

A Jailer Becomes a Christian



Scripture Reference: [Acts 16:16-40](#)

Suggested Theme: In Christ, we can experience true joy despite negative circumstances.

Memory Verse: “Be full of joy in the Lord always. I will say again, be full of joy.” [Philippians 4:4, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

Paul cast an evil spirit out of a young slave girl, but her owners were angry and brought Paul and Silas before the city magistrates. Even though they were both beaten, chained and thrown into prison, they were heard singing hymns and praying to God during the night. The jailor panicked when an earthquake caused the prison doors to open and the prisoners’ chains to fall off. Paul and Silas assured the jailer they would not escape and then taught the jailer and his household about Jesus. Before the night was over, they were all baptised. The next day, Paul and Silas were released from prison.

Background Study:

[Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts](#)

[Philippi](#) was a Macedonian frontier town, a Roman colony and a military outpost. A section of the 1,120 kilometres (696 miles) Roman road system called the [Via Egnacia](#) passed through Philippi. This meant the city was on a direct trade and military route that connected what is now modern-day Albania, the Republic of Macedonia, Greece, and European Turkey (information taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Via_Egnatia).

The situation in Philippi was unlike earlier mission work. There was no synagogue to attend, and there were no groups of Jews who already respected God and were waiting for an expected Messiah. Instead, Paul and his travelling companions (Silas, Timothy and Luke) started their work in Philippi by seeking out the few people who had gathered outside the city by a river to pray. One of these people, [Lydia, along with those in her household, had already become Christians](#).

A slave girl followed Paul and his companions, yelling at them day after day while they were trying to talk to people about Jesus. Annoyed, Paul cast the spirit out, knowing this girl was under the control of an evil spirit. Immediately, the girl was her true self again, no longer controlled by the unwelcome spirit.

The evil spirit had given the young woman the ability to tell fortunes. Her owners had made money from this, so they were angry at the monetary loss.

Order and control would have been extremely important in a Roman military outpost like Philippi. There was ongoing tension between the Roman government and the Jews, so when the gathering crowd joined the slave girl’s owners in accusing Paul and Silas, the officials would have wanted to appease everyone and not let things escalate. There were no legal charges, but it must have seemed simplest to get rid of these

Jewish outsiders in favour of the Roman citizens living in Philippi. After all, Roman citizens had to have a proper trial by law, but these were only Jewish teachers from far off Antioch and Jerusalem. We learn later in the story ([Acts 16:35](#)) that the officials were planning on letting the crowd settle down and then, early the next morning, quietly telling the jailer (the officer in charge of the jail) to release the prisoners and send them on their way.

While hurting, bleeding and confined to a small, dark place, one might expect that these two men would cower and retreat into depression. Instead, Paul and Silas did the unthinkable. As the other prisoners listened to them, they began praying and singing hymns to God.

When the earthquake struck, the chains holding the prisoners were broken. If they had chosen to, the prisoners could easily run out of the prison and escape. This would have put the jailer in a terrible position with his superiors. If a jailer's prisoners escaped, then the jailer responsible would most likely have had to pay with his life. Realising that this was probably going to happen anyway, the fearful jailer drew his sword to take his own life. At this point, Paul stopped him and assured the jailer that no prisoners had escaped.

Paul was not the kind of prisoner the jailer would have expected. He invited Paul and Silas to accompany him to his house to tell everyone in his household about Jesus. Not even waiting until morning, the jailer tended to Paul and Silas' wounds and then proceeded to be baptised along with everyone in his household.

This one night had been full of drama for this man. He experienced a catastrophic earthquake, watched the prison he was in charge of being reduced to rubble, and had a last-minute reprieve from committing suicide. He and his household became followers of Jesus, but when morning came, he would still have had to answer to his superiors. Despite all of this,

“After this the jailer took Paul and Silas home and gave them food. He and his family were very happy because they now believed in God.” Acts 16:34, ICB

Up to this point, Paul had withheld a very important fact from the jailor and other government officials. In the morning, he finally revealed that both he and Silas were *Roman citizens*. This would have been a shock to all of those involved. This meant that the magistrates had broken Roman law by beating Roman citizens publicly without a trial. Paul could have quietly left the city, but he decided to make a statement about his legitimacy as a citizen. Likely, this would have protected Lydia, the jailer and other Christians in Philippi from unnecessary prejudice later on.

