

Aim of lesson

To show that God chooses very different kinds of people to form part of his family and that even your class can be included.

Bible background

Acts 16.

Outline of lesson

Ask the class if they can remember who was accompanying Paul on his second preaching journey. Read Acts 16:1-5 to see who else joined them. (Can they remember what it was that Paul was delivering to every town, v4?)

No way

The class can trace on the maze at the top of the worksheet as you slowly read v6-9. They should include a drawing of what Paul saw in his dream. You may like to use this section to discuss God’s guidance. What stopped Paul going into Bithynia or Asia? Was it a vision like the one at Troas? Did the Lord speak to him as on the Damascus road? Did God arrange the circumstances so that he was stopped? Does God guide our lives? How? Should we regard difficult circumstances as God’s way of saying we should be doing something else? Would Paul and Barnabas have continued on their first journey if they had thought like that?

In Philippi

The rest of chapter 16 could be read in three sections. Have the class look at the first two pictures, and find them in the first reading (v11-15). The captions should be something like ‘This is the river where Paul met Lydia on the Sabbath, and where she was baptised’. The other sections are v16-24 for the next two pictures, and v25-40 for the last three.

Hymns in prison

It is hard to imagine conditions in prison. Prisons today are relatively clean and safe places, but in Paul’s day being in the inner prison with their feet fastened in the stocks, conditions would have been intolerable. With no light, no fresh air, no sanitation, Paul and Silas would have been in the dark, breathing foul air and unable to move. Their backs would be bleeding and extremely painful from the beating they had received. Yet they sang hymns not just during the day, but at midnight. What was it that enabled them to cope with their plight? Paul’s letter to the believers in Philippi gives some clues.

- Paul managed to find good even in bad situations and wicked people. In Philippians 1:12-18 he wrote of a later time when he was in prison – this time in Rome. Some were preaching Christ in a way that made his situation worse, but he does not complain; instead he rejoices that Christ is being preached.
- He managed to see through the prison walls to trust in the Lord who was with him. Look at Philippians 4:11-13; his faith in God and the Lord Jesus enabled him to cope with any situation.
- He regarded difficulties as good things because they enabled him to understand better the suffering of the Lord Jesus and to become more like him – Philippians 3:8-10

Digging deeper

Find out about Timothy and Titus

This references give us background to these two men: who they were, where they went, and how they helped Paul.

Relevance to our lives

We can learn from the example of Paul, to be content in any situation, trusting in God because it is God who brings problems in our lives (Hebrews 12:6-9), and we can trust in God to care for us (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Prayer

The class could write a prayer asking God to help them when times are tough. There may be a particular problem or situation affecting them or a friend which they could consider.

Other suggestions for activities

- The prison scenes could be formed into a drama.
- The class could write a letter from Silas to one of his friends or relations back in Jerusalem telling of the time spent in Philippi.