

COVENANT — THE NEW COVENANT

Paul and Silas in Philippi

LESSON 07

JULY 19, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Acts 16:16–40

FOCUS VERSES

Acts 16:25;

Philippians 4:4

²⁵**And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.**

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⁴**Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.**

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Recognizing our covenant with Jesus allows the Spirit to produce joy.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will embrace the Spirit's beckoning to joy.

COVENANT CONTEXT

On Paul's second missionary journey, which is recorded in the Book of Acts, God led him to Europe, a new continent to hear the gospel. He and his companion Silas were persecuted, but God worked a miracle that led to the salvation of a jailor and his household. Even through difficulty, God was opening up a new church and inviting new people into covenant relationship with Him. Paul later wrote a letter to this same church known as the Epistle to the Philippians.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is your favorite song to sing when times are tough?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to Paul and Silas singing when they were in prison.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. CHURCH PLANTING IN PHILIPPI

A. Paul in the Will of God

***DISCUSS:** If God has given you a dream or vision of something to come to pass, has it already happened? If not, what Bible passages encourage you as you look for God to perform what He promised?*

- B. Paul Addressed the Girl Possessed by a Demon
- C. I will follow God's will, knowing He will make a way.

DISCUSS: *How has God provided direction or redirection in your life through your spiritual disciplines?*

II. PAUL AND SILAS ARRESTED

- A. The Philippians' Unexpected Response
- B. The Shatter Zone (V)

DISCUSS: *How do we deal with resistance to the gospel in today's culture?*

- C. Paul and Silas's Unexpected Response
- D. I will praise God even when my situation seems bleak.

DISCUSS: *What are the benefits of having joy in negative situations?*

III. THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

- A. Paul in Prison Again
- B. A Message Worth Repeating

DISCUSS: *What intentional reminders to rejoice can you incorporate into your life?*

- C. I will embrace the Spirit's beckoning to joy.

Internalizing the Message (I)

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to give joy to those in limiting situations
- For God to use our trials to bring hope to others

LESSON CONNECTION

From stories around a campfire to tense page-turning novels, jailbreaks are a topic of fascination. In 1924 John Dillinger and his accomplice attempted to rob a grocer, and Dillinger was sentenced to serve ten to twenty years in Indiana State Prison where he learned the craft of bank robbery from his fellow inmates. Perhaps in return for their impromptu education, Dillinger assisted in planning the escape of eight inmates. After his parole, he put his newfound skills to work, robbing five banks in four months.

In 1933 John Dillinger was apprehended and jailed again, only to be broken free one month later by the inmates he had previously assisted. Dillinger was recaptured and moved to Crown Point Jail, which had been described by authorities as "escape proof." At Crown Point, Dillinger carved a piece of wood into a fake pistol, blackened it with shoe polish, and forced his way out of the jail, driving the Sheriff's car out of the state.

In the infamous 1962 Alcatraz escape, Frank Morris and brothers John and Clarence Anglin collaborated on their crafty mission. After approximately six months of preparation, they set their plan in motion. Morning guards first noted the men's absence upon discovering in the prisoners' beds three heads made of toilet paper, cardboard, cement chips, and human hair from the barbershop floor. Using spoons, a drill made out of a broken vacuum cleaner motor,

a homemade periscope, a raft and life preservers made of more than fifty stolen raincoats, and a raft inflator made from a musical instrument, the trio of inmates fled the maximum-security island prison. Their remains or whereabouts were never discovered.

Cartel leader Joaquin “*El Chapo*” Guzman made headlines for two escapes from maximum-security federal prisons. In 2001 Guzman allegedly hid in a laundry cart and was wheeled out the prison doors. Some believe that Guzman simply walked out of the prison, undisturbed by corrupt guards and prison officials. In 2015 Guzman made a second grand exit, convincing his associates to buy land near the prison for an escape route. After climbing down through a hole in the shower floor and riding a motorcycle through a well-lit, ventilated one-mile tunnel, he flew to a hideout in the mountains of his home state.

