

The Freedom of the Spirit

Acts 16:16-34

October 11, 2026

Small Group Questions with Leader Notes

This Sunday we continued a sermon series entitled “*Empowered to Bear Witness to Jesus’ Kingdom.*” This series focuses on how the risen and ascended Jesus empowers his disciples for mission through the gift of the outpoured Holy Spirit.

Small Group Questions

1. Observe. Read Acts 16:16–24 What do you notice about the slave girl, her owners, Paul and Silas, and the city authorities? What does each character seem to want, and who has power over whom?

Leader notes:

Encourage the group to observe and identify details in the passage before drawing conclusions.

- The slave girl is exploited for the profit she brings her owners.
- Paul and Silas are identified as servants of the Most High God, yet their actions threaten the owners' income.
- The owners frame their complaint in terms of public order and Roman customs, while Luke reveals their financial motive.
- The magistrates and crowd exercise power over Paul and Silas, who are beaten and imprisoned without a fair hearing.

The story reveals overlapping forms of bondage and power—spiritual, economic, social and even political.

2. In verses 16–18, Paul commands the spirit to leave the slave girl in the name of Jesus Christ. What changes as a result, and what remains unchanged? What might Luke want us to notice about the limits of her liberation? What does the girl's deliverance reveal?

Leader notes:

The spirit leaves her, but the passage gives no indication that her legal or economic circumstances change. Her owners' response focuses on their lost source of income, and Luke does not tell us what happens to her.

The passage depicts a genuine spiritual liberation without suggesting that every other form of bondage automatically disappears. It also exposes the way economic interests and systems can hinder another person's freedom.

If you want to pursue this thread: **Why might Luke leave her story unresolved?** Her unresolved situation invites us to notice the difference between deliverance from one form of bondage and comprehensive flourishing.

3. Read verses 22-28. How do Paul and Silas respond to their suffering and mistreatment? What is surprising about Paul and Silas's behaviour in prison? How do the earthquake and the prisoners' open doors change the situation, and how do Paul and Silas respond?

Leader notes:

Despite being beaten, shackled, and imprisoned, Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns at midnight. When the earthquake opens the doors and loosens the chains, they do not flee. Paul instead prevents the jailer from taking his own life.

Ask the group to distinguish between what the text explicitly says and what we infer. Luke doesn't explain exactly what Paul and Silas were thinking or why the other prisoners stayed.

Their outward circumstances do not dictate their actions. Their response demonstrates a freedom that is not simply the ability to escape constraints, but a freedom expressed in living out their purpose to love God and love others.

4. What does this passage teach us about true freedom? Paul and Silas are physically confined, yet they worship and serve others. How might this story challenge common ideas of freedom at play in our culture? How does it shape your understanding of freedom in Christ?

Leader notes:

The passage invites us to consider freedom as more than external independence. Paul and Silas are not free from injustice or suffering, but they remain able to worship God and act for another person's good.

Connect this with the sermon's central distinction: Christian freedom is not merely freedom from limitations, but freedom for life with Jesus and the purposes for which we were made.

Be careful not to imply that external circumstances do not matter, or that people experiencing oppression should simply accept it. The passage exposes injustice; it does not call injustice good.

Freedom in Christ is not simply self-determination. It is a life increasingly shaped by belonging to Jesus, serving him, and participating in his purposes.

5. Read verses 27–34. What does freedom make possible for others? What do Paul and Silas do for the jailer? How does their concern for him shape the outcome of the story? What does this suggest about the relationship between Christian freedom and love for others?

Leader notes:

Paul stops the jailer from harming himself, reassures him that the prisoners are still there, and speaks the word of the Lord to him and his household. The jailer responds by caring for Paul and Silas's wounds, and he and his household are baptized. The story concludes with rejoicing.

Christian freedom is not merely a personal benefit. It frees us to notice, serve, and love others—even when doing so costs us something.

As a follow up (if you have time): **What might it look like to use our freedom, resources, influence, or time for someone else's flourishing?**

6. Where might the Spirit be forming this freedom in us? Looking across the whole passage, where do you see a contrast between bondage and freedom? Where might Jesus be inviting you or our church community to grow in freedom that leads to love, courage, or action for justice?

Leader notes:

Allow time for personal reflection. Your group might identify patterns of fear, resentment, self-protection, the need for control, or other pressures that make it difficult to love others. Others may reflect on ways their community can respond to exploitation or injustice.

Keep the question invitational rather than prescriptive. The aim is not to suggest that people can overcome every constraint by trying harder, or that suffering is a sign of spiritual failure. In the sermon it was emphasized that the source of this freedom is Jesus, through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Christian freedom is received from Jesus and formed in us by the Spirit. It leads not only to personal transformation but also to participation in God's work of justice, liberation, and flourishing.

Close in prayer.

If appropriate, you might invite the group to name one concrete response that flows out of question 6.

Pray for the Spirit to form the freedom of Jesus in us and our church community.