

# **Are You Ready To Sing?**

By

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## **Introduction**

There are times in our lives when the trials of life emotionally overcome us, especially when one “bad” thing happens after another. It seems like “we just can’t get a break.” Our spiritual vision becomes so clouded that we don’t even feel like looking up to God, much less praying to Him. We go to church and the songs seem so empty. We wonder, “Really... where is God?”

This lesson focuses on a series of events in the lives of the apostle Paul and Silas. As they were preaching, they encountered a number of severe trials that should have had them screaming in agony to the top of their lungs. But yet they sang, and their deliverance came “rubblin’ in”. See what we can learn about Paul and Silas so we can bring in our deliverance - “singing our way to victory”.

## **Scriptures Used in This Lesson**

Acts 16:16 – 34

Luke 4:31 – 37

I Corinthians 3:16 – 17

John 14:16

John 16:13

James 5:16

2 Corinthians 1:3 – 4

## **Just Minding Their Own Business**

Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy were in the city of Philippi, in a part of the world called Macedonia, during Paul’s second missionary trip. Philippi is located in Greece, along the coast of the Aegean Sea, north and west of Athens. It had been a Roman colony for a little over 100 years and was a prosperous city because of near-by gold mines. The year was about 49 or 50 AD.

Paul and Silas were preaching in the city when they encountered a slave girl who was a fortune-teller by a demonic spirit. Read Acts 16:16 – 18. In verse 18, the KJV says that Paul was “grieved” by the girl. The word comes from a Greek word “diaponeomai” which means that they were troubled, offended, and pained by this girl. Today we would say, “She was extremely annoying and getting on their nerves, big time.” So Paul commanded the spirit to leave her.

After the evil spirit left the girl, a series of events occurred that spelled trouble for Paul and Silas. Read Acts 16:19 – 24. If we detail their “tribulations” here is what we will find:

- They were lied upon
- Others turn against them
- They were stripped of their clothes and possessions
- They were beaten severely
- They were cast into the inner prison
- Their feet were put in stocks
- When the prison door was closed, found themselves in darkness, heat, and a stench
- Being in the “inner prison” they were isolated from everyone that cared about them

A note about the beatings and prison: The Romans had several devices used in beating or flogging their prisoners. A “flagrum” was used in the beating of Jesus. It was a whip with a short handle with two or three thick leather strips at the end of the handle. Lead weights and pieces of bone were tied to the end of each strip. The leather strips cut the skin, and bone weights created deep lacerations and contusions. Sometimes flesh was literally torn from the back side of prisoners exposing veins, arteries, muscles and bones. Other Roman instruments used in beatings were elm rods, wooden canes, and a variety of whips. We are not told what device was used on Paul and Silas, but we are told that the beating was severe. Most times two or more soldiers were used to beat each prisoner. These soldiers were called *lictors*, thus the phrase, “take a licking”.

We are also told that they were cast into the “inner prison”. Roman prisons were divided into three areas. The first was the barracks, for prisoners who were more or less “confined to quarters” for light offenses. The next level had cells that were locked but open to light and fresh air. The “inner prison” was the worst of all. It was a room with only one entrance through the roof of the enclosure. There was no light, no fresh air, no running water – just darkness, heat, and the stench of human waste.

Paul and Silas had their feet put in stocks. Roman stocks were designed not to just to make prisoners immobile, but to cause pain. There were up to five holes in some stocks and many prisoners suffered from dislocated limbs while being placed in them. So if you read the scriptures too quickly, you’ll miss the real “meat” of what they endured. Paul and Silas were stripped, brutalized, and imprisoned in the worst conditions.

Although most of us will never physically experience anything as brutal as Paul and Silas’ treatment, we can become emotionally stripped, brutalized and imprisoned. Because we live in an ungodly, decaying world that does not honor or know God, bad things happen. Sometimes bad things happen because of our own decisions or those made by someone close to us. Sometimes satan tries to discourage us to keep God from receiving glory through our lives. Sometimes we can find no reason for the troubles of life; life just happens. Whatever the reason, there are times when you feel whipped and forsaken.