Jailbreakers capture our imaginations and demonstrate desperate and creative measures people will use to escape to freedom. While we may not be wily, hardened criminals, we all have experienced situations that feel dire, invoking our innate urge to fight or flee. Like prisoners, we may exhaust ourselves, our relationships, and our resources searching for a way out of inescapable problems. In Acts 16 Paul and Silas showed an unexpected response to imprisonment, reminding us that in God’s plan, limiting situations can be transformed into great opportunities and prison walls can become open doors.

BIBLE LESSON

I. CHURCH PLANTING IN PHILIPPI

A. Paul in the Will of God

After the Spirit-led decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, Paul determined to revisit cities where he had preached to encourage the churches and leaders. Along the way, the Spirit prevented Paul and his ministry partners from entering Asia or Bithynia. During the night Paul received a vision in which a Macedonian man beckoned him to come and help. Paul and his companions journeyed, willing to receive direction from God, even if that meant changing their course. Upon arriving in Philippi, a leading city of Macedonia, the team was surprised by their welcoming committee. They were greeted not by a Macedonian man, but by women who prayed along the riverside on the Sabbath. Among this small Jewish gathering was Lydia, a God-fearing businesswoman, whose heart God had opened to Paul’s message about Jesus. Lydia and her household were baptized, and her home became a central location for the Philippian believers.

Normally Paul would have gone first to the synagogue, but it is likely there were not even ten Jewish men there to warrant a synagogue. Yet there in that Macedonian city, God established a church in the home of a prayerful, worshipping woman. The vision of the Macedonian man led Paul and his team to a new ministry environment, but its fulfillment was different than they imagined. Often God gives us just enough direction to move forward into His purpose without giving all the details of what we will experience as we go. Obeying God’s will involves acting in faith on the information we have and seizing surprising opportunities to minister.

DISCUSS: *If God has given you a dream or vision of something to come to pass, has it already happened?*

If not, what Bible passages encourage you as you look for God to perform what He promised?

B. Paul Addressed the Girl Possessed by a Demon

Lydia was a devout and reputable woman, known for selling purple dye, a luxury product. She was affluent enough to open her home to Paul and his companions and influential enough to lead her household to Jesus Christ. In sharp contrast to this free woman, Paul confronted a girl who was socially and spiritually bound. As Paul and his companions went to prayer, this slave girl who was possessed by a demon met them. From her age to her gender to her enslaved status, this girl stood at the bottom rungs of the social strata. The dark spirit that bound her and the masters who profited from her fortune-telling abilities had taken advantage of her.

She followed Paul for many days, crying out, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). Although her message was true—Paul and Silas did show the way of salvation—it may have been motivated by a desire to affiliate herself with the miracle-working ministers to gain more business. Troubled by her persistent disruptions, Paul commanded the spirit to leave. When Paul spoke the name of Jesus, the power dynamics were reversed and God set the girl free from her oppressive lifestyle.

C. I will follow God’s will, knowing He will make a way.

Paul and his ministry partners followed God’s will as they responded to the Spirit’s leading. The Lord opened Lydia’s heart to receive the gospel message. They were faithful to their devotion because they were on their way to prayer when they met the young girl in need of a miracle.

Like these Book of Acts travelers, we follow the will of God in decisive moments of our calling and in our daily commitment to spiritual disciplines. As we follow, God prepares and positions others in our path so we can reach them. We anticipate that His Spirit will empower our work and confirm our witness.

***DISCUSS:** How has God provided direction or redirection in your life through your spiritual disciplines?*

II. PAUL AND SILAS ARRESTED

A. The Philippians’ Unexpected Response

Everyone should have been happy for this newly freed young lady, but her deliverance was a disruption and disappointment to the Philippians. Her masters were enraged that they had lost their source of income. Instead of showing gratitude, they dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace before the local rulers and accused them of introducing illegal customs for the Romans. The crowd rallied against Paul and Silas in a mass rage where the magistrates stripped them, beat them with “many stripes,” and imprisoned them (Acts 16:23). Paul would later recall to the church at Thessalonica how they were shamefully treated in Philippi, highlighting how they were treated brutally and humiliated publicly (I Thessalonians 2:2).

