PHILIPPI

In Philippi, Paul and his companions are confronted with opposition that is supernatural, societal, and governmental. And yet, in the face of these great powers, the Gospel still spreads throughout the city and the region.

Why? Because God's power is greater.

In our text today, we get to see God's wonderful power to open hearts, open homes, and open prisons. Through this power, we are given salvation, we are given a family, and we are given freedom.

Today, our hope is that your group will be encouraged and strengthened by the promise and potention of God's power in our lives.
About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 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.

Acts 16:25-26

What is the most powerful thing you have seen in your life? How did it make you feel seeing it?

Read Acts 16:11-15. What act of God's power do you see happening in this story?

We get to see God's power to open the heart of Lydia to respond to Paul's message. It is a reminder to us of how God calls us, softens our hearts, and helps us to believe. It is also a reminder that, apart from God, we cannot change people's hearts or minds about who he is. Salvation is always his work.

What is God's power overcoming or defeating?

In this case, his power is overcoming the power of pride, sin, and death. Sin and pride harden our hearts and convince us that we don't need God. Only he can open our eyes to the truth that we need him.
What did God do in your life to open your heart to believe in and receive him? Or, what might he be doing right now?

Encourage your group to share how they came to believe in God. Challenge them to think of the people, circumstances, and events that God may have worked through to help them believe.

Luke tells us that Lydia, after her baptism, opened her home to Paul and his companions. How might this be a sign of how the Spirit was alive and working in Lydia after her baptism?

We can see both her generosity and her desire to be a part of God's family. Our salvation was never meant to be private and personal. Our salvation was meant to bring us into a body, a temple, a family of other believers.

Why do you think belonging to God's family is supposed to be such an important part of our salvation?

There are many reasons. Personally, God's family is meant to be a source of encouragement, discipleship, forgiveness, grace, and accountability for us. Publicly, this family is the means through which God has decided to reveal himself to the world. How we treat each other, how we live together, and how we treat our neighbors is meant to be a means of revealing God's holiness to the world. Lastly, Paul describes us each as being stones that make up one big temple that will be presented to God. He describes us, this family, as being Christ's bride. He also describes us as one big body made up of different parts. You cannot have salvation and escape membership in this family.

Read Acts 16:16-18. What act of God's power do you see happening in this part of the story?

We see God work through Paul to cast the spirit, or demon, out of the slave girl.

What is God's power overcoming or defeating?

God's power is overcoming even the supernatural forces that we cannot see, but are at work all around us. The devil, demons... they a real and present danger to us. But God's power makes even the devil look weak.
What are the spiritual, religious, or social attacks that we encounter in our world today?

Encourage your group to try and name the ways that we face opposition in proclaiming the Gospel today. Don't be afraid to challenge your group's responses by asking why these things slow us down or stop us. Often, we point our fingers at others or our circumstances, but really, the biggest hurdle we face is our own fear and insecurity.

Read Acts 16:25-34. Because Paul freed the slave girl, her owners have him and Silas stripped, beaten, and thrown in jail. As you look at the story, how would you describe the mood and scene inside the jail later that night?

*We don't know what kind of songs they were singing. The NIV says, "hymns," but hymns as we know the didn't exist. They were likely singing Psalms, many of which focus on God's presence and faithfulness even in the face of great danger and hardship. The scene, then, was not one of panic or fear, but of confidence and trust in God.*

What song or hymn would you be singing? Explain why.

*This is just meant to be a fun question for your group to think about. What are the songs that are meaningful to you? What songs would give you comfort in this type of hardship? It might be beneficial to hear each other's responses.*

What is God's power overcoming or defeating in this part of the story?

*God's power is overcoming the forces of creation - he uses an earthquake to shake the foundations of the prison - but God's power is also overcoming the forces of oppression that are shaped by human beings.*

In what ways are people oppressed in our world today?

*There are many ways. Racism, social injustice, crime, abuse, neglect, unfair loans, discrimination, and more.*
How would salvation provide freedom and hope to those situations?

Salvation doesn’t always open the prison door or end the physical slavery, but salvation does bring freedom and hope in the knowledge that regardless of what happens to us here on earth, God will be faithful to us and our reward will be with him. This doesn’t mean we should stop fighting for freedom from oppression here on earth and we should never use this an excuse to allow systems like slavery to exist. But it is a reminder to us all, no matter what our circumstances are, that God is with us and better things lie ahead.

In the text today, we see God’s power act in three significant ways:

God’s power opens hearts for salvation.
God’s power gives us a family to belong to.
God’s power sets us free from oppression.

Which power are you most in need of today? How could the church/your group help you and encourage you this week?

Encourage open and honest answers and be sure to affirm each response.

As you reflect on our scripture this week and on God’s awesome power, what is the most important thing for you to remember? In what specific way will that impact what you do this week?

Be sure to be ready with your own answer as well.

To close, read Romans 8:38-39 together as a group and pray, thanking God for his power and presence in our lives.