

WEEK 11
08.14.16

COMPANIONS IN CRISIS



FOCUS VERSE

Acts 16:25

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

LESSON TEXT

Acts 15:22, 40

22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

.....

40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

Acts 16:19–26

19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,

20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.



FOCUS THOUGHT

In the midst of a crisis, God-inspired self-control can save the day.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Turn Down the Noise

My wife had a discipline technique that worked well as she taught elementary students. When the noise level in the classroom started increasing, she lowered her voice. Soon the students quieted down. I thought of that when I recently read an article on self-control from *Kids Health from Nemours*. The author stated, “Reacting to kids’ meltdowns with yelling and outbursts of your own will only teach them to do the same (and actually is associated with an increase in children’s negative behaviors). But keeping your cool and calmly working through a frustrating situation lets you show—and teach—appropriate ways to handle anger and frustration” (http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/temper.html?tracking=P_RelatedArticle, accessed February 15, 2015).

I have lived long enough to discover I can help manage the crises in my own life by self-control. When a crisis arises, I can increase my frustrations by listening to the clamor in my head of all the bad things that could happen. That is a sure way to raise my blood pressure and lead to depression. On the other hand, I can turn down the volume by listening to the soft, still voice that says, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Remembering what He has done for me in the past is one way I have learned to relax and control my fears.

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OUTLINE

I. TRAVELING COMPANIONS

- A. Silas Was Respected
- B. Paul Chose Silas
- C. Paul and Silas Were Companions on the Journey

II. CONFRONTATION WITH THE ENEMY

- A. Damsel with the Spirit of Divination
- B. God’s Timing
- C. The Arrest

III. SELF-CONTROL IN CRISIS

- A. Did Not Panic
- B. Maintained Self-Control
- C. Worshiped God in Prison

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

At some point, each of us probably has come face-to-face with a personal crisis. The crisis may have taken an extended period of time to develop, or perhaps the onset was sudden and unexpected. The manner in which we respond to a crisis is often just as important as the crisis itself.

Some people seem to lose control during a crisis. To the onlooker, their behavior may

seem haphazard, with no rhyme or reason. Under duress, they make split-second decisions without a clear vision of the end goal. Other people handle a crisis like an ostrich with its head stuck in the sand, unwilling to do anything for fear of making the situation worse. But sometimes lack of action is the worst course one can take. Inaction can transform a minor crisis into a major crisis. In many instances, damage control can be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

The appropriate crisis response does not come naturally. People who excel during a crisis keep a cool head and make logical responses to crisis stimuli. Through their careful response, they minimize the effects of a crisis and may even reverse the pending results. Professional crisis interventionists, those who make a living handling crisis situations, are known for keeping their composure. However, this trait alone is not enough to be effective. They also have to study and stay abreast of any procedural changes. They have to be knowledgeable of human characteristics, tendencies, and interactions. They must be prepared in advance for any scenario and any changes that might occur during a crisis.

Like the trained crisis interventionist, we need to be prepared in advance to handle problems life throws our way. With God's help, we can face any crisis with the confidence that we are trained and equipped to handle it. In periods of trials and tribulations, we can be prepared if we are diligent in prayer, fasting, and studying God's Word. If we truly trust in God, we will be quick to turn every situation over to Him. He will give us the right things to say and provide us with the right course of action to take. The Bible encourages this type of trust in Psalm 23:4: "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." This is the kind of trust Paul and Silas had in God.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. TRAVELING COMPANIONS

In planning a trip, a person who had the opportunity to choose a traveling companion would probably look for a thoughtful, insightful individual who could engage in conversation effortlessly. This companion would allow the other person equal access to the conversation and value that person's input and opinions. If the two shared many common interests and had a similar outlook on life, the trip would be even more enjoyable.

Paul and Silas would have been companionable travelers. They had common interests, they shared the same convictions, their lifestyles were similar, and they held the same outlook on life. Most of all, they loved Jesus, and their desire to spread the gospel was the basis of their existence.