B. The Shatter Zone

Conflict erupted whenever Paul and Silas ministered in the Philippians’ shatter zone: an unstable place created when contrasting cultures collide. When opposing ideas, traditions, and values meet, harmony between groups shatters,

and relationships become volatile and even violent. The journey into Philippi pulled Paul and Silas beyond where they were familiar because it was their first venture into a true Roman colony and their first venture into Europe. Anyone looking from the outside would say it wasn't going so well, but God had bigger plans than anyone could see.

Whenever the gospel is pioneered in new territory, we can expect spiritual and social resistance. In addition to charges that Paul and Silas were against Rome, they were also accused of causing trouble in Philippi (Acts 16:20–21). The accusations were unfair and untrue; they were not there to cause trouble but to bring the gospel and the power of God that comes with it. They preached a message of peace but were accused of inciting an uprising. Meanwhile their adversaries commanded a mob. The double standard is glaring.

(V) Although Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were rashly punished without a fair trial. From their prison perspective, it would have been easy to be discouraged by the injustice of it all and the apparent failure of their mission. God led them to Macedonia, so why were they in prison? But we learn from these two faithful missionaries that when we carry the revolutionary message of Jesus into new and difficult environments, trouble is not necessarily a sign of failure.

***DISCUSS:** How do we deal with resistance to the gospel in today's culture?*

C. Paul and Silas's Unexpected Response

Around midnight, in a dark prison in an unfamiliar city, Paul and Silas did not sink into despair. Paul looked over to Silas, nodded, and Silas knew what to do. He hummed in the key of E flat, and Paul and Silas began singing. The prison guards had heard a lot of prisoners cursing and some even praying, but singing was a first. The other prisoners listened and God responded. A great earthquake shook the city of Philippi, especially the prison, creating a literal shatter zone as foundations shook, doors opened, and chains were loosed.

When the guard awoke, he could not believe his bleary eyes. All the doors were opened, all the chains were loosed, and the prisoners must have surely escaped. He drew his sword to kill himself, but Paul saved his life when he assured him they were all there. Not even one prisoner had escaped—a miracle all by itself. The jailor fell in front of Paul and Silas and asked the pivotal question: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). The missionaries shared the message of salvation through Jesus. The jailor took them to his home and Paul preached to him and his household. The same hour, the jailor and his household were baptized, the jailor washed his former prisoners' wounds, and he fed Paul and Silas. God freed the missionaries from their natural bondage and the jailor and his household from their spiritual bondage. And it all started with a song in prison.

D. I will praise God even when my situation seems bleak.

As we minister to others, it may seem our witness is poorly received, producing conflict rather than success. However, from a prison cell Paul and Silas's praises resound to remind us we can choose to praise God even when we are misunderstood, insulted, shamed, or abused. Our praise is a witness to everyone who hears us. God will open prison doors and closed hearts, working out our worst moments for our good and His glory.

DISCUSS: *What are the benefits of having joy in negative situations?*

III. THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

A. Paul in Prison Again

Years later Paul wrote a letter to the Philippian church, encouraging them amid their persecution and the news of his imprisonment for preaching. The saints at Philippi were familiar with resistance to the gospel, as persecution had marked the church's founding days. Despite writing under such dark days, the letter to the Philippians bears a hopeful tone. Imprisonment, which appeared to be a setback, had actually resulted in "the furtherance of the gospel" (Philippians 1:12). Paul's trial commanded attention within the palace and beyond, and other Christians were emboldened to preach because of his unwavering faith. Paul did not promote a message of false positivity that ignored suffering; instead, Paul accepted his suffering as an opportunity to imitate and bear witness to Jesus Christ. The Philippians knew as well as anyone that salvation can come from suffering.

Facing two possibilities, release from prison or a martyr's death, Paul expected that Jesus Christ would be glorified through him. Though Paul had confidence in his deliverance, he recognized that neither imprisonment nor death would be a total loss. Paul considered the benefits of either outcome: the church's joy in his release and return, or the joy of being with Christ in the resurrection. Paul's praise was not conditional on another escape because he kept Jesus' mission and eternal impact in perspective.

