

Follow The Leader!

The Journey Part 4

The Purpose of This Series- This series is entitled “The Journey” particularly for the purpose of learning to live the affective and fruitful life of a believer. These thirteen messages are shared to give the believer, young or old, new or seasoned, a clearer picture of the life intended for them and what God has for them. I believe this series will help the believer tie up some loose end and help them walk with confidence and abundance.

The Purpose of This Message- The message today is to help us see where Paul is coming from and how that affect his perspective. All of our perspective derives from our past experiences. Paul had a make it or break it experience on his first outing in serving God that required more faith and guts. Many people receive Christ into their heart but never make it past the first challenge that they face. Through Paul's example we learn the secret to launching into the next realm of experiencing God. You will do good to take this journey as well so that your life can be full of God encountered moments.

We started a Journey together three weeks back, studying the life's of Paul, Silas, Timothy and the Thessalonians through Paul's writings in I Thessalonians. We have found out what three people from three totally different backgrounds, up bringing, education and experiences can do when they obey God and work in unity. They gained the reputation of turning the whole city if not the whole world upside down.

Their faith affected a community of nearly 200,000 people just in three weeks. You might not think that these were ordinary men, and in once sense they weren't. **They trusted God in a different dimension than many Christians ever learn to trust God.** I Thessalonians provides us with insight how we might walk, take the journey if you will, into that dimension of faith that will lead you in victory over the most challenging circumstances of life.

As we journeyed through Chapter 1, Paul taught us that gaining proper perspective of who God is and who Jesus is leaves you with two important components of the Christian journey, **Grace and Peace. In the New Testament, the view of God is a picture of a loving Father and the picture of Christ, though He dies on the cross for you and I, He is the picture of Lord, not only over the powers of Satan but as Lord over us. We are to follow His lead! In response to knowing that, grace and peace is now a part of our journey!**

Paul had a special place in his heart for the Thessalonians. He was thankful for them and often prayed for them because **their motives for living had been changed by the work of the Holy Spirit.** This work of the Spirit caused them to live healthy Christian lives.

- Instead of **fear, insecurity** or **pride** dictating their works, their **works were now produced by faith.**
- Instead of **abandonment, rejection** or **low self-worth** influencing their labor, their **labor was now prompted by love.**
- Instead of **dominance, controlling** or **aggression** motivating their behavior over the long run, (endurance), their **endurance was inspired by hope.**

I Thessalonians 1:4-5. We learned how Paul was confident that the Thessalonians were truly

living free by the evidences of the names they bestowed on them, calling them:

- Brothers,
- Loved by God
- Chosen.

Paul shares the five contributing factors of why he could assure them of all of these entitlements, because the gospel came to them with...

1. Word
2. Power
3. Holy Spirit
4. Deep Conviction
5. An example how to live

That word came with such power that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, **it penetrated their thinking, their experiences, their beliefs and brought them to deep conviction.** It created a **Holy Meltdown!** When you are dealt with by God's Word, His power, the work of the Holy Spirit that brings deep conviction, you need someone to pattern your life after. And Paul, Silas and Timothy lived an example how to live.

Last week I shared a sermon entitled "American Idol," and how the Thessalonian's became examples to thousands of Christians hundreds of miles away. They actually helped churches establish proper ways to live as they followed the example of Paul, Silas and Timothy and of Christ.

By imitating the best in others and all of Christ, our lives will soon become an example to be imitated. But like the Thessalonians, it didn't come without a price. It was during their suffering that they became followers, not when it was convenient, easier or a "better" time. It could have cost them more, brought more suffering, but the Word of God came with power.

Their **respect for how they treated Paul, Silas, and Timothy**, how they **dropped their idols**, and how they **anticipated Christ's return** set the precedence for other believers to pattern their lives after.

I Dare You!

What is the wildest dare that you ever did? A dare is something that we might be challenged to yield to. And today we can't help but be inspired by the daring heart of Paul and Silas.

Today, we will take a couple of steps into chapter 2 and then spend most of our time in Acts 16. It is important that we understand Paul and what he has gone through to make Thessalonians such a fantastic place.

"You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition."

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

I'm not sure if you are like me, but I review about every conversation and exchange I have with other people. At times I make noises remembering the words I used and how I said them. Sometimes I make faces without realizing it. My wife knows exactly what is going on in

my head and calls me on it.

I'm not sure if Paul had similar reviews as me, but one thing for sure, he had to determine within his own heart, "Was my time spent with the Thessalonians good or bad? Was it fruitful or a waste of time? Was it a success or a failure? Was our labor in vain?"

