



Paul Sings in Jail

Goal: To explore how trusting God frees us to be faithful in challenging situations.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Acts 16:16-34

Paul and Silas were in prison. They had healed a slave girl, were beaten, and were imprisoned. But in the midst of this challenging situation, God acted.

At about midnight, when Paul and Silas were “praying and singing hymns to God” (v. 25), a violent earthquake shook the foundations of the prison. Immediately the prison doors were opened and the chains fell off the prisoners. When the jailer was ready to kill himself, afraid he would be blamed, Paul told him not to harm himself. This led to the jailer asking what he must do to be saved. Paul and Silas said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (v. 31). The jailer responded in faith to the grace of Christ, and he and his entire family were baptized, expressing their gratitude for this grace.

The natural reaction to being imprisoned is fear. But in the midst of their situation, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God. Their faith sustained them and was expressed in worship. This freed them to trust God, no matter what, so they could be unafraid. In faith, we trust God too.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Children probably think of jail as a place for “bad” people and will wonder why someone like Paul would be jailed. They may find it hard to believe that following Jesus would get Paul and Silas in such trouble. If appropriate, explain that there are still places in the world where being a Christian is dangerous.

Children can relate to the experience of being afraid. They all are able to tell stories about it. Some can also relate to standing up for what you believe in a march or a protest. Some may have participated in a march with their schools or parents/caregivers. They are likely aware of this kind of activity that makes the daily news. This will help them make a connection with Paul and Silas, who were imprisoned for their action of helping to save a young woman whose life was in danger.

They can be helped to know that our actions on behalf of others are important and that God is always with us.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

As you read and prepare to tell the story, be attentive to all of the scenes. It's a rich text with a lot of movement, from the action of Paul and Silas saving the young woman, to being thrown into jail, to the earthquake and the encounter with the jailer, and then the celebration at the jailer's home.

The children may not equate singing with praying. Help the children learn the power of prayer and hymn singing.

*God, trusting in you isn't always easy.
Help me to relax and live in your grace. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 6, 14, 21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

candle

green cloth

bowl of water

sheets, pillows

Grace Notes (GN) 1

internet-connected
device

ball of yarn

Responding

Praying

copies of **GN 2**

Offering

church musician,
hymnals or songbooks

Extra

copies of **GN 3**

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Offering God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG M

Greet the children by name and with the words, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” Smile and acknowledge your pleasure in seeing them.

As children arrive, invite them to decorate a table for worship. Ask the children to include a Bible, a candle, a bowl of water, and a green cloth. Suggest they add drawings of items such as purple cloth, coins, and chains. Wonder what the items have to do with the story.

Ask the children to build a “prison” using props such as tables, sheets, pillows, and chairs.

Invite some of the children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Invite one or two volunteers to practice today’s Scripture reading.

Singing

Gather around the worship table. Remind the children that Jesus wanted us to share the good news of God’s love and compassion with the whole world. Play and sing “The Whole World Is in God’s Hands”—**SCM 14**—to celebrate sharing God’s love with the world.

Praying

Turn on the candle, reminding children that the candle represents Christ’s light in the world.

Pray the following echo prayer aloud, or ask a volunteer to lead the prayer:

Dear God, /
thank you for being with us today. /
Tell us something new about you. /
We are ready to listen. /
Amen. /

B *Providing opportunities for children to speak or act in front of others can be a fun way to learn from one another and can build children’s confidence. However, it can also provide opportunities for unwanted behavior such as bullying or fidgeting. Help children focus on respecting others and being polite.*



Preparing to Hear the Story

Explain that today’s story is right after the one they heard last week about Lydia in Philippi. Encourage the children to tell you what they remember about last week’s story. Explain that today’s story also occurs in Philippi.

Ask the children what comes to mind when they hear the word *prison*. Explain that the Bible story they will hear is about Paul and Silas, who are placed in prison for telling others about Jesus.