B. A Message Worth Repeating

Throughout his letter, Paul repeatedly wrote about rejoicing. He personally found present and future joy in the Philippians' participation with him in the gospel, in preaching Jesus Christ, in the church's unity, in Jesus' return, and in the church itself. (See Philippians 1:4–5, 18; 2:2, 16; 4:1.) Paul commanded them time and time again to rejoice in the Lord—in their covenantal relationship with Jesus and because of His saving work on Calvary.

The theme of rejoicing culminated in one of the final exhortations of his epistle: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). Even from another prison cell, Paul's call to joy was persistent, repetitive, and not dependent on all his prayers being answered. Like the steady rhythm of a song, joy continued to set the pace for the Philippians' faith and witness in their city.

DISCUSS: *What intentional reminders to rejoice can you incorporate into your life?*

C. I will embrace the Spirit's beckoning to joy.

We often need repeated reminders to rejoice. Joy is often thought of as a mental and emotional state, but rejoicing is an active choice. No matter how we feel, we can choose joy by expressing our gratitude to the Lord and focusing on praiseworthy things. As we make the choice to rejoice, the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts, producing the sweet fruit of joy. Biblical joy is not a shallow optimism that comes from our understanding or pleasant situations. We rejoice not in ourselves but in the Lord. As people of God, we celebrate the story of salvation and communion with our Savior. Like Paul and the church at Philippi, we can also rejoice in the body of Christ. Appreciating the church community, working toward unity, and celebrating those who serve and sacrifice give us bountiful reasons to

rejoice.

Teacher Option: *Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate the value of responsibilities in covenant relationship.*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

(I) In 2014 a nine-year-old boy named Willie Myrick was kidnapped from his driveway in Atlanta, Georgia. Willie was terrified, but he remembered a song from church. For three hours the kidnapper drove him around the city while Willie sang a gospel favorite, “Every Praise.” The kidnapper cursed at Willie and told him to “shut up,” growing progressively more annoyed. In an amusing understatement to reporters, Willie acknowledged, “He was probably irritated of me singing.” Seemingly unafraid even as a kidnapped nine-year-old in the backseat, Willie repeatedly sang the hook: “God my deliverer, yes He is.” Finally, unable to endure any more of the private gospel concert, the kidnapper shoved Willie out the door and told him not to tell anyone what had happened. Willie was rescued and his story naturally went viral, reaching numerous news outlets and even leading to a meeting between Willie and the gospel artist who sang “Every Praise,” Hezekiah Walker (fox4kc.com, “Boy sings gospel song until kidnapper can’t stand it anymore, tells him to get out of car”).

Willie Myrick’s deliverance anthem was written by David Bratton. Inspired by a Sunday sermon about praise, Bratton penned the chorus. He stated, “After I wrote ‘Every Praise,’ I thought it was too simple and that nobody would think it was a real song, because it only had a few lines.” Three years after writing the chorus, he added a short bridge and the song was eventually recorded. “Every Praise” became a soaring success; it was number one on gospel radio for twenty-six weeks and dubbed the Gospel Song of the Decade by *Billboard* magazine in 2019. Astonished at the song’s popularity, Bratton reflected on its simplicity, stating, “It can be sung by the most talented or the least talented. Just about every musician can play it. I’ve heard it sung with just a guitar and a washboard. I’ve heard it sung with orchestras” (journalofgospelmusic.com, “Genesis of a Gospel Song: ‘Every Praise’”). Though the writer initially thought it was barely a song, the few memorable lines helped save a young man’s life.

Rejoicing is something we all can do, whether we are young or old, musically apt or tone-deaf. Our song may be simple, but the message is profound; every praise belongs to God, and we offer it to Him in every situation. Like Willie, our choice to rejoice can increase our faith even when we are afraid. Our rejoicing frustrates our enemy and encourages everyone who hears. Ultimately, our rejoicing results in deliverance, for us or through us.