Vain/failure (2756) (*kenos*) means empty, hollow, vain, fruitless, without usefulness or success.

It's sort of like Heaven's Gates and Hell's Flames, how was that? I can tell you today, it was no failure. As a matter of fact I was pulled aside by a woman who attended another church in our community. She wept as she told me that her daughter accepted Jesus Christ into her heart during the production and she is absolutely hungry for God. She could not thank me and our church enough! It was not a failure, it was a success!

I look at Paul's writing here and wonder what he is saying. There are many things that I have done that I would exactly call a success, but I would be confident it wasn't a failure. You don't see Paul saying, "Our time with you was so successful!" No, he says, "It was not a failure." Not really the "umph" of a victory!

The Challenge of The Journey

As you respond to Christ and walk by faith, the watermarks of a "successful" Christian are seldom clearly defined. That's why it is so easy to become religious in our activity, it gives us something to measure our commitment, we go to church, read our Bible do "Christian" things. But the journey of a Christian isn't always so defined, so "successfully defined."

Of course now, hundreds of years later, we see in Paul's writings a great amount of success. If only he knew how his writings would affect the whole world. And so is the same with you. You have no idea how your affecting others around you. At best you might say, "Well, I don't think my life is a failure." I guess that's alright, Paul felt the same.

When we get clouded over with all the responsibilities, the demands of life and we respond in faith over the simple nudges to obey, we may never know how that will impact someone else's life. A friend of mine hooked up on Face Book. He is a very dear friend of mine, and what drives that endearment is that during our first few weeks of college he gave me his shoes. I didn't know what it was like to have cool shoes. It's not that I was impoverished or was neglected. I just never had an interest in "pretty boy" shoes.

He would not leave me alone about the shoes. He got me to try them on. Walk in them around the room, all the while I felt very awkward. I didn't know that your first impression may be your last impression. I didn't understand that how you presented yourself caused people to believe in you or to be turned off by you. I didn't know that my, "long hair, holey jeans, leather moccasins and old army tank top might not be the best look for a pastor."

I didn't know how to dress or how to look, and he dressed me up. Little by little I acquired an acceptable wardrobe that made me believable, that helped me look confident and smart. You can say to yourself, "Well people shouldn't judge." But it's not all judgement, it's review. The signal I was sending out was, "**If I don't take care of myself, why do you think I would take care of what is most precious to you?**"

Interestingly, Paul's opening statement in Chapter two was, "**You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure.**" Normally, when you hear a statement like that you know

there is a corrective instruction about to come out. Something that would have made it better, something that would have rung the bell! But that's not where Paul goes.

Nine times in I Thessalonians Paul says, “You know.” It's important that we are reminded of what we already know. It's important because our imagination can carry us off to the point that we see no purpose at all for what we are doing and why we are doing what we are doing.

Paul also uses “*You know, brothers...*” 18 times in I Thessalonians, proportionately greater than any other letter that he wrote. There was something genuine in his connection with these people. He had a divine connection with them. He loved them and felt loved by them.

No labor in the Lord is vain,

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

1 Corinthians 15:58

In the day of Christ, all service will be reviewed by the Lord and we will be...rewarded!

“If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

“I’VE WASTED IT, I’VE WASTED IT”

An incredible pastor and preacher, John Piper, tells of a story his father would tell as an evangelist:

“Oh, how he would plead! Children, teenagers, young singles, young married people, the middle-aged, old people—he would press the warnings and the wooings of Christ into the heart of each person. He had stories, so many stories, for each age group—stories of glorious conversions, and stories of horrific refusals to believe followed by tragic deaths. Seldom could those stories come without tears.

For me as a boy, one of the most gripping illustrations my fiery father used was the story of a man converted in old age. The church had prayed for this man for decades. He was hard and resistant. But this time, for some reason, he showed up when my father was preaching. At the end of the service, during a hymn, to everyone's amazement he came and took my father's hand. They sat down together on the front pew of the church as the people were dismissed. God opened his heart to the Gospel of Christ, and he was saved from his sins and given eternal life. But that did not stop him from sobbing and saying, as the tears ran down his wrinkled face—and what an impact it made on me to hear my father say this through his own tears—“I've wasted it! I've wasted it!”