*Have you or someone close to you been emotionally stripped, brutalized or imprisoned? What was your/their outlook on life? How did you/they feel about God? Have you ever felt abandoned, but yet were not physically alone? Why does it seem like God is so far away at those times, when He's not?*

## A Choice, Not A Feeling

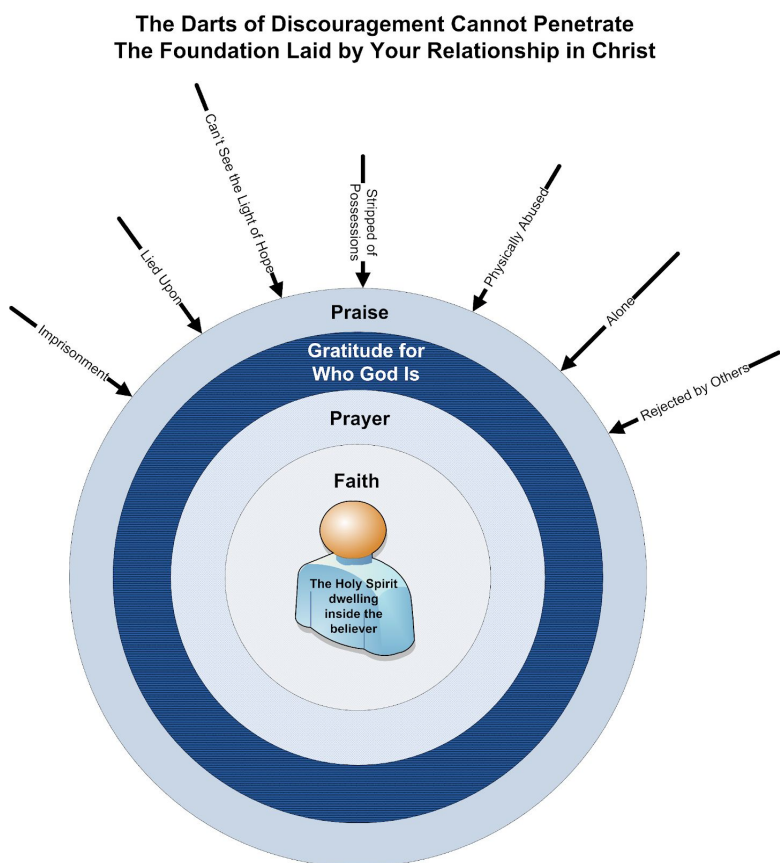
Read Acts 16:25 – 28. This passage caught my attention and started me thinking. When I read verse 25 my first reaction was, “How in the world could they be praying and singing to God? He was the One Who allowed this to happen. They were preaching the Gospel when all this began. I don’t get it.”

Then I read verse 26. This was powerful; their prayer and praise to God, in the midst of their tribulation, brought them deliverance. I thought about this and wondered, “How can this be?” I was amazed by the fact that these men *chose* to sing songs of *praise* to God. It had to be more than a feeling because they had been severely beaten and were in a dark, stench filled prison; the pain of their wounds was still fresh. How can you praise God in the midst of pain? It had to be a choice, and not a feeling.

The more important question is, “How can this apply to your life, right now given your current situation? How can you make this real?” Let’s look at the picture on the right and break it down step by step.

When you accepted Christ as your Savior, and believed in Him in your heart, you received His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Read I Corinthians 3:16 – 17 and John 14:16. From these scriptures we can see that the Holy Spirit dwells in you forever. The Holy Spirit is the foundation that enables your faith to grow.

As you develop a *regular routine* of prayer and Bible study, your relationship and understanding of the Lord and His ways grow. Jesus



told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would guide them to all truth (John 16:13). So it is with us...He guides us to the truth about Who our Father is...step by step by step; it's a process.

As we grow in relationship with God, our faith grows. Faith, from the Greek word "pistis", is that strong conviction as to the truth about God, His ways and character. If you keep a notebook and write down what God does for you, over time you will have documented God actively working in your life. His actions will *confirm* what the Holy Spirit reveals to you about Him. We stop praying to "someone up there, somewhere" and begin to pray to Someone we can sense, feel, and know. God becomes more familiar and real to us.



***[dynamic in its working].***

As our faith grows, our prayers become powerful and effective. As confirmation, read the second half of James 5:16. The Amplified Bible states the following. I have emphasized the last half of the verse.

*Confess to one another therefore your faults (your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins) and pray [also] for one another, that you may be healed and restored [to a spiritual tone of mind and heart].*  
***The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available***

When we earnestly pray for others we see God move in their lives. This encourages us that He will work on our behalf also.

