



BECAUSE PEOPLE MATTER

REACH+EQUIP+GO

“GO CHANGE THE WORLD”

For use the week of November 27, 2011

Read to the group (5 minutes)

Number 1 on the list is North Korea. 50th is Malaysia. These two countries are the bookends of the top 50 countries where persecution of Christians is the worst (source: opendoorsusa.org).

What, you may think, do persecution and Thanksgiving have in common? The Bible event this study focuses on paints a vivid picture of the relationship between the two... and a dramatic perspective on how God uses the contradiction of persecution and Thanksgiving to bring people to Christ. This study finds two of God's spokespersons unfairly accused, brutally beaten, arrested, jailed and through it all, able to make an impact for Christ in their community and throughout the world.

CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER (10-20 minutes)

Answer and discuss one of these questions:

1. What are you most thankful for this Thanksgiving season? Pool your group's answers to make your Top Ten list. When the list is finished, create categories for the responses. Any surprises?
2. Think of Christians living in the top 50 countries where persecution of Christians is the worst. Assume their country's religious climate will never change. What might be on those persons' Top Ten thankful list?

STUDYING THE SCRIPTURE (20-30 minutes)

The New Testament book of Acts is an edge-of-your seat history of the Christians living in that first generation after Jesus went back to heaven. Meet Paul and Silas, two spokespersons for God, arrested and...

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She 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." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed 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.¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods.²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose.²⁷ 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.²⁸ But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.³⁰ He then 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—you and your household.”³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized.³⁴ 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 household. Acts 16:16-34

- In what city did this event take place? (see Acts 16:12)
- Describe the initial conflict (verses 16-18). What facts can you discover about the female slave? About Paul?
- What motive was behind Paul and Silas’ persecution? (verse 19)
- How did the slave woman’s owners win over the magistrates and the crowd? (verses 20-21)
- Describe the magistrates’ punishment (verse 22-24). Was justice served?
- What are typical responses to a legal injustice? What have your responses been to any personal or legal injustices?
- How did Paul and Silas respond to their injustice? (verse 25)
- How did God choose to get the jailer’s attention? (verses 26-30)
- There is a sudden shift to spiritual issues. Who is involved? What is the outcome? (verses 30-34)
- Imagine Paul and Silas living with different responses to the magistrates’ sentence. What might have been missed?

- Examine some of your recent responses to challenging or trying circumstances. Where is it possible that God might have wanted to do some work? Were you in a frame of mind to recognize it and participate in it?
- The power of thanksgiving (and Thanksgiving) is found in our ability to stay focused on God in all of life's circumstances. This perspective is at the heart of GO to make an impact for Christ. What is your most significant "stay focused on God" battle? Pray for God's help in growing into a Paul and Silas thanksgiving lifestyle.

ADDITIONAL STUDY (time permitting, or on your own)

Look at the New Testament book of Philippians. Paul wrote this book to the people living in Philippi, the city where his unjust punishment and imprisonment took place.

Using a concordance or an online Bible study site (biblegateway.com), search for the word "joy" and its variants (i.e. joyful, rejoice). What are the circumstances associated with joy and rejoicing? How easy or hard is it for you to embrace the attitude and action of joy when facing similar circumstances?

What growth next step is God calling you to take to increase joy in your life?