This was the story that gripped me more than all the stories of young people who died in car wrecks before they were converted—the story of an old man weeping that he had wasted his life. In those early years God awakened in me a fear and a passion not

to waste my life. The thought of coming to my old age and saying through tears, “I’ve wasted it! I’ve wasted it!” was a fearful and horrible thought to me.”

Philippi

*“We had previously **suffered** and been **insulted** in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.*

I Thessalonians 2:2

What does it take to get you down? Paul uses two words that are very important for our understanding if we are going to go on the Journey that God is leading us on.

Philippi had obviously left an impression on Paul. It may have been the greatest challenge he had faced up to that moment. It was monumental in his life because it was a place where he drew a line in his life and decided that he was going to follow after Christ in his gift with a mission. I believe that you can only follow Christ fully to the point that you are willing to sacrifice for Him. Some people get this wrong. They live with loose ties, never gaining anything so they can be free to move where the Spirit leads. And in that they become successful at nothing. I believe if Paul were not in ministry he would be a leader elsewhere. But there are those times where you realize, this is it, I can't take it any more or, this is it, I'm in even if it kills me. I'm all the way in and I will not turn back! This was Paul at Philippi.

1. **Great Start (Acts 16:12-15)**

It was at Philippi, a Roman colony and key city in Macedonia, where Paul and others who had traveled with him went out on the Sabbath to pray. Philippi is the **probably the first place in Europe where the gospel was preached**. The story of the founding of the church at Philippi is told by Luke in Acts 16:11-40. Apparently, the Jewish population of Philippi was so small that they did not even have a synagogue in which to worship, only a “place where prayer was customarily made” by the riverside. There, outside the city gate was a river.

Paul and Silas looked for a quiet, private place to pray and there were some women who were gathered there. They sat down to speak to them, Lydia was one particular woman who sold purple cloth in Thyatira and was a worshiper of God.

As Paul talked to the women about Jesus, God, “opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.” (Acts 16:14) Right there at the river she and the members of her household were baptized in water. They were invited to stay at Lydia's home to base out of for their ministry.

2. **Grieving Part (Acts 16:16-24)**

Things were going pretty good and it must have been a few days later, as these men were going to find a place in prayer that they were “*met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.*” (Acts 16:16) Paul and his team encountered something that wasn't in the “Christian Handbook” and he didn't know how to respond. When you launch out in serving God, not all “good” things are right. Not all help is help at all! It really bothered him. His Spirit became unsettled and knew there had to be some sort of response.

*“This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the **way to be saved.**” She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In*

the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her."
Acts 16:17-18

There are many things in our Christian walk that we don't really know how to respond to. Paul was facing one of them. Here is this little girl who had a spirit in her. It was proclaiming the truth, but it was not presented in the proper way. Many people are supporting the gospel and don't know what spirit they are of! Today there are about as many people preaching a gospel out of their frustration of church experiences than there are out of pure relationship with the Holy Spirit. There are so many who are motivated to preach a gospel that is different from the mean, loud, abusive, hurts of their own personal experience than they are of the here and now voice of God! LISTEN, I cannot be cautious enough, preach the gospel! But don't do the gospel in a way because it's different from a bad experience.

Hopefully this will help explain. My third daughter was going through an identity crisis when she was young. She was wearing weird clothes, doing weird things, just not being who she was. After much prayer the Lord showed me that she was caught up in the "Ashley Simpson Syndrome." If you recall Ashley Simpson, she was the exact opposite of her sister Jessica. If Jessica's hair was blond, Ashley's was black, so on and so on. My daughter was spending more time "not" being her sisters, that she was becoming less and less of herself. She was getting lost, off track of her true self.

You can never be anybody trying *not* to be someone else! Read that and understand! Too many young men are trying not to be everyone else who has preached the gospel. In so doing they are creating a whole new gospel that is not accurate and is dislodged from the true center of Christ. Many young guys and gals as well were bored with their church...and they survived. They are bent on never letting anyone having to experience life like that again. But in the process they become anti-previous church and are set out looking the opposite rather than truly relevant. Many churches today are relevant. I think most of them are led by guys who get saved late in life and come out of the business world. They don't mess with sacred cows and refuse to get caught up with spiritual spit fights. If it works do it and if it doesn't, then stop it. They are not afraid to be organized, understand the need for a budget and know that vision and meetings to carry them out are the only way to progress the process. If they look like church as it was, then so be it. But they are not concerned about how "church people" review the program. They are concerned with the bottom line, are people finding Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior. Is there healing, love and a healthy appetite for the Word of God?