If a child asks about baptism for himself or herself or a family member, inform the parents or caregivers and offer to connect them to the pastor to discuss baptism.

Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.

Hearing the Story

B **LD** **L**

Invite a child to find Acts 16 in the Bible. Ask one or two volunteers to read Acts 16:16–34. Place the open Bible on the worship table. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.”

Hand out strips from **GN 1** to the children. They may have more than one strip or share strips as necessary. Tell them you will read a retelling of the story. As you do, when they hear their word(s), they should say their line. Practice the parts. Tell them they may have to say their part more than once. Read **SCM 6**, pausing after bolded words for response. Use your voice, your expressions, your own feelings, and your body to make the story more lively. Vary the tone, speed, and pitch of your voice to indicate changes in mood.

Reflecting on God’s Grace

TD **SD**

As with Lydia in the last session, the jailer’s response to grace and the good news about Jesus is to ask to be baptized. Focus your attention on the bowl of water, drawing the children’s attention to the water. Dip your hands gently and slowly in the water as you comment that your church uses water to baptize people. Talk about how the jailer was baptized and what happens in your church when someone is baptized.

Explain that baptism shows us God’s grace—we belong to God’s family. Invite the children to gently dip their hands in the water one at a time and imagine what the jailer felt like when he was baptized. Ask children to share any memories they have about baptisms.

Singing

Sing “Amazing Grace”—**SCM 21**. Encourage the children to sing loudly and with passion. For a more festive version, watch the YouTube video “Bee Geesus—Amazing Grace (The lion sleeps tonight) LIVE” at bit.ly/2non65F that combines the words to the tune of “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” and encourage the children to sing along.

Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Claiming God's Grace

A B

Like the jailer, we sometimes have repetitive thoughts that are negative and damaging, anything from “I can’t do anything right!” to “I’ll never learn this!” Suggest that the children think about negative things they may say to themselves. Then ask them to think about something that makes them special and to come up with a movement that describes that. Help them with examples if needed, such as if a child is good at math, she or he can start writing numbers.

Invite everyone to stand in a circle to share their movements. Say, “(Name) is special because . . .,” and invite the child to do his or her movement. Everyone will echo you and do the movement.

After all have had a turn, tell the children that one thing that makes them extra special is that God loves them and they are each a child of God. Paul and Silas knew this. The jailer learned about God’s love and was baptized! Have the group come up with a movement for “God loves me! I’m a child of God!” Do the movement together, and invite the children to do the movement with their families.

TD *For children who have tactile sensitivities, stimulations like body contact—that most people do not particularly notice, or at least are not bothered by—could cause extreme reactions that may be interpreted as bad behaviors.*

Celebrating God's Grace

TD

Play a game to celebrate God’s gift of freedom for Paul and Silas and the jailer’s discovery of God’s grace.

Use the following directions to play the game:

- ▼ Choose one child to be the “Jailer.”
- ▼ The first person tagged by the Jailer must link arms with the Jailer, becoming the Jailer’s prisoner. Anyone tagged next links arms with the last person in line.
- ▼ As soon as there are two prisoners, the prisoners must begin singing a song together. Prisoners join in the singing.
- ▼ When you call out “Earthquake!” everyone caught by the Jailer must circle around the Jailer and say, “God loves you!”
- ▼ The prisoners are set free and the person who was caught first becomes the next Jailer.

After playing several rounds of the game, discuss:

- ▼ What was it like to be chained together?
- ▼ How might singing help you in a difficult situation?



- God helped Paul and Silas by sending an earthquake. Tell about a time God helped you with a problem.
- Why did the jailer want to know about God?

Praying God's Grace

LB

Wonder about what Paul and Silas may have prayed. Suggest the children think of concerns for which they want to pray. Encourage them to think beyond their situations to include church, community, and world concerns. List some of these items on newsprint.

Distribute copies of **GN 2** and invite the children to write or draw a concern on the musical note. Have the children read aloud their concerns. Explain that reading the items reverently is a way to pray. Display the prayer notes in your space along with some blank copies and add to them in the coming weeks.

