

# THE PRISONERS, THE EARTHQUAKE, AND THE MIDNIGHT SONG

## LESSON PLAN

5-11  
year-olds

**Session Summary:** God's word tells us that God puts his people in particular times and places so that they can share the good news of Jesus. Let's look and listen out for opportunities to do the same, and be ready to take them!.

### Let's pray before we start

*Father God, please teach us about how you use your people to share your message of good news with other people. Amen.*

### Let's get started

I'm going to read out a list of places you might be. Put them in order of where you think you'd be most likely to make a new best friend:

- in the supermarket
- at church
- in the park
- at school
- on holiday

Well, in today's true story from the Bible, we're going to hear about a time when two of God's people were in a very unusual place and God used them to grow the group of Jesus' friends there. As I read this story...

- every time you hear the words 'Listen!' or 'Do you hear it...?', put your hand up to your ear like this [demonstrate] and listen hard!

### Let's listen to the story\*

(Read *The Prisoners, the Earthquake, and the Midnight Song* up to and including the words "... now they ALL believe in Jesus!" on the page that looks like this—you will read the rest of the book later.)



(Note for parents: The consequence for the jailer's life of any prisoners escaping is dealt with carefully but fully. Depending on the age and/or sensitivity of your child, you may want to paraphrase further or omit certain phrases. *It is worth looking at those spreads beforehand.*)



\* *The Prisoners, the Earthquake, and the Midnight Song* by Bob Hartman/Catalina Echeverri is available from Christian retailers and at [thegoodbook.com](http://thegoodbook.com) (US) / [thegoodbook.co.uk](http://thegoodbook.co.uk) (UK).

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## Let's think

(If you are doing this session with children across the full age range, start by asking questions below to the younger child(ren) before asking the questions for older ones. If you only have older children, the questions for older children can be asked as stand-alone ones.)

### Questions for younger children

What were Paul and Silas doing at midnight while they were in prison?  
(Singing)

When Paul and Silas were set free by the earthquake, what did they do?  
(They stayed there, they didn't run away, they told the jailer about Jesus...)

What question did the jailer ask them?  
("What must I do to be saved?")

Who did Paul and Silas tell him to believe in? (Jesus)

### Questions for older children

How would you describe Paul and Silas's attitude to being in prison and why? Does it surprise you? Why?

What might you expect them to do when the earthquake set them free? Who do they show they care about more than about themselves?  
(Possible answers: the jailer, God, Jesus!)

Paul and Silas praised God and sang about Jesus when their situation became worse as they were put into prison. They no doubt thanked God when their situation became better, because they had been freed by the earthquake, but their priority was still to speak about Jesus.

How do we tend to feel when our circumstances take a turn for the worse? What good news can we remind ourselves about? (We can often only feel sad. It's good to remember things we have to be joyful about: God's love, his forgiveness, his presence by his Spirit, his certain promises...)

It's ok to try to improve our situation and to ask God to. But what does Paul and Silas's example show us about what we can also be ready to do in any situation? (Tell people the good news about Jesus; praise and thank God.)

God used Paul and Silas to save the jailer!

In Acts 17 we read about Paul telling some people in Athens that God made the first man—Adam—and that from him came all the different people around the world. Then Paul adds that, "[God] decided exactly where and when they must live" (Acts 17 v26, ICB) because God wants people to search for him and find out about him (v 27).

This means God has chosen the exact time and place for us to live! He will put us in places where he can use us to grow the group of Jesus' friends.

This means the friends and neighbours and classmates God has put us with might be just like that jailer. They might want to find out about God, and God has put us in the right time and place to tell them about Jesus!

## Let's play a game

...as we start to think about what Paul and the other apostles told people about Jesus.

(Have paper and pencils or a wipe-clean board to hand. If you happen to have a set of story dice,



you could use them instead of drawings. The “stories” don’t need to make sense, so the drawings can be as random as you like. Have fun making up silly stories together, both as a break and to set up the next activity.)

