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A Jailer

Getting Free from Internal Prisons

Acts 16:6-40

“Starting a church is just about the hardest job on earth,” groaned one church-planting pastor. “But it is also one of the most exciting.”

GROUP DISCUSSION. What attracts you to your particular church and congregation?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Do some soul-searching about yourself and your church. What is your place within the church? How are you serving? Who is serving you? How has the church helped you develop as a Christian? What do you hope that you can become within the context of the church? What can you help the church to become?

Like many ethnocentric Roman communities, Philippi had little tolerance for “odd” faiths and practices. The ruins of an arch one mile west of town still stand as reminder of that intolerance. Outside that gate

lay cemeteries, meeting sites of foreign religions and all else that the Romans classified as “impure.” The city of Philippi was not a friendly place to start a church. But Paul did just that. *Read Acts 16:6-15.*

1. How did the Christian church in Philippi begin?

2. What does this passage tell you about Lydia’s character that would make her a capable founding member of that church?

3. *Read Acts 16:16-40.* Since the slave girl was telling the truth about God, why do you think that Paul told the evil spirit to leave her (vv. 16-18)?

4. What evil influences complicate your own life?

5. Christ’s power is greater than any power of evil—which is why Paul could command the evil spirit to leave the girl in the name of Jesus Christ. As you reflect on the power of Jesus, what practical steps can you take in your struggle against the evil that touches your own life?

6. Look again at verses 19-21. What problems for the new church in Philippi were the charges against Paul and Silas likely to create?

7. The jailer was himself a prisoner: a prisoner to his job and a prisoner to his inner fears. What all did God do to free him from each of those prisons?

8. Paul told the jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (v. 31). What freedoms does this new relationship with Jesus provide?

9. If Jesus is your Lord, what structure does this bring to your life?

10. From what you can see of the jailer’s actions, why do you think that he would be a valuable addition to the new Christian church in Philippi?

11. How did Paul’s method of leaving Philippi act as further protection for the church he had founded (vv. 37-40)?

12. When you think of the future of your church, what worries come to your mind?

What can you do to help protect your church from the kind of harm that you envision?

Pray for your church. Pray for specific leaders, for newcomers, for families under stress, for organizational decisions, for internal peace. Pray that God will present many opportunities for people within your church to share the good news of Jesus and that he will draw new believers into your church, where they will receive spiritual nurture and grow into mature faith.

Now or Later

Many people live within their own internal prisons. Sample prisons are shyness, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, addictions, poverty, depression, language deficiency, heavy family responsibilities, illness, aging, worry, work-related stresses or unemployment, and lack of faith. In the days ahead, look for opportunities to assist one person enclosed in one of these internal prisons. Ask God’s help in bringing a fresh freedom into that life. If it is appropriate, draw your church into care for this person.