

Paul and Silas in Prison

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: Praise God in the hard places. Others are listening, and God can use it to bring them to Jesus.

Bible passage: Acts 16:16–40. Students read it out loud themselves.

Memory verse: "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." *Acts 16:25 (KJV)* and "I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth." *Psalms 34:1 (KJV)*

You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.

Before class: read Acts 16:16–40. Write both memory verses on the board. Label the four corners of the room: Complain, Worry, Get Angry, Pray. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room a few verses each.

1. Opening game: Four Corners (5–10 minutes)

Read each situation. Students walk to the corner that shows what they would honestly do first. 1) You get blamed for something you didn't do. 2) Your best friend moves away. 3) You get sick on the day of a trip you were waiting for. 4) Someone posts something mean about you. Ask a few students why they chose their corner. Say: "Paul and Silas had a terrible day. Watch what they did at midnight."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: Acts 16:16–24. Students take turns, a few verses each. Old words in this passage:

- **damsel** (16:16): a young woman or girl; **a spirit of divination** (16:16): an evil spirit that claimed to tell the future
- **gain** (16:16, 16:19): money; **soothsaying** (16:16): fortune-telling; **shew** (16:17): show
- **grieved** (16:18): troubled and upset; **the same hour** (16:18): right then
- **magistrates** (16:20): the city rulers; **exceedingly trouble** (16:20): cause great trouble
- **rent off** (16:22): tore off; **stripes** (16:23): blows that leave marks
- **charge** (16:23–24): an order; **made their feet fast in the stocks** (16:24): locked their feet in heavy wooden boards

About the hard parts: read 16:22–23 and 16:27 as written, without adding details. If anything a student says about hurting themselves worries you, tell their parents and your pastor.



Read out loud: Acts 16:25–34. Old words in this passage:

- **foundations** (16:26): the bottom stones of the building; **bands were loosed** (16:26): chains came off
- **keeper of the prison** (16:27): the jailer; **supposing that the prisoners had been fled** (16:27): thinking they had escaped
- **Do thyself no harm** (16:28): don't hurt yourself; **sprang in** (16:29): ran in
- **Sirs** (16:30): a polite word, like "sir"; **thy house** (16:31): your family
- **spake** (16:32): spoke; **straightway** (16:33): right away; **set meat before them** (16:34): gave them food

Tell the end in your own words: in the morning the magistrates sent **serjeants** (officers) to let them go (16:35–36). Paul said, "They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans" (without a trial, though they were Roman citizens), and said the magistrates must come and bring them out themselves (16:37). The magistrates **feared** and **besought** them (begged them), brought them out, and asked them to leave the city. They went to Lydia's house, comforted the **brethren** (the believers), and departed (16:38–40).

Teach the key moment. Write Acts 16:31 and 16:33 side by side on the board. Say: "The jailer asked the biggest question anyone can ask. Paul and Silas said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.' Then they spake unto him the word of the Lord (16:32), and the same hour of the night he 'was baptized, he and all his, straightway.' He did not wait until morning. Lydia did the same earlier in this chapter: the Lord opened her heart, and she was baptized with her household (16:14–15). Jesus said, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved' (Mark 16:16), and Peter preached it in Acts 2:38. In the book of Acts, believing and obeying go together."

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Paul and Silas prayed and sang "at midnight," hurt and in the stocks (16:24–25). What does it take to praise God at your midnight?
2. "The prisoners heard them" (16:25). Who is watching how you handle hard days?
3. The doors were open, and Paul said, "we are all here" (16:28). Why do you think they stayed? What did it mean for the jailer?
4. Paul was kind to the man who locked his feet in the stocks. Who is hard for you to be kind to?
5. Look at 16:31–34. List everything the jailer did after he believed. What does it show about real faith?
6. Paul stood up for fairness in 16:37. When is it right to speak up, and how can we do it in a way that honors God?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: **at midnight** means in the middle of the night, the darkest hour; **sang praises unto God** means sang songs telling God how great He is; **bless the LORD** means praise and thank God; **continually** means all the time.

Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Acts 16:25 this week; keep working on Psalms 34:1 next week too.

5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "The jailer asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16:30, KJV). That is the question for every one of us. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and we obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: '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) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-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 utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."

Pray with the students, 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.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. What is my "midnight" right now, something hard I'm going through?
2. Write three things I can still praise God for, even in that.
3. Who might be listening to how I handle it? Write a short prayer for that person.

If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: when a hard moment comes, pray and praise first. Then look for one person who needs to hear about Jesus.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, You are worthy of praise at all times, even at midnight. Help us bless You when things are hard, be kind to those who hurt us, and point others to Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student asks about the girl's spirit: it was an evil spirit, and Paul cast it out "in the name of Jesus Christ" the same hour (Acts 16:18). The name of Jesus has all power. Keep it simple and don't add details.