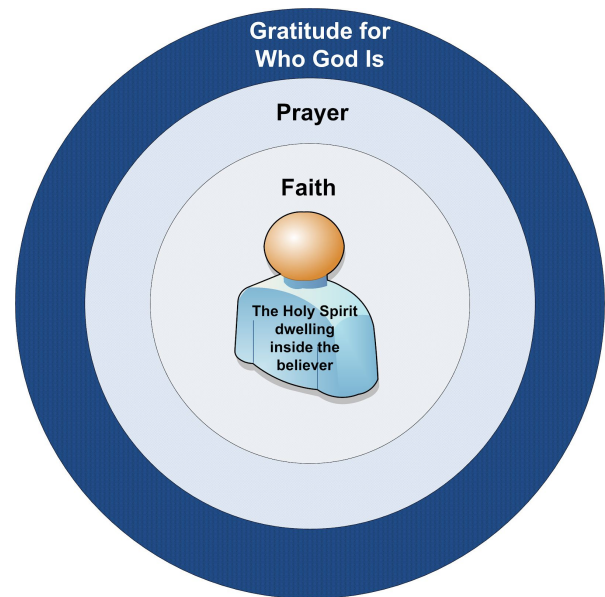
As time goes on, we come to "know" Him. "Know" from the Greek word "eidon" means the following:

- to see
- to perceive with the eyes
- to perceive by any of the senses
- to perceive, notice, discern, discover
- to turn the eyes, the mind, the attention to anything
- to pay attention, observe
- to see about something
- to ascertain what must be done about it
- to inspect, examine
- to look at, behold
- to experience any state or condition
- to see i.e. have an interview with, to visit
- to know
- to know of anything

- to know, i.e. get knowledge of, understand, perceive
- to have regard for one, cherish, pay attention to (1Th. 5:12)

Normally I wouldn't list so many definitions, but they all express a dimension to our relationship with God that reflects part of our growth. Regular prayer and study allows us to understand and perceive Him; we ascertain what must be done because of our relationship with Him; we turn our eyes, mind and attention towards Him. The more we know Him the more we want to examine and inspect truths about Him.

Over time we develop gratitude for not only what He does for us, *but Who He is*. It's just like the relationship with a loving parent; you love them for who they are. These are signs of a growing personal relationship.



Finally, we come to a point where we can praise God in the midst of a storm. Continued practice of our “routine” strengthens and “thickens” each layer. Our faith stands firm no matter what darts we encounter.

How do I know that this works? A couple in our bible study group had a son who contracted a rare disease when he was eighteen. Within months he had died, never graduating from high school. Within a couple of years, the couple started a “back-to-school” celebration in their neighborhood to provide free school supplies to kids in honor of their son. Each year, kids from all over came to play games, win prizes and get free supplies. To date thousands of kids and parents have benefited from the couple’s generosity.

The pain they felt at the loss of their son was real. They were emotionally stripped, brutalized and imprisoned. The emotional scars are still “tender” at times. *But the foundation of their faith allowed them to turn their grief into generosity towards others.* The most tragic “dart” of discouragement that a parent can imagine was fired at this couple, and they were not defeated. *God can and is willing to do the same for you.*

This is how He receives glory. Most parents who come to the “back-to-school” celebration don’t know the story behind the couple’s son; they just receive the benefits of what God can do in the lives of those who “sang songs of praise” in the “inner prison”. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3 – 4. This couple lived this verse. Out of their tragedy, they were able to bring joy to others. This is in addition to the obvious comfort they could bring to other parents who have lost children.

**Key Point:** The *daily* building of your relationship with Christ builds the foundations that enable you to overcome *any* tribulation that comes your way.

**Key Point:** It's not really *you* who overcomes tribulations, but the *Christ in you*. As your relationship with Him grows, you learn to depend more and more on His abilities and not your own.

*Do you know of someone who overcame a great trial? How did they do it? How did their relationship with God change before, during and after the trial? Do you think you could be victorious through the same trial? Why or Why not?*

If you read Acts 16:29 – 34, you can read the rest of the story and see how Paul's jailer was saved. But the key question at this time is, "What about you? How can you sing a praise to victory based on how you *feel* now?"

Well based on now you *feel* now, you can't. You must *choose* to praise. Remember, it's a choice not a feeling. Also, remember that your foundations grow as your relationship with the Lord grows. So do the following:

1. Find a time each day to read one chapter out of the Bible.
2. Ask the Lord to give you understanding about Him and His ways before you read.
3. Write down each week something the Lord has done positive in your life.
4. Ask the Lord to show you how to help someone else with what He's given you - your time, talents, heartaches, and victories in accordance with 2 Corinthians 1:3 – 4.
5. After one month review the list.
6. Repeat steps 1 – 5.

## **Summary**

Life is full of challenges. Life is not fair. Many things you can't control. Neither can you turn back the hands of time. You are where you are. So the most important question to ask is, "Where do I go from here?". The answer is, "Closer to the Lord." He is the only resource you have to overcome your challenge(s). Sympathy, well wishes, and good intentions are nice, but don't give you victory – only a growing *personal* relationship with Christ. Make a decision today to *choose* Christ; make a decision today to "sing".