jailer's newfound faith brought him joy. Why is joy a common response to the gospel?**

**What are we liberated from when we accept God's gift of salvation?**

Paul and Silas were open to God's use of their difficult circumstances to bring about good. Instead of letting fear hush their testimony of Jesus, they turned their prison cell into a worship center. The end result was that they were liberated from physical bondage and the jailer and his family were liberated from spiritual bondage. As it so happens, spiritual freedom was at the heart of Jesus' ministry.

## APPLICATION

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

**How would you describe your responsibility as a Christ-follower, based on the texts we've examined today?**

**For whom are you praying for an opportunity to provide care and share Jesus?**

**How have you seen the gospel at work in and through our group and the reaching efforts of our church lately? How can you celebrate what God is doing in our midst?**

## PRAYER

Close in a time of prayer, thanking God for His great care and compassion. Ask Him to draw you deeper into the knowledge and experience of His character, and then ask Him to send you out as an ambassador of that character to those who need Jesus.

## COMMENTARY

### ACTS 16:25-34

**16:25.** The situation looked ominous for Paul and Silas. They were successful in reaching Lydia for Christ and liberating a slave girl from Satan's control. But their success got them in trouble. They were beaten and jailed. Instead of letting fear hush their testimony of Jesus, however, Paul and Silas turned their prison cell into a worship center. Instead of mourning their pain, they gave themselves to worshiping God by praying and singing to Him. Luke said they sang hymns, or songs of praise directed to God. Every word they uttered in prayer and song reflected the joy and peace God gave them in their ordeal.

**16:26.** Paul and Silas's expressions of worship served as testimonies about the Lord to the people around them. Luke indicated that the other prisoners listened as the two missionaries worshiped God. Later, God used them to keep the jailer from harming himself. In turn, the jailer went into his house and shared the message of the Lord that brought him new life. The transformation of the people in his household stemmed from listening to Paul and Silas as they worshiped God in their prison cell.

The turn of events for the jailer started when Paul and Silas were locked up in his prison. What Paul and Silas did in prison shows us the value of a lifestyle of worshiping and serving God. Such a lifestyle opens wide the door of possibilities for us to tell the people observing us about Jesus Christ.

A sudden and violent earthquake changed everything for Paul and Silas. The earthquake quivered the ground with such force that it shook the jail's foundations. All the doors in the jail burst open, and the chains holding the prisoners came loose, setting everyone free. The remarkable turn of events liberated the missionaries.

**16:27.** But they didn't try to escape. Their decision to stay put made an eternal difference in the life of the jailer. The earthquake probably aroused him from sleep. Looking around, he assumed every prisoner had escaped because all the prison doors stood open. Responsible for what happened, he knew he had no other choice but to take his own life. Otherwise, he would be executed for allowing the prisoners to escape.

**16:28-32.** That's when Paul and Silas came to the jailer's rescue. First, they convinced him none of the prisoners had escaped, which saved his life from execution. Then they shared Christ with him, which would save his life for eternity. Those who are overwhelmed by fears or a sense of personal failure need to discover the joy and peace Jesus gives those who believe in Him.

Notice the way Paul communicated with the jailer so he could be saved. The man's respect for Paul and Silas moved him to fall down in their presence and to address them as "sirs." Then the jailer asked them the question that led to the transformation of his life forever, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas responded simply and clearly that he would be saved if He put his faith in Christ, if he would believe on the Lord Jesus. Notice what Paul did not say. He did not tell the jailer he would be saved from his

sins if he did good actions for others and treated them fairly, if he observed the Lord's Supper and was baptized, or if he merely associated with a group of Christians. None of these actions, and others like them, would bring him new life and a fresh start. Only personal faith in Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and sinners, would result in his salvation.

Also, Paul and Silas told the jailer the persons in his household could be saved if they too trusted Christ. When the jailer took the two missionaries to his home, that same hour of the night, he washed their wounds, and Paul and Silas spoke the message of the Lord with everyone there. As a result, each person in the jailer's family received Christ. Salvation always involves each individual's repentance and faith in Jesus. Along with the jailer, all of them were baptized.

**16:33-34.** The jailer watched as everyone in his entire household trusted Jesus the Savior. No wonder the jailer rejoiced. The meal he served to Paul and Silas only scratched the surface of his gratitude to them for helping him and his family know Christ. The family's coming to faith shows the positive spiritual influence today's Christian parents can have on their families.