I’m going to draw three pictures, and you are going to make up a short story based on those pictures. It can be as sensible or silly as you like!

(Take it in turns to draw and make up stories.)

When we read the story earlier, did you notice the three pictures in speech bubbles that appear on lots of the pages? (Flick through to find some of the early examples.)

What true story do you think those pictures are telling?

(You could refer back to the text on the page beginning “Their names are Paul and Silas...” if there is any doubt/confusion.)

## Let’s listen to God

... to find out how those pictures help us to know the answer to the jailer’s question.

(The book of Acts doesn’t present the gospel message quite as many children might have been used to hearing it—explicitly in terms of substitution or our sins being punished at the cross, for instance. Much of the focus is on Jesus’ identity as the promised Messiah. Key elements from gospel explanations elsewhere in Scripture are touched on in the storybook *The Prisoners, the Earthquake, and the Midnight Song*, and you can allow children to add them in to the discussion.)

Listen carefully as I read some verses from the book of Acts. In them we hear what some of Jesus’ apostles said when they told people the good news about Jesus.

(Choose as many passages as you think appropriate for your children’s attention/understanding. Do make sure Jesus’ death and resurrection, the gift of the Spirit and the call to repentance are all included.)

Point to the right picture from the book (have it open ready) every time you think you have heard something mentioned that has to do with that picture.

“Long ago God planned that Jesus would be handed over to you. With the help of evil people, you put Jesus to death. You nailed him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead. He set him free from the suffering of death. It wasn’t possible for death to keep its hold on Jesus.” (Acts 2 v 23-24, NIRV)

“The people ... said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 2 v 38, NIV)

“God had given a promise through all the prophets. And this is how he has made his promise come true. He said that his Messiah would suffer. So turn away from your sins. Turn to God. Then your sins will be wiped away.” (Acts 3 v 18-19, NIRV)

“You had Jesus killed by nailing him to a cross. But the God of our people raised Jesus from the dead. Now Jesus is Prince and Saviour. God has proved this by giving Jesus a place of honour with him. He did it to turn Israel away from their sins and forgive them. We are telling people about these things. And so is the Holy Spirit. God has given the Spirit to those who obey him.” (Acts 5 v 30-32, NIRV)

“[God] commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17 v 30-31, NIV)



## Let's think again

### For younger children:

Paul told the Philippian jailer to believe in the Lord Jesus. If our friends ask us what we believe about him, how could we answer?

### For older children:

How would you summarise the message of the apostles whose words we have been hearing from Acts? (Key elements: Jesus died, as was foretold, and was proved to be the promised Christ. God raised him from the dead. He will return to judge. Forgiveness comes as we repent and believe. Those who trust in Jesus receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.)

How would you explain what it means to repent and believe? (Turn away from sin and back to God; trust that Jesus is the promised, rescuing King, trust in his death for the forgiveness of sin and in his resurrection)

Can you come up with a picture for those ideas?

## Let's pray together

I'm going to read out some lines to help us pray. Let's think together about how we can fill in the gaps in those lines based on what we've learned today from God's word.

Lord Jesus, we praise you because you are \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for Paul and Silas's example of \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you that we can be saved by \_\_\_\_\_.

Please show us who we could tell about Jesus and please remind us about the great truths we have to share with them. We pray now for \_\_\_\_\_ and we ask you would give us an opportunity to tell him/her/them about you.

Now let's use our ideas to pray together...



## CRAFT/ACTIVITY IDEAS

**Using minimal resources...** Draw/paint/collage your own copy of the three-picture gospel summary that features throughout the storybook.

**Using things you may have around...**

- you'll need a map of your local area: make or print one out and mark on it places you often spend time. Write on it one of the memory verses below, or draw the gospel symbols on it, and put it near your front door to remind you to be ready to listen/look out for opportunities to share the good news.
- you'll need paper strips and glue: make paper chains like prison chains and add the gospel picture symbols to them
- you'll need paper, a hole-punch, wool/string/shoelaces: draw a picture of Paul and Silas singing in prison. Punch rows of holes at the top and bottom of the page and thread the string/wool/lace through top to bottom as jail bars.