As time went by, a church was established in Philippi. Paul would later write a letter to them, and the letter, [the Book of Philippians](#), can be read in the New Testament. The theme of the Philippian letter is joy.

There are many lessons to learn from this story, and joy while undergoing trials is just one of them. Paul and Silas rejoiced in a dark prison cell, and the jailer rejoiced in his new faith despite the chaos of his life.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Teach the children how to sing “[Rejoice in the Lord Always](#).” Possibly invite others to join your group for this song. If you do not feel confident in leading singing, ask a guest to teach the song to the children. After singing, ask the children, “Did you know that those words in that song come directly from the bible?”

Have one of the children look up and read [Philippians 4:4](#). The ESV or KJV translations contain the exact words of the song.

Guess who wrote those words? Paul said to rejoice in the Lord always. Paul was happy to be a Christian even when bad things happened to him. Let's listen to today's story, and you will see what I mean . . .”

The Story:

Paul was a missionary. He and his friends (Silas, Timothy, and Luke) travelled to many places to teach people about Jesus. When they were in the city of Philippi, they liked to go to a quiet place by a river where people were praying. People there wanted to know more and more.

As they left the city to go to the river, a young slave girl shouted, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Even though that sounded good, she kept following after them and yelling the same thing repeatedly. Soon, no one could hear Paul and his friends talking about Jesus because the slave girl was interrupting them with her shouting.

Paul became annoyed but knew the slave girl was not acting normal. An evil spirit was causing her to act this way. So he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!" The spirit left her at that moment, and she was herself again.

The girl must have been happy but was not free to go home. She was a slave. To be a slave is like having a boss and doing whatever he or she wants you to do all of the time but never being paid. Instead of being a boss, this person is called an owner.

When the evil spirit lived in the girl, people would pay the owners money so they could come and listen to the girl tell them what would happen in their future. The slave girl had to do what her owners said, even when she was tired or sick.

The slave girl's owners were very angry that Paul made the evil spirit leave the girl. Without the evil spirit living in her, she could not tell people's futures. If she could not predict the future, then no one would pay them money.

The girl's owners grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them to the marketplace in the middle of the city. Magistrates are like judges in a court, so the owners started telling lies and complaining to the magistrates. The magistrates did not want any trouble, so they imprisoned Paul and Silas without a fair court trial.

The magistrates ordered Paul and Silas beaten, and then they told the jailer (the man in charge of the prison) to guard them very carefully.

To make sure they did not escape, the jailer had stocks put around Paul and Silas' feet before putting them in a prison cell in the middle of the prison. Then he locked the door.

Paul and Silas must have been hurting from the beating, and the prison must have been dark and scary. But they did not give up. In fact, in the middle of the night, the other prisoners were surprised to hear singing and praying coming from the middle of the prison. Even though all of these terrible things were happening, Paul and Silas still trusted God and were glad they were Christians.

While Paul and Silas were singing hymns, something amazing happened. A huge earthquake shook the entire prison. After the earthquake, the chains fell off the prisoners, and the cell doors flew open.

The jailer rushed into the prison and saw all the doors open. He thought all prisoners had escaped and knew he would be in trouble. He was so sure of this that he took out his sword and started to kill himself.

But Paul shouted at him to stop. None of the prisoners had escaped.

The jailer knew that Paul had saved his life. He took Paul and Silas to his house so that Paul could tell him and his family about Jesus. The jailer decided he wanted to follow Jesus. He did not want to wait, so he took care of Paul and Silas' wounds and went immediately to be baptised.

After they saw the jailer being baptised, everyone in his household also wanted to be baptised. Even though it had been a terrible night, the jailer rejoiced because he and his household now believed in God and Jesus.

The next day, the magistrates decide to let Paul and Silas out of prison. Paul reminded them that it was against Roman law for them to put a Roman citizen in prison without a trial. They did not want to get in

trouble, so they had to treat Paul and Silas nicely after this. Paul and Silas went to Lydia's home and visited the other Christians in Philippi. Then, they left the city to go and tell other people about Jesus.

