

Facing Life's Obstacles & Opportunities



It was just another day. Paul and Silas were headed to a prayer meeting. They had no idea all the trouble that would occur. The story of Paul's visit to Philippi in Acts 16 illustrates how life is filled with obstacles and opportunities.

Central Lesson:

Life is filled with both obstacles and opportunities—God will guide us if we walk with Him.

1. Each day starts best with **PRAYER** & dependency upon God (16:16).

"16 One day as we were going down to the place of prayer...."

Prayer was a high priority to the apostles. Today, prayer is not as important to the average Christian. We need to give prayer a greater priority in our lives. It is the best way to start our day. It is the key to connecting with God and drawing from Him the strength we need to face life's challenges.

2. Spiritual warfare is **REAL** (16:16-18).

"16 ...we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes. 17 She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved.' 18 This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And instantly it left her."

Warren Wiersbe explained, "Paul did not want either the gospel or the name of God to be 'promoted' by one of Satan's slaves, so he cast out the demon. After all, Satan may speak the truth one minute and the next minute tell a lie, and the unsaved would not know the difference." (Wiersbe Commentary, 374). Spiritual warfare was real in the first century and it is real today. The New Testament repeatedly warns us of the activity of Satan and his fallen angels. We need to learn about spiritual warfare and be ready for battle.

3. **OPPOSITION** to good is constant. (16:19-21).

"19 Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. 20 'The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!' they shouted to the city officials. 21 'They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice.'"

Notice that the owner had no concern for the girl. They were interested only in the money she provided. Paul freed her yet the owner opposed it.

4. **SUFFERING** while seeking to do good is constant. (16:22-24).

"22 A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. 23 They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. 24 So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks."

5. True believers learn to **WORSHIP** in the midst of trouble (16:25).

"25 Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening."

Paul and Silas were wrongly treated. They could have complained. But they walked closely with God. They understood His working in their lives. So they spent the night praying and singing in worship. True believers learn to worship in the midst of trouble.

6. Remember that God is always with us & **WORKING** through our circumstances (16:26-28).

"26 Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! 27 The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. 28 But Paul shouted to him, 'Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!'"

It was a Roman law that if a prisoner escaped, the guard would be executed. The jailer was going to kill himself thinking the prisoners escaped. But, all the prisoners stayed in their cells. Paul called out to the guard and told him not to harm himself. God was at work through the situation—the earthquake, doors immediately opening, chains of every prisoner falling off. God was at work in their situation.

7. God has His divine **APPOINTMENTS** & opportunities to share with people the message of life (16:29-34).

"29 The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' 31 They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.' 32 And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. 33 Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. 34 He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God."

The guard could not believe his ears and his eyes. All the prisoners were still in their cells. Obviously, he had heard Paul and Silas praying and singing during the night (16:25). Perhaps he heard Paul witnessing and sharing the gospel with the other prisoners. The guard brought Paul and Silas out of the jail and asked what he needed to do to be saved. Paul's answer was the simple gospel, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." (16:31). The guard responded by accepting and trusting in Christ. Furthermore, the guard's entire family responded to the gospel and they all responded in faith. God was at work in this whole situation. This was a divine appointment that resulted in the opportunity for Paul to lead the jailer and his entire family to Christ.

Some times we don't understand why we experience certain troubling circumstances. But God may be at work. He may be placing us in a situation where we can represent Him. God has divine appointments for us and they may include troubling circumstances.

Central Lesson:

Life is filled with both obstacles and opportunities—God will guide us if we walk with Him.

► Accept Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ► Attend a small group. ► Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.