It is the adult church kids who get bogged down. They just don't want to be bored with church as they knew it. They have become avid followers of Christ, but in the process, yield over to their creative side to make it fun, different or exciting which can eventually become more important than being truly relevant. Careful church boy or church girl. You have more to be confused about and your motives have a tendency to be driven by more reasons than biblical persuasion. If you've been locked in a religious cage for several years, you might not know what to do with your freedom. One of the most costly mistakes one can make is to spread your wings that are fueled by discontent over past experiences rather than present effectiveness.

Churches do that. They say, "We aren't going to...be religious, act churchy, be absorbed with

administration, obsessed with numbers, be hateful, keep anyone out, be bogged down with meetings, limit God! But as freedom opens the door to the masses, it also invites the freedom of expression and expectation. In some sense, definition is eventually demanded and the only way to respond is to act in what was thought of as religious characteristics.

Growth demands that you take care of the kids with administrative decisions. The seating and parking becomes an issue and you have to address the problems with numbers. There is potential division and strife and you have to deal with issues that leave you looking as if you are hateful and forces you to draw the line with people, maybe even keeping or kicking some people out. Your healthiness as a church demands that you communicate clearer, plan better, provide more and review what you can do...meetings become a demand. And before you know it, you realize why people did what they did in looking so "religious," and how they got lost in the process. This is a humbling revelation, one I've found myself in several times and all I can do is beg God for forgiveness and determine within my heart that these demands and processes will not end up limiting Him.

You find out that this freedom you have found brought on a whole incredible response and before long in all the other areas of your ministry, you look just like all the churches you never wanted to look like. Here's the only way to really be different, in the midst of all the demands, decisions and organization, don't forget God! Humble yourself and repent quickly of your judgements toward the dead churches that are filled with committees and boards but have no life changing vision. In your independence, you show some of the same makings. Caution, the enemy to the church was never organization, it was and has always been forgetting God!

Paul probably had the most prominent voice in the community to proclaim this real message. He could have left it at that...but he couldn't. He would not allow the wrong spirit or attitude to be the platform for his ministry. Many churches are established through unresolved conflict. Many times today, church planting is nothing more than disgruntled launches! A pastor friend of mine told me that he had had one of the most difficult two years. He looked at me and said, "We helped plant another church." Smiling while pain reeked in his eyes, no more needed to be said, I knew exactly what he was telling me. How sad and painful.

Put yourself in Paul's place. He enters a town. Before his entry his ministry has been nothing but difficult and painful. As he arrives in Philippi someone wants to be his announcer. Someone in the town that is well known. Someone who has everybody's ear, someone who had spoken into everybody's life in that community. This individual was going to provide the ability to be a direct show in for Paul. But he could not settle with it. He could not feel at peace. Something was not clicking and his heart could not settle. Even though it would be easy to overlook it and ride the wave, the spirit within him would not let it go.

Andrew Jackson, the seventh president of the United States, joined the Continental Army at the age of thirteen. Both his brothers died during the Revolutionary war as well as his mother while giving care to prisoners of war. By the age of fourteen Andrew was an orphan. He grew with an interest in law and served as a lawyer until his military experience was once again needed. Jackson became a national hero when he defeated the British at New Orleans in the War of 1812. His popularity gave him the nick-name, "Old Hickory" for his ruggedness. Fiercely jealous of his honor, he engaged in brawls, and in a duel killed a man who cast an unjustified slur on his wife Rachel. A major general in the War of 1812, Jackson's wife Rachel died on 22

December 1828, just weeks after his election to the presidency.

There was a certain awe about him and a deep respect. On one particular Sunday in a Methodist church in the southern part of the United States, Mr. Jackson entered the church where pioneer evangelist Peter Cartwright was preaching the Word of God without fear or favor. Just before the message, the pastor whispered to him that Andrew Jackson had just entered the sanctuary. He cautioned Cartwright to be very careful of what he said lest he offend their famous guest. The evangelist, however, knowing that *"Fear of man will prove to be a snare..."* (Pr 29:25), was determined not to compromise the truth. He also knew that great leaders need the Lord as much as anyone, so he boldly proclaimed the gospel. In fact, halfway through his sermon he said,

"I understand that Andrew Jackson is present in the congregation today. If he does not repent of his sins and accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, he will be just as lost as anyone else who has never asked God for His forgiveness."