Years after leaving Philippi, Paul would write a letter to the church there. In your Bible, this letter is called the Book of Philippians. One of the things Paul wrote in the letter was this:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." [Philippians 4:4, ESV](#)

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#) or [click here for the printable illustrations.](#)

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Or use the video below.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalize its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

Review:

1. How was the slave girl bothering Paul and Silas in Philippi? (She followed them around and yelled when they tried to teach people)
2. What did Paul do because he was annoyed? (He ordered the spirit of divination in the slave girl to come out of her in the name of Jesus Christ)
3. Why were the slave girl's owners angry at Paul and Silas? (Their slave girl could not tell fortunes after the spirit of divination left her, so they could not make money)
4. What happened to Paul and Silas? (They were beaten, flogged, and put in prison)
5. What did Paul and Silas do in prison? (Sang and prayed)
6. Why was the jailer about to kill himself? (An earthquake opened the prison doors, and the prisoners' chains fell off. He thought the prisoners would escape and that he would be in trouble)
7. What stopped the jailer from hurting himself? (Paul and Silas told him not to, and told him that none of the prisoners had escaped)

8. How long did it take the jailer to decide to be baptised? (Less than one hour)
9. What happened to Paul and Silas? (The government let them leave prison, they went to Lydia's home, and then left the city)
10. What did this story show you about God?
11. What did this story show you about people?

Reflection:

1. Why do you think there was an earthquake that opened the prison doors and broke the prisoners' chain?
2. Why do you think Paul and Silas were praising God in prison?
3. How do you think Paul and Silas felt when they were praying and singing hymns to God in prison?
4. What do you think the other prisoners thought about Paul and Silas' praying and singing? Do you think any of them wanted to follow Jesus?
5. Do you think the prisoners were surprised that Paul and Silas were singing despite being in prison?
6. Have you ever felt joy or wanted to praise God when something hard was happening?
7. What promises has God made us that we can remember when we have a problem or are afraid or sad?
8. How does Jesus give us joy? Can Jesus bring us joy even during hard times?
9. What is something you wonder about in this story?
10. What part of this story was the most interesting to you?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [Happy all the Time \(Inright, outright\) Song](#)
- [If You're Happy and You Know It Song](#)
- [Rejoice in the Lord Always](#)
- [All Wrapped Up, All Tied Up, All Tangled Up in Jesus!](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- On the map, point out that this story also took place in Philippi, where Lydia lived.
- Application: Use [situation cards](#) to discuss how to have joy in various situations.
- To review, you or the children can draw a large outline of Paul on a whiteboard or piece of paper (even drawing with a stick in the sand works fine if you are outside). Then, after you have taught the lesson, ask the children to think about what they have just learned from the Bible. Have them write descriptive words or draw pictures inside and around the outlined illustration of Paul. When you see what the children are writing or drawing, you may be surprised or encouraged by what insights they have picked up from the story. This is also a good opportunity to correct or add to anything you might not have

covered as well as you could have when you were teaching.



If you prefer, you can [download and print the illustration of Paul provided here](#) and then have the children write and draw on it for the review.

- Alternatively, if you are teaching a series of lessons about Paul, then you might draw an outline of him on a large poster or paper and then add descriptive words about him each time you study a new lesson.
- [Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together as a set.](#)



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Make a relief map of Paul’s Journeys featuring the place in today’s story. If you are studying Paul’s journeys over a few lessons, you could add more details to the map each time you learn about another stop on the journey. Instructions on how to make a relief map at <https://www.weirdunsocializedhomeschoolers.com/step-by-step-to-making-salt-dough-map/>
- Have the children copy [Philippians 4:4](#) or [James 1:2-3](#) onto a poster and decorate it. Display it as you teach or encourage the children to put it in a prominent place in their room at home.



Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).

- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page with text \(Ministry Spark\)](#)
- [Craft: Video clip \(1 minute and 32 seconds\) showing how to make Paul's basket from an egg carton, string and pencil \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Craft: A pop-up book about salvation \(biblesongsandmore.wordpress.com\)](#)
- [Craft: Make handcuffs and chains from paper towel roll and string. Youtube video \(1 minute and 2 seconds\).](#)
- [Review: Create a "passport" that covers Paul's life. Good visual ideas and activities. It could be split up to go with several lessons or taught all together as a review of previous lessons concerning Paul found \(kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.co.nz\)](#)
- [Lesson: Lesson on Paul and Silas in prison with great ideas and printable visual aids. Links to reproducible pages and worksheets at the bottom of the page \(kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.co.nz\)](#)
- [Visual aid and other ideas for telling the story \(kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.co.nz\)](#)
- [Read more about Philippi at wikipedia.org\)](#)

<https://www.pinterest.com/marynnz/paul-2nd-journey/>

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