**More of a project...** Make "Good News Cookies": look up a fortune cookie recipe online and draw the gospel pictures or a verse, or the Q&A "What must I do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus."

## IN THE WEEK

**Replay the silly story telling game** (or other fun story telling games such as consequences or mad-libs). Before you finish draw the gospel pictures (you might have come up with additional ones for "repent" and "believe"). Have a go at telling the gospel "story" to one another.

**Learn a memory verse.** As a family, learn this verse over the course of the week. You could write up the memory verse somewhere and cover words with post-it notes or write out the initial letters only, or try setting it to a familiar tune for instance as you learn it...

"Jesus...said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...'" (Matthew 28 v 18-19, NIV)

**Enjoy singing about the apostles' gospel mission.** "The Apostles Were Jesus' Witnesses" (*Colin's New Testament Big Bible Story Songs*). Another about the charge to believers today is "Go and Make Disciples" (*All Together Now*). Songs that teach the content of Christian gospel belief: "We Believe (Apostles' Creed)" (*Getty Kids' Hymnal*), "He lives! (An Easter Song)" (*The Jesus Hokey Pokey*), and "This is the Gospel", (*Remember the Lord*), "God showed us his love" and "Justified" (*This is Awesome Cutlery*).



# TALES THAT TELL THE TRUTH LESSONS

## INTRODUCTION

You can use these suggested lesson plans to give you a quick-to-prepare way of engaging with a story in the *Tales That Tell the Truth* Bible storybook series, and with the Scripture that underpins it, helping children see what it means for them.

Each session includes:

- A “Session Summary” to help the adult leading the session know where it’s going.
  - A suggested session for pre-school age children (3-4 years).
  - A differentiated lesson plan for children from 5-11, with different activities signalled as being for “Younger” (approximately 5-7 year-old) and “Older” (approximately 8-11 year-old) children. In some instances, there are also possible further questions/activities you can use for older children in a family.
- Use what you judge appropriate for your children’s experience, understanding and concentration. (You may find the “younger” questions more helpful for an older child who is unfamiliar with the Bible or the gospel message.) But try to include something from the “Let’s listen to God”, “Let’s think” and “Let’s pray together” sections, as well as the story-telling. Feel free to cover the material in more than one sitting!

Each lesson is put together so that it can be read out directly as it is written, with any explanatory notes for adults included in brackets. It is as light on necessary materials as possible but includes many of the elements your children might be used to from Sunday church:

- An introductory activity that establishes a key concept the children will need to help understand the passage.
- Activities to help them engage as they listen to or read the Bible story.
- A story-telling segment that seeks to tell the Bible story in a memorable and visually engaging way. (This involves using part of a book from the *Tales That Tell The Truth* series. In some of the sessions, the book is deliberately read in two parts so that you can look at the Bible before reinforcing the message using the remaining pages of the book.)
- An opportunity to think about a passage of Scripture and what it means using appropriate questions.
- An activity or discussion that encourages the children to understand what the passage means for us today.
- Encouragement to children to pray in light of what they’ve learnt about Jesus in the lesson.
- Games that reinforce the learning, but that also provide a concentration break and a chance to move around!
- Craft activities, ranging from those requiring minimal resources to more complicated projects.

Each session ends with specific suggestions for ways you can revisit what you have been thinking about over the course of the week. Here are some other ideas for ways to recap what you have learnt:

- Show your craft proudly over Zoom/Skype/Facetime etc... to a family member or friend!
- Replay the game. Can your children remember what it reminds us about Jesus?
- Encourage children to have a go at re-teaching the lesson to their dolls/playmobil/Sylvanian families.
- Read the storybook at bedtime.

As far as is currently allowed, why not try to get together with another family with children of a similar age? You can share around the “leading” and enjoy precious time together!

We pray that these resources will give families and churches a way of engaging their children with Scripture at a time when normal church family life has been disrupted and grow all of us in love for our powerful, loving, saving Lord!