Instead of becoming angry, Jackson admired the preacher for his courage. He listened with keen interest to the message and felt such deep conviction that after the service Cartwright was able to lead him to the Lord. From that moment on, the two became the best of friends. (H.G.B. Our Daily Bread - The Fear of Man Bringeth a Snare)

"When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities."
Acts 16:19

Paul and Silas was grabbed ahold of, dragged them to stand before the authorities and magistrates of that community. It should have been a wonderful miracle moment, but it was a blistering, repulsive display of man's evil side.

I wonder how a move of God, a true move of God would affect our community and state. How many jobs would be lost as nurses because people are treating their bodies properly. How many cars or homes would be sold because people were not so ambitious trying to look as if they are the perfect family? How many clinics would have to shut down because of the drop in STD's and unexpected pregnancies? Would record companies be closed because no one would sing like that again or no one would buy the music? How many government agencies would close because people are working on a job and making ends meet because they have taken on full responsibility for their decisions, husbands are staying home and families are being united? Could our government make it without the statewide lottery, with fewer teachers in the class room because there is respect and order? What would our nation do if God really moved on our land? Do you think someone might get mad? (I have no doubt. Our government has built it's political support in creating victims, not citizens!)

I believe Paul was as shocked as many pastors are when God does a work in their church. When people come in who are gifted and excited and are willing to do what the pastor has begged for years for someone to do. What would a move of God do to our church? What would happen to our volunteers working with our children and our youth? How would we organize and who would be in charge? What would get paid off and what would be next to

build? Who would the most likely leaders be? Would it be those most prominent or who has the longest tenure but never really did anything, or would it be those most gifted, those perfect for the spot with a great heart to boot? What would happen if God moved in your church?

As Paul and Silas is brought to the magistrates, the accurate situation was not the accurate statement, and it seldom will be. Look what happens,

“They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”
Acts 16:20-21

Paul was taken by surprise. Instead of applause and the awe of Godly revelation power, he was grabbed as if he were a criminal, dragged to the authorities and accused of undeserved ill treatment.

The attack on Paul and Silas was motivated by three underlying attitudes,

1. **Prejudice-** “These men are Jews...”

Recently in San Diego, (May 2009), a Bible study group of about 15 people had met in the home of pastor David Jones every Tuesday for the past five years. Last month, someone complained about parking in Jones' neighborhood. When the county investigated, they issued Jones a written warning of illegal use of land and asked him to stop hosting his weekly Bible meetings, claiming that they were in violation of county regulation and needed to apply for a major use permit. This process can cost ten's of thousands of dollars. Because of the uproar the situation was quickly turned over and apologized for.

It would be important to listen to the statements of Pastor Martin Niemöller which he made about Germany in 1945,

“First they came for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up, because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me.”

2. **Dissension-** “...throwing our city into an uproar...”

There are so many compromising voices for us today. Statements that say, “Listen to his words! It must be God, look how easy it is, it feels so right.” While at the heart there is deception, division and evil spirits. It is just as important to question the positive as the negative.

I remember my former pastor, Jimmy Evans from Trinity Fellowship in Amarillo, shared the story of a wealthy man who brought in a thousand dollars for each of the staff members. That was a time when the church was young, struggling financially and the gifts would have been well deserved and desperately needed. But the Lord spoke to his heart and told him that there were attachments to the cash. Pastor Jimmy pushed the cash back toward the man and said, “We can’t receive this money because you want to purchase some relationships on our staff and we are not going to do it.” The

man was outraged. He left the church but to this day he knows he did the right thing.

Someones healing might be the beginning of revival or of rebuke. I've seen so many churches that had an adequate move of God but were in refusal to allow outsiders in. God's move is not always welcome. His presence is always welcome, but not His move. In Philippi, Paul dealt with a girl who had a spirit in her, she made the owners gone. Whatever it was about her, the owners knew when she had it and when she didn't. After Paul rebukes the spirit, the girl didn't have the spirit any more. Verse 19 said the owners didn't take it too good.

3. **Illegal**- "...customs unlawful..."

According to Cicero, Tertullian, and other writers, the Romans had a law that no Roman could follow the teachings of any religion that had not been approved by the Senate. The Roman government wanted its people to worship the emperor. Some religions were tolerated in order to keep peace in some of the lands that Rome had conquered. But no one could worship in a way that had not been approved by the Senate. Christianity had not received approval from the Senate. That's why Paul and Silas could be accused of teaching anti-Roman customs.- John MacArthur

What causes you to quit? What is it that makes you think you've tried your hardest? Is it when there is a situation that needs to be resolved? Is it when people don't like your decisions? Is it when you get in trouble for doing something right? Is it when someone slurs you because they are prejudice against you? Is it because they see what you are doing as descendant instead us purposeful for the Kingdom? Is it because they are doing "illegal" things toward you?