A. Silas Was Respected

Some men from Judea had come to Antioch teaching that the Gentiles had to obey the law of Moses in order to be saved. Because their teaching caused great dissention among the Gentile believers, Paul and Barnabas were chosen to travel to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to consider the matter. After much discussion, James suggested writing letters to the Gentile churches letting the people know they were not required to follow the law of Moses and giving them direction as to what they were to do. The apostles and elders were

pleased with James's suggestion. They sent two of their own men to accompany Paul and Barnabas to deliver the letter to the church in Antioch: "Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren" (Acts 15:22). Choosing Silas to go with Paul and Barnabas indicated the respect the brethren in Jerusalem had for him.

After the letter was read to the Antioch church, the Gentile believers rejoiced. Then Judas and Silas spoke to them: "And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them" (Acts 15:32). From this verse we know that Silas was a prophet and a minister. That he would be asked to speak to the congregation showed the respect the brethren in Antioch had for him.

After spending some time in Antioch, Judas and Silas were allowed to return to Jerusalem. However, Silas decided to stay.

B. Paul Chose Silas

As mentioned in the lesson for week 6, when Paul and Barnabas could not agree on whether to take John Mark with them on a second missionary journey, they chose to go their separate ways. Barnabas chose to take Mark with him, and Paul chose to take Silas with him on his second missionary journey. Silas was willing to go.

Silas had probably been in the congregation when Paul and Barnabas told the Jerusalem church of their experiences during their previous missionary journey. He heard of the far-reaching effects of Paul's controversial proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Savior. Paul's message had infuriated the non-believing Jews in various locations where they traveled, and perhaps Silas was expecting the same on this journey. However, that knowledge did not deter his zeal for the ministry.

Like Paul, Silas was a Roman citizen, a fact that would serve them both well later when they were put in prison in Philippi. Silas possessed a maturity of faith that empowered him to see the harvest.

Apparently the leaders in the Antioch church approved of Paul's choosing Silas to travel with him: "And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren

unto the grace of God” (Acts 15:40). Silas’s commitment proved to be an invaluable asset to Paul’s ministry.

C. Paul and Silas Were Companions on the Journey

Paul is hailed as the most prolific writer in the New Testament and as a pioneer to the Gentile nations. Like all great leaders, Paul needed a good “right-hand man.” Moses had Aaron, Elijah had Elisha, and Paul had Silas. Paul and Silas were traveling companions on one of the greatest missionary journeys in history.

Throughout their journey, they experienced joy when non-believers were converted. They faced hardship and persecution when their bold message of salvation in Jesus’ name angered the Jewish religious establishment. Through the highs and lows of their ministry, they achieved incredible results. God blessed their efforts and rewarded them with fruits of their labor. Ecclesiastes 4:9 states, “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.”

Their common bond was their unwavering faith in God. If they had food to eat and a place to sleep, they praised God. If they felt the pangs of hunger and slept in a prison cell, they praised God. Uncertainty was their constant companion, for they were never sure how they would be received, who would become friends, or who would become enemies. But of one thing they were certain: God was in control. Whatever the situation, the circumstances, or the risks, they gave God all the honor and glory and continually lifted up His name in praise.

II. CONFRONTATION WITH THE ENEMY

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Peter 5:8–9).

The enemy may seek to attack us when we are down, but he may also come against us

when things seem to be going well. His single-minded task is to destroy our relationship with God, and he will stop at nothing to try to accomplish his goal. However, believers do not need to cower in fear, nor should they be afraid to enjoy the good days, free from apprehension that something bad may be about to happen. Living a Christ-centered life means we can have peace to praise God in the good days as well as the bad days. Paul and Silas demonstrated such an attitude during their journeys.

God called Paul and Silas to an extraordinary task: to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and establish the believers in the faith. The challenge and complexities of their calling cannot be overstated. They were charged with bringing a new faith with a Jewish foundation to a pagan world and also with peacefully assimilating Gentile believers into congregations made up of Jewish believers who did not understand that Christ’s message was for all people.