Offering God's Grace

A

Before the session, ask your church's musician to help lead the activity.

To experience how Paul and Silas's songs helped them endure, plan a time for children to sing or listen to songs of endurance. Explain that many faith communities have faced difficult times, and some groups of Christians have expressed their struggles through music. African American spirituals are based on the theme of endurance.

Brainstorm words or phrases that mean "endurance" and write them, or have a volunteer write them, on a sheet of newsprint. Distribute copies of the songbook or hymnal your church uses and look for songs of endurance. Some examples may be "Guide My Feet," "I Love the Lord, Who Heard My Cry," "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me," "We Shall Overcome," or "Give Me Jesus." Look for a reference to "African American Spirituals" in the index of writers or list of sources of music in the hymnal. Sing or listen to several of the songs. Invite children to name songs that help them to endure or give them strength, whether sacred or secular.

Choose a song that you would like to practice and sing for the congregation during worship or fellowship time. Suggest that the children introduce the song by telling their listeners that they learned about Paul singing in jail. Encourage them to each share one of the words that means "endurance" and then sing the song.

Extra Activity

Help the children share the power of prayer and singing. Hand out copies of **GN 3**, crayons, scissors, and glue sticks. Let the children select a piece of construction paper. Ask the children to think of someone they know who is experiencing a hard time, someone who needs a little help. Tell them that they will make a pop-up card to give that person using the following instructions.

To find recordings of these songs in the style of gospel music, search for the titles on www.youtube.com, adding "gospel" to the song title. Play one of the videos for the group.



Some examples of synonyms for *endurance* are: ability to withstand hardship, persistence, consistency, survival, perseverance, stamina, staying power, strength, toughness, grit, take a licking and keep on ticking, and so forth.



- ✎ Color the bars of the jail as well as the Paul and Silas scene.
- ✎ Cut out the jail bars rectangle and Paul and Silas scene along the solid lines.
- ✎ Fold the rectangle in half along the center dotted line.
- ✎ Fold both ends along the dotted line, toward the center, then open back up.
- ✎ Cut along each thin line, being careful to stop at the dotted line.
- ✎ Open the bars up and carefully fold back the other direction.
- ✎ Fold the construction paper in half, making a card.
- ✎ Place the jail bars inside the card, aligning both folds, and then glue both end strips in place.
- ✎ Open the card and separate each of the thinner bars, pulling and creasing them forward.
- ✎ Fold the bottom tab of the Paul and Silas scene back and put glue on the tab.
- ✎ Insert Paul and Silas under the thin bars, near the words, and glue in place.
- ✎ Open the card to see the men praying and singing in jail.
- ✎ Decorate the front of the card with the words, "Do not be afraid."

Invite the children to hold the cards to their hearts and say a prayer for the person they were thinking about. Encourage them to deliver their cards.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Work together to clean up the space.

Gather in a circle. Hold the end of a ball of yarn and toss it across the circle while you say: "Go with joy and tell someone about Jesus!" Have the child who catches it hold the yarn and toss the ball to someone else while saying the words. Continue until everyone is holding the yarn, creating a web across the circle. Pray aloud:

God, help us remember the jailer and his faith in you. Help us remember Paul and Silas and their joy in telling the story of Jesus. Help us tell this good news too! Amen.

Send the children with these words: "Go out to share the love and grace of Jesus with everyone you meet."

Paul and his friends OR Paul and Silas—"We follow Jesus!"

Jesus—"He's the best!"

Say OR said—"Talk to me!"

Slave woman—"I'm free!"

Leaders—"We are important people."

Beaten OR beating—"Ouch!"

Prison—"Uh oh!"

Jailer—"That's me!"

Heavy blocks of wood—"This is NOT comfortable!"

Singing—"La, la, la!"

Praying—"Dear God . . . Help!"

Prisoners—"See our chains."

Baptize OR baptized—"Splish! Splash!"



