

## Answering a Question that Nobody's Asking

### Acts 16:16-40

#### Small Group Discussion Guide

1. In Sunday's message, Pastor Josh said that followers of Jesus in our day are kind of like the character "Bo" in the movie *Signs*, who leaves water glasses all over the place, to the annoyance of her family—until they find that those water glasses are what will save their lives. The point of comparison is that the prevailing view of Christians in our society seems to be that we are a bit odd, mildly annoying, or downright strange. All the while, we have a life-saving answer in the gospel of Jesus.
  - a. What do you think of this comparison?
  - b. Are Christians "answering a question that nobody's asking?" In other words, are we speaking to an audience whose attention we haven't yet earned?
  - c. Have you ever had someone directly ask you to tell them about Jesus? If so, what prompted them to ask such a question?
  - d. Pastor Josh argued that **if we want to give people the life-saving answer that is found in Jesus, we must first provoke the question**. Let's see how that plays out in this week's story.
2. Read Acts 16: 16-21.
  - a. What strikes you about the words that the demon-possessed girl is saying in public?
  - b. What similarity do you see between this girl's words and those of demon-possessed people in the Gospels (see, for example, Luke 8:27-29)?
  - c. Pastor Josh stated that the issue of fortune-telling, or psychics, is a relevant one in our day as well. The ability to communicate with the dead or to foretell the future is, in Scripture, always associated with Satan himself or with evil spirits. For that reason, we should be very guarded about participating in any such events. Do you have any experience with this?
  - d. The social status of a female slave in Paul's day was as low as could be. She had no worth to anyone aside from her ability to gain an income for her owners. The fact that Paul and Silas take the time to set her free, then—even at great cost to their own freedom—is striking. (A better translation of v. 18 would be that Paul was *grieved* or *indignant* over this girl's condition.) From this observation, Josh concluded that one way we provoke questions about our faith is by valuing people who no one else in the world values.
  - e. **Application:** Who, in your sphere, might fit this category? How could God be calling you to show concern for people who are not viewed as "valuable" by our world's standards?
3. Read Acts 16:22-25.
  - a. Try to get "into the shoes" of Paul and Silas here. What sensory experience do they have in this scene? What might they be feeling before the magistrates, and in the jail cell?
  - b. Does it surprise you that they were singing hymns and praising God? Pastor Josh said that while ideally we are always overflowing with praise, sometimes we must sing praises as an act of discipline, so that our hearts will follow suit with authentic praise. Have you ever had this experience? What do you think of this suggestion?
  - c. What do you make of Luke's observation that the other prisoners were listening? Apparently, the other prisoners didn't hush them. What must have been striking about their observation?
  - d. Pastor Josh claimed that when we praise God instead of grumbling, in the midst of discomfort or injustice, we provoke questions about our faith. Do you agree or disagree? Have you ever seen this in your life or someone else's—how unique it is to have an attitude of praise and trust even when circumstances are bad?
  - e. **Application:** Can you make a list of 10 reasons to praise God, right now? (Leaders, if you have time, you may want to provide people with pens and paper and use this as a little exercise.)

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#### 4. Read Acts 16:26-34

- a. Does it strike you as odd that Paul and Silas (and the other prisoners) don't take the opportunity to escape after the earthquake? For Paul and Silas, at least, what do you think is the reason that they remain?
- b. How do you see the hand of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of the jailer, through the circumstances that take place here?
- c. The crucial question comes in v. 30: "What must I do to be saved?" Looking back throughout the story, what all has happened to provoke this question?
- d. Josh said that we provoke questions when we value the salvation of others over our own personal advancement. For Paul and Silas, this meant passing up a chance at freedom for the sake of the jailer. What might this mean for you in your relationships?
- e. What strikes you about the way that Paul and Silas answer this crucial question? Anything? What characteristics do you notice in the response of the jailer and his family? Why do you think that they respond with such an overwhelming reaction?
- f. **Application:** Right now, imagine someone in your life who is not yet a follower of Jesus. Imagine that they ask you, "I've been watching your life, and you have something that I need. How do I come to know the life that you've found?" How would you answer? If someone asks you to lead them into relationship with Jesus, do you know how to help them do that? (Leaders: if you are not equipped to help people in your group do this, please let us know so that we can help you!)

#### 5. Read Acts 16:35-40

- a. Are you surprised at Paul's response in v. 37? Why does appeal to his Roman citizenship? What does he hope to gain? (Leaders: A Roman citizen could not be punished—in this case beaten—without a trial, so the local magistrates could have gotten in serious trouble for their treatment of Paul. New Testament scholars think that Paul demanded a personal apology from them in order to insure official recognition for the Christian church in Philippi, so that they could avoid the kind of treatment that he had experienced.)
- b. Luke's observation in v. 40 seems to be loaded. What all do we know about the church in Philippi at this point? Who is definitely part of this new church body? (Lydia, the slave girl, and the jailer, at least—an unlikely bunch!)
- c. **Application:** At this point in your journey, is there a specific step that God is calling you to take—either in your daily routine here, or in some more significant decision to go elsewhere—that would provoke questions about your faith in Jesus? Are there people in your sphere of influence in whom you need to intentionally invest, for the sake of having a chance to share the gospel?
- d. Read Romans 8:31-35. How do Paul's words, in this paragraph, show us the motivation for doing what God has called us to in this area?

#### Sharing/Prayer

- Spend time sharing about your current needs
- Pray for one another, and pray for the people whose names came up in your Bible Study, that the Holy Spirit would be preparing their hearts to ask questions about Jesus and eventually receive him by faith.