They faced significant opposition from some within the fledgling Christian church; however, that was not their greatest challenge. Just as it is with believers today, the true enemy of Paul and Silas was the prince of darkness, Satan, and his various plans for thwarting their purpose. One such example was their confrontation with a young woman possessed with an evil spirit.

A. Damsel with the Spirit of Divination

Paul and Silas were going to a place of prayer when a young woman with an evil spirit met them. She was considered a valuable commodity to her masters because her fortune-telling earned much profit for them. She began followed Paul and Silas, crying out, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). Her cry was similar to those of the demoniacs who encountered Jesus, even using the same phrase “most high God.” She continued to do this for many days, and Paul, annoyed by her behavior, finally drove out that spirit with the strongest weapon on earth: “I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour” (Acts 16:18).

Why was Paul so greatly annoyed with this young woman if she appeared to be speaking the truth? The biblical text does not answer this question, which has left biblical scholars to speculate on the reasons. Some have speculated he felt great sympathy that she was bound by this evil spirit and was frustrated with her plight, while others suggest he was angered because she was portraying Jesus as a way to God, rather than the exclusive way to salvation. In Acts 16:17, the word *the* in “the way of salvation” is not in the original Greek and was supplied by translators. The word *a* could also work grammatically (a way of salvation). Also, some may have confused “the most high God” with Zeus, with whom the Philippians were more familiar.

Paul and the other apostles had already established that their message of Christ’s sacrifice was the only way to God, because Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. The early church faithfully proclaimed, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Perhaps Paul was annoyed because the damsel continually drew attention away from their cause with her ongoing, disruptive shouting. Whatever the reason, he cast the demon out of the girl.

B. God’s Timing

Ecclesiastes 3:1 proclaims, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” The believer can be assured that in every season, God has complete control. Everything revolves around His timing. He neither needs nor seeks the approval of human beings when setting His schedule. He knows what will happen before it happens. To be sensitive not only to His will but also to His timing, we must stay connected to God through prayer, fasting, and studying His Word.

The Holy Spirit empowered Paul to cast out the demon from the young woman; however, he waited until he felt the time had come for her deliverance. Perhaps Paul needed time to discern by the Spirit what was actually transpiring and how the onlookers perceived the actions of the damsel. Whatever the reason for the delay, when Paul was led to move

forward, he commanded the spirit to leave the damsel. The timing was right for deliverance. Paul knew that God was in control and God’s timing mattered above all else.

C. The Arrest

As a result of the young woman’s being set free from demonic possession, her masters were divested of the steady stream of income they had been earning at her expense. Enraged, they took Paul and Silas before the magistrates, accusing them of troubling the city by teaching customs that were unlawful for Romans to observe. (See Acts 16:19–21.)

Paul and Silas were beaten mercilessly and thrown into a dark prison. The jailer was charged with making sure they did not escape, so he put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in stocks. Yet in that cold, dark prison, Paul and Silas were not discouraged. They ushered in God’s presence by praying and singing praises to Him in spite of their circumstances.

When God is in control, we do not have to spiral out of control.

III. SELF-CONTROL IN CRISIS

In a crisis, we must choose to maintain self-control or give in to the spirit of the flesh. Situations in the Bible demonstrate the perils of acting without self-control. Samson died blind because he told Delilah the secret of his strength. Moses did not enter into the Promised Land because he smote the rock instead of speaking to it as God had commanded. David endured the guilt of sacrificing the life of a loyal, innocent man and suffered the loss of his own baby because he looked upon Bathsheba with lust in his heart and committed moral sin. These men all accomplished incredible things for God: Samson slew thousands, Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, and David was a man after God’s own heart.

Yet each of them experienced major crises in their walk with God because they lacked self-control at crucial junctures in their lives.

Self-control, called “temperance” in the King James version of the Bible, is vital to our Christian walk and is listed as one of the nine fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23. We exercise self-control when we reject feelings, impulses, or desires of a sinful nature. Paul and Silas could exercise self-control when faced with a crisis because they understood that God was in control. When God is in control, we do not have to spiral out of control. When we allow God to be on the throne of our hearts, we can trust He will lead, guide, and protect us in every way.

