



Caring and Sharing in Times of Crisis

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| <p>Scripture</p> <p>Acts 16:25-34</p> | <p>Main Point</p> <p>Challenging circumstances are opportunities for us to worship God and share the gospel with others.</p> |
| <p>Memory Verse: Acts 16:31</p> <p>They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.”</p> | <p>Supplies Needed</p> <p>Sheets of paper for groups White board or poster Memory verse printout</p> |

Introduction

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

Middle School Activity

As the students arrive, create groups of about 3-5 students and give each group a sheet of paper. Tell each group to work together to create five new rules for their middle school. Encourage them to be creative and fun. After each group has had time to create their list, allow each group to share their results.

- What rules at school are more difficult for most students to follow?
- What are the consequences of breaking the rules?
- How would you define freedom? Is freedom an absence of rules?
- What does it mean that we are free in Christ?

High School Activity

As the students arrive, create a list on the white board of challenging circumstances high school students endure. Anticipate the students will list common pressures and consequences of poor decisions. Encourage their creativity and thoughtfulness.

- Have students identify items in the list that are created by an individual’s poor choices. Circle these.

- Have the students identify items that seem more a matter of circumstances. Put a rectangle around these.
- What do you learn about a person when they go through challenging circumstances?
- What does it mean to be free? Is it more than freedom from trouble or freedom from rules?

Main Point

We will see in our study of Acts 16 that challenging circumstances are opportunities for us to worship God and share the gospel with others.

- How can we worship God even through challenging circumstances?
- Have you ever felt as though God was not with you during difficult times? Was there something that reminded you of God's presence even during the worst of times?
- Why would challenging circumstances be an important time to share the gospel with someone else?
- Can you name any difficult times in our country when people were more ready to listen to the gospel?

Transition

“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. The challenges this kind of obedience causes gives 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. Use the commentary to teach through each of the passages.

Read & Explain: 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?
- If you were the jailer, what would you think 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 the midst of 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 thinking the prisoners escaped, he prepared to kill himself.

In the Roman world, guards often were executed for negligence (see 12:18-19). Paul told the jailer no one 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 everyone must ask who seeks the way of salvation.

Read & Explain: 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 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 make opportunities available 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 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.

Memory Verse

Review previous memory verses:

- Matthew 9:37-38: Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."
- Psalm 126:3: "The Lord had done great things for us; we were joyful."

Invest group time in helping students learn this week's memory verse. Have the memory verse printouts ready to place on the board. (As an alternative, write the verse on the white board and be prepared to selectively remove words.) As the leader, you will be setting a good example if you do this work with them.

Help students learn this week's memory verse through the following steps:

1. Have the students find a partner and practice reading the verse to one another out loud.
2. Bring the group back together and have them read in unison and out loud the memory verse as it is placed on the board.
3. Replace it with the second sheet that has a few words omitted and have the students recite the verse in unison and out loud together.
4. Replace it with the third sheet that has many words omitted and have the students recite the verse in unison and out loud together.
5. Remove the verse from view, and have the students recite the verse in unison and out loud together. Help whenever needed.

Encourage the students to recite the verse each morning and pray that God will use this verse to remind them that challenging circumstances are opportunities for us to worship God and share the gospel with others.

Application

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

As the group reflects on the study today, ask the following questions:

- 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?
- What will you do this week to actively share the gospel with someone else?

Pray

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 worshipping 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 worshipping 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.