Paul and Silas was dragged to the magistrates and then the people joined in,

"The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks."

Acts 16:22-24

As you might remember, Paul talks of his experience here in Philippi as "to treat shamefully and outrageously" in I Thessalonians 2:2, "...**suffered and been insulted...**" We have a tendency to think that the moral dignity back then was not near the modesty that we carry today. But the words, "**stripped**," comes from the Greek word, *perirēgnymi* (4048), to rend or tear off all around, with more study it means they shredded their clothes off of them. They were not only de-clothed, their clothes were ripped from their bodies with nothing to hide. Would you finally feel violated?

Beaten, *rhabdizō*, (4463) beaten with rods. This is one of three times that Paul was beaten with rods. (2 Corinthians 11:25) Probably wooden sticks, branches as well as walking canes. Whatever the punishment it was shameful and it was merciless. The Bible describes the beating as being "severely flogged." The original Greek states that there were laid upon them many a blow, stripe left on them. Possibly left them unconscious, but more than likely without any self control or strength.

Cast/Thrown, ballō (906) to throw or let go of a thing without caring where it falls. They were literally tossed into prison, dragged, unable to even defend themselves against gravity. Busted knees, lips, maybe missing a tooth, a jailer was given clear expectations of their captivity. Nothing was going to mess this up. Why? Because the concerns were real, the city was literally being thrown in an uproar.

Where there is God there is peace? Right? How about where there is God there is refuting and differences? They wanted them in prison, looked after under clear supervision.

According to the standards of that day, a prison was more like the resemblance of a dungeon. A dark, damp, stench-ridden place, with no facility for waste or comforts of any kind. If your picture of prison is anything like what we have today think hole in the ground for the prison Paul was familiar with. It was wet, musty, cold and damp. Men were literally dumped or tossed down there. From within one such hole, the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Philippians, remarkably a book whose theme rings with the most unusual theme ever to be written by someone in prison: **joy**. In Philippians 4:4, you can read these words: "Rejoice always. Again, I say, rejoice!" This was not an attempt only to be mean, this was a deep concern that the city might not regain its composure. These two men literally rocked this city for Christ!

As for the stocks, there were stocks that existed and were used in early America. When you picture them you see a wooden device that closed down over a person's hands or feet. But what we learn from archaeologists, the stocks used in Paul's day had a series of holes that spread further and further apart from one another. The purpose for that was to try to spread the legs of a prisoner as far as they could go so that cramping would be induced.

There is no doubt that Paul and Silas had suffered a terrible beating with rods, possibly breaking ribs, causing internal hemorrhaging, created some nerve damage to their spinal cord and their backs would have been shredded. Now their legs are stretched by stocks, and suffer from cramps. They are basically naked in this dark cell without light and with lice, rats, and disease all around them where all the prisoners were forced to live in their own filth.

3. Glorifying Art! (Acts 16:25-40)

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”

Acts 16:25

Their bodies riddled with pain and possibly convulsing in recovery, despite the disgusting surroundings and depressed atmosphere, midnight became Paul and Silas's call to the eternal. They didn't quietly sing to themselves, drowsy with exhaustion. They regained, maybe demanded conscientiousness to the point that there was no question as to what they were doing. It must have been good because the other prisoners "listened" to them. Prayer and singing praises to God. Thrown among the most rebellious, evil and disgusting, were two who didn't care who heard them praying and singing praises to God! This was a night where the normal groans and cursing was not heard. It was not your average night.

You say, "I wish I could rejoice the same way that Paul and Silas did." Do you know how you can have a song in your heart? Ephesians 5:18-19 gives us the answer: "... be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your own heart to the Lord." If you want those things in your life, you must be Spirit

controlled. If you are unhappy, it's because you aren't filled with the Spirit. When I meet a miserable person, I tell him, "You are focusing on your miseries too much. You are supposed to live a Spirit-filled life. That will put a song in your heart." When you are Spirit filled, you will still have problems. But you will be able to experience the glory of enduring your problems with victory.

Paul was not going to let these negative circumstances get in the way of his relationship with God. Why? Because bitterness was tempting to knock on his door. Fear was beginning to knock on his door. Doubt was beginning to knock on his door. The idea of quitting was beginning to knock on his door.

