

Paul and Silas in Prison

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: We can pray and praise God even in hard times, and God can use it to bring others to Jesus.

Bible passage: Acts 16:16–40. Read it before class.

Memory verse: "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." *Acts 16:25 (KJV)*

You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), 18 index cards, a marker, a whiteboard or large paper, and one take-home sheet for each child.

Before class: write the memory verse on 18 index cards, one word on each card, and the reference "Acts 16:25" on the last card. Make two sets if you have a big class.

1. Opening game: Who Is Singing? (5–10 minutes)

Everyone closes their eyes. Tap one child on the shoulder. That child hums a song everyone knows, softly, from where they sit. The others keep their eyes closed and point to where the sound is coming from. Then everyone opens their eyes to see if they were right. Play a few rounds. Ask: *Could you hear them even with your eyes closed?* Say: "In today's story, two men sang in a dark prison at midnight, and everyone around them heard."

2. Bible story: At Midnight They Sang (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to Acts 16. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words.

A girl set free. Paul and Silas were in **Philippi** (Acts 16:12). As they went to prayer, a girl with an evil spirit met them. Her masters made "much gain," a lot of money, from her **soothsaying**, telling people what would happen to them (16:16). Many days she followed them, crying, "These men are the servants of the most high God" (16:17). **Look up Acts 16:18.** Paul, "being grieved" (troubled), said to the spirit, "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour."

Into the stocks. When her masters saw their money was gone, they caught Paul and Silas and brought them to the **magistrates**, the city rulers (16:19–20). The crowd rose up against them, and the magistrates commanded them to be beaten. After many **stripes** (blows that leave marks), they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was told to keep them safely (16:22–23). **Look up Acts 16:24.** He put them in the **inner prison**, the deepest part, and made their feet fast in the **stocks**, heavy wooden boards that lock the feet.

Songs at midnight. **Look up Acts 16:25.** "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." Say: "They were hurt, locked up and in the dark. And they chose to pray and praise."



The earthquake. Look up Acts 16:26. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, the **foundations** (the bottom stones) of the prison were shaken, all the doors were opened, and every one's **bands** (chains) were loosed. The **keeper of the prison**, the jailer, woke up and saw the doors open. He drew out his sword and was going to hurt himself, because he thought the prisoners had fled (16:27). **Look up Acts 16:28.** Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." Nobody ran away!

What must I do? The jailer called for a light, sprang in trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas (16:29). **Look up Acts 16:30–31.** He asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (his family). Then they spake unto him "the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house" (16:32). **Look up Acts 16:33.** The same hour of the night he washed their stripes, "and was baptized, he and all his, straightway," right away. He brought them into his house, set **meat** (food) before them and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house (16:34).

In the morning. The magistrates sent **serjeants** (officers) to say, "Let those men go" (16:35–36). But Paul said they were Romans and had been beaten openly without a fair trial; the magistrates must come themselves and bring them out (16:37). The magistrates were afraid when they heard they were Romans. They came, begged them, brought them out and asked them to leave the city (16:38–39). Paul and Silas went to the house of **Lydia** (a believer from earlier in the chapter, 16:14–15), comforted the believers there and went on their way (16:40).

3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. Paul and Silas were hurt and locked up, and they sang (Acts 16:25). Why do you think they praised God right then?
2. "The prisoners heard them." Who hears how you act when things go wrong?
3. The doors were open, but Paul and Silas stayed (16:28). Why do you think they didn't run?
4. Paul was kind to the man who had locked his feet in the stocks. How can you be kind to someone who has not been kind to you?
5. The jailer believed and was baptized "straightway" (16:33). Why do you think he didn't wait until morning?

Recall questions

1. Where did the jailer put Paul and Silas? (*In the inner prison, their feet fast in the stocks, Acts 16:24*)
2. What loosed every one's bands? (*A great earthquake, 16:26*)
3. What did Paul cry with a loud voice? (*"Do thyself no harm: for we are all here," 16:28*)

4. Memory verse: Earthquake Scramble (5 minutes)

Explain the old words: **midnight** means the middle of the night; **sang praises unto God** means sang songs telling God how great He is; **the prisoners heard them** means the other people locked in the prison were listening. Read the verse together from the board. Then erase the board, shuffle the 18 cards ("The earthquake shook them up!") and hand them out. Kids holding cards race to stand in the right order and read the verse out loud. Shuffle and play again until everyone can say it.

5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "The jailer asked, 'What must I do to be saved?' Paul and Silas said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.' Then they taught him the word of the Lord, and that same hour he was baptized, he and all his (Acts 16:30–33). Jesus said, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved' (Mark 16:16, KJV). Believing and obeying go together. God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). How do we obey the gospel? 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means to turn away from sin; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5)."

Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

This week: when something goes wrong, pray and praise God first. Someone is listening.



6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. Acts 16:12: What city were Paul and Silas in? (*Philippi*)
2. Acts 16:18: In whose name did Paul command the spirit to come out? (*In the name of Jesus Christ*)
3. Acts 16:24: What were their feet made fast in? (*The stocks*)
4. Acts 16:25: What time was it when they prayed and sang? (*Midnight*)
5. Acts 16:29: What did the jailer call for? (*A light*)
6. Acts 16:33: What did the jailer wash? (*Their stripes*)
7. Acts 16:34: What did the jailer set before them? (*Meat, which means food*)
8. Acts 16:40: Whose house did Paul and Silas go to? (*Lydia's*)

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that we can pray and sing praises to You anytime, even at midnight. Help us praise You when things are hard, be kind to everyone, and tell others about Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

About the hard parts: tell the beating (Acts 16:22–23) and the jailer's sword (16:27) plainly and briefly, with no details. Keep the focus on Paul's kindness: "Do thyself no harm." If anything a child says about hurting themselves worries you, tell their parents and your pastor.

If a child asks about the girl's spirit: it was an evil spirit, and the name of Jesus Christ is stronger: it came out the same hour (Acts 16:18). Don't add scary details.