Paul and Silas were committed to a common goal and exhibited self-control. Paul said, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (I Corinthians 9:27). To the Romans he wrote, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). If we lack self-control, it will be impossible to be living sacrifices pleasing to God.

A. Did Not Panic

Few of us would be free from panic if we found ourselves in Paul and Silas’s situation. But though they had been beaten severely and thrust into prison, they chose to pray and sing praises to God. When an earthquake came later that night, they remained calm. How could they have had unflinching peace in the face of such a crisis? Paul and Silas knew the totality of God’s delivering power. They knew God controlled the sun, the moon, and the stars. Even if they found themselves directly above the epicenter of the quake, they knew that God had the power to keep them through it.

In his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren said: “You’ll never know that God is all you need until God is all you’ve got.” God was, in fact, all Paul and Silas had, but not simply because they had suffered great calamities. God was everything to them because they freely gave of themselves and desired to be like Him. They lived what Paul proclaimed—to be content when they had abundance or

when they lacked. (See Philippians 4:11–12.) This spirit of contentment empowered them to face persecution, imprisonment, and an earthquake without the slightest trepidation or fear.

B. Maintained Self-Control

Paul was well aware of the need for self-control. He admonished Timothy: “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (II Timothy 3:1–5).

Paul and Silas could draw strength from their personal relationship with God. For them, self-control was more than simply steely resolve or intestinal fortitude. There were no self-help gurus or support groups to motivate them to respond in the right way. Their relationship with God trumped everything else in their lives. Their commitment to God yielded self-control in the face of crisis because they knew that God was the only One who could change their situation.

*We can shine forth
God’s power and
hope when we praise
God in our darkest
situations.*

C. Worshipped God in Prison

At the midnight hour when there seemed to be no hope, Paul and Silas turned their prison cell into a pulpit through prayer and praise. Prayer and praise were to them, as they should be to us, the most potent weapons against the forces of Satan. Prayer and praise resulted in their deliverance from prison.

When an earthquake came, they did not run for cover or leap at the chance to escape. The prison guard was ready to commit suicide for fear that the prisoners had escaped, but Paul and Silas assured him they were all still there. Their presence had a calming effect on the rest of the prisoners, and not one prisoner tried to escape.

What was the end result? The jailer brought Paul and Silas out of prison and asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). The prison cell became the pathway to freedom for him and for his entire family. After Paul and Silas “spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house,” the jailer “was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (Acts 16:32–33). We too can shine forth God’s power and hope when we praise God in our darkest situations. What a powerful lesson for us today!

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Paul and Silas took Jesus’ words in John 14:27 to heart: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Paul and Silas were companions in crisis, but they never walked a single step of their journey alone. Like the three Hebrew men in the fiery furnace, there was another person with them all along the way.

We too can have the peace of God. In fact, peace is listed along with temperance in

Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit. To the Romans, Paul said, “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Romans 15:13).

Paul offered a strong admonition for believers that may seem difficult to apply: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6, NKJV). Although it may be difficult not to be anxious, if we take everything to God in prayer, with thanksgiving, peace is available: “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7, NKJV). This is how Paul and Silas lived their lives. If we could grasp only a portion of the type of faith in God that Paul and Silas had, we would not fear in times of crisis.

We should follow the example of Paul and Silas by praying and praising God during the bad times as well as the good times. Even in the bad times, we can find something good for which to praise God. If thinking of something good in such times is difficult, we can praise God for who He is and for past blessings. God inhabits the praises of His people. (See Psalm 22:3.)

Perhaps if believers who feel bound by circumstances focused their hearts on God’s sovereignty in their lives, they could endure the “prison cells” with the cool calm exhibited by Paul and Silas. ■

REFLECTIONS

- What characteristics do you find most valuable in a traveling companion during tough times?
- What separates Paul and Silas from the average Christian?
- What do you find most difficult in following a “Paul and Silas lifestyle”?
- What can believers do to drive out fear from their Christian walk?
- How can our praise lead others to salvation?