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

II Corinthians 4:8

He was saying, "Oh I've got problems, things are coming against me in every direction I look. But it hasn't taken me out, it hasn't crushed me. It's got me a little dizzy. I'm not sure I see it all clear, but I will not get down. I get attacked by people who don't get it, but my God has not left me. I've be down on the mat, my legs are shaking as I get back up, but I'm not out!"

- The J.B. Phillips translation says, "... **we may be knocked down, but we are never knocked out!**"

How could Paul go through all of that?

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

II Corinthians 4:16-18

Paul learned to look toward the invisible, eternal plan of God knowing that he was never abandoned when he ended up in such situations. How many of us would reconsider all of our actions wondering where we made a wrong turn. It's not that fun, it must not be God. **Paul knew that what was happening to him in the physical was only a means of accomplishing the eternal!** You have got to look differently and see things in the eternal.

Paul and Silas had learned the secret of how to lift their hearts above their troubles and enter into God's presence and power. Praise and worship was not a magical concert at the beginning of their services. It was something that was resident in their inner hearts. It was a normal expression to praise joyously so that God would have avenue to channel his power into their circumstances.

What Is Praise?

Psalm 22:3 says that God inhabits in the praises of Israel, or His people. Praise creates an atmosphere where God likes to dwell. Praise is not our reaction of coming into His presence, it is an instrument, a tool that we activate by faith that brings us into God's presence and releases His power! When you learn to worship and praise God, you are opening the gates of this temporary life and you are entering into the eternal presence of God.

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.”

Psalms 100:4

Notice two words that are important here: Thanksgiving and Praise

- **Thanksgiving** is thanking God for all He has done and given you. **It is recognition of what God has done.**
- **Praise** is simply Praising Him for who He is, His character, Holiness and rule. Praise means “to commend, to applaud or magnify. **It is revelation of who God is.**

Many people get the thanksgiving down but struggle with praise. See praise takes faith and revelation. Faith to believe what the Bible says about God and you verbally, loudly agree with it:

- You are a mighty God!
- You are a just God!
- You will reign for ever and ever!

You can be thankful to God for all you have, but it takes faith to praise Him. You must know who He is. As you praise Him, He will reveal Himself to you. Praise Him! How do I do that? Get in God's Word and see what is said of Him by others and what He has to say about Himself. Many people have abandoned this side of Praise and Worship. They have only opened one side of the gates. You cannot fully enter in until both are widely opened!

His Presence Is In The Praise

Jesus taught us that a heavenly presence will be in the gathering of believers who congregate in His name:

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Matthew 18:20

A “gathering in His name” means that those who gather must do so based upon what Jesus had done for them. Jesus became the true Gospel, the Word of God, and so we preached about Him, and we sing about Him.

“I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.”

Hebrews 2:12

At times we get a little loud and beside ourselves giving praise to our Lord at Cornerstone Church. These activities are not a war dance to conger up the spirit of the Lord, it is a heart expression of gratitude, (thanksgiving), and praise for what we know God had done in our lives. And in the process, God comes and listens in. It is often during this time when the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit usually becomes activated.

Some people mistakenly believe that worship is a response after the Holy Spirit moves upon them but it is absolutely the other way around. God responds as we draw near Him.

“Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

James 4:8

How Do You Praise?

“Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD.”
Psalms 89:15

When we praise God we can express it in so many ways, here are some Biblical expressions of praise:

Declaring of thanks (Hebrews 13:15)
Clapping hands and shouting (Psalms 47:1)
Musical instruments and dancing (Psalms 150:4)
Singing praise songs (Psalms 9:11)
Psalms, hymns, & spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19-20)
Making a joyful noise (Psalms 98:4)
By lifting our hands (Psalms 134:2)
By being still (Psalms 4:3-5, 46:10)
By being loud (Psalms 33:3, 95:1-6)

When Jesus spoke to the **Pharisees**, He addressed their hypocrisy because their worship was only an outward show and not from their heart.

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”
Matthew 15:8

Real praise to God is giving from an open and sincere devotion to the Lord from your heart. When we praise Him there may be verbal expressions of adoration and thanksgiving, singing, playing instruments, shouting, dancing, lifting or clapping our hands. But true praise is not “merely” going through these motions. God delights in unpretentious praise and worship pleases the Lord.

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”
John 4:23

Living a Lifestyle of Praise

1. I Will Do It At All Times

Praise and worship is not something that is part of our service. Too often it is something that many people leave at church. A key thought today is that praise should be an everyday part of a believers lifestyle. It is an expression of the heart no matter where you are, at work, in the car, at home in bed, or anywhere; when you praise the Lord it brings the refreshing of the Lord's presence, along with His power and anointing.

“I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.”
Psalms 34:1

Praise is an outward expression of an inward faith. It is where our head knowledge proclaims our Spirit's certainty. It is the revelation point. We launch our faith into

action through praise before we ever have to take action in the physical.

2. **I Will Do It At All Cost**

A valuable point that I have learned about praise is that it is often, and most often a “sacrifice.” It is not the first thing on our lips or in our mind, but it is something that we offer to God sacrificially, not just because we feel like it, but because we understand what the scriptures say about praise and that we behave our way into feeling rather than feel our way into a behavior. Like one person said it so well, “Praise is the only thing that you can give to God that He hasn't already give you.” I will praise Him at all cost because I have seen what God can do. If you don't have a history of praising God, I encourage you to step out on faith over the next few weeks and constantly be in a position of praising Him.

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

Hebrews 13:15

3. **I Will Do It At All Battles**

In 2 Chronicles - Chapter 20, the children of Judah, (which actually means Praise), were outnumbered by the hostile armies of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir. King Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, along with all the people from his kingdom sought the Lord for His help. God responded that it was His battle and to march out against the enemy and they would see Him fight for them. The Lord assured the people that this would be His battle. He told them to go out against them, and He would do the fighting for them. So they sent their army against their enemies, led by the praisers!

“Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: “Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever.””

II Chronicles 20:21

When we praise, it manifests God's presence and repels our enemy, Satan. Satan cannot tolerate the passionate praise of God's people. He operates in pride, confusion and desire. But acknowledging God brings us to honor, humility, clarity and freedom. An atmosphere filled with worship and praise causes big problems for Satan.

“He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.”

Psalms 50:23

As the army of Judah stepped out, praising God, saying or singing “Give thanks to the Lord, for His love endures forever.” Something incredible happened,

“As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.”

II Chronicles 20:22

When we begin to praise His name, it sends the enemy running, God sets ambushes against them! We were created worshipers, so worship! I challenge you to become a person of praise, and you will experience the release of the power of God!

Back To Philippi

As you probably remember, it was about midnight and Paul and Silas were **praying** and singing hymns to God, now look what happens,

“Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.”

Acts 16:26

Suddenly, there was an earthquake that shook the prison! All the prison doors flung open at the same time, and amazingly, the chains of Paul, Silas, as well as every prisoner there was equally released! It had an amazing affect on everyone there,

“The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don't harm yourself! We are all here!”

Acts 16:27-28

“The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Acts 16:29-30

“They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.”

Acts 16:31-33

“The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.”

Acts 16:34

This is what it's all about. Not just taking the journey, but taking someone along with you. There is nothing sweeter than to see the joy fill someone's heart and home because of the work of God, the Word coming with power that releases the Holy Spirit to bring deep conviction into someone else's life. And here, immediately following this experience, Paul begins fellowshiping with them to lend his example of how to live and think.

Then next day Paul and Silas are released, but Paul refuses to leave, (Vs. 37) without an escort since they were beat publicly without a trial. Look where they went,

*“After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where **they met with the brothers and encouraged them.** Then they left.”*

Acts 16:40

Look at what Paul and Silas did, they encouraged the brothers. Picture with me Paul's eye swollen shut, Silas' lip still bleeding and both of their hair matted to their scalp. Look at the borrowed clothes, possibly purple, being soaked through with blood. And listen to their story of what God has done. Listen to their joy, the excitement that must have filled the room. Listen as they celebrate what God did and is going to do. Listen to Paul connect Lydia with the jailer's family. Watch as they have to say good by, as they walk out the door and no one knows where to lay their hand on their back as a sign of affection or how to hug them. Notice

them walk away, talking joyfully even after pulling an all nighter!

This is a memory that Paul couldn't shake and felt important that he bring it up to the Philippians. The contrast was amazingly different. But just as important. God loved them as well. And he wanted them to know it. Paul realized that a journey to follow the Lord is not the easiest path to take. As a matter of fact Paul finishes in I Thessalonians 2:2

“...but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.”

I Thessalonians 2:1-2

Paul was telling the Thessalonians, “With God's help we risked to tell the story of God's good news again.” See, their message again was not without “strong” opposition, but they dared to tell it. Sometimes we lose the daring aspect of being on the journey. We stop the risk and we live in a passive Christian walk. It's time to bust out of that mediocre life and let God help you live a daring life again!