



## GROW AT HOME

## DAILY DEVOTION

## DAY 54

## READ

## ACTS 16

## REFLECTION from PASTOR CONNIE SURRATT

This chapter focuses on Paul and Silas's missionary journey. As I read through it, I think back to all of the different trips Doyle and I have been privileged to take with fellow SeaCoasters. We have been to many places, including a trip a few years ago where we stood in this very spot where Paul and Silas were brought before the magistrates. It was so surreal to walk there and think about what is taking place in this chapter.

That may have been our most recent trip, but I'll never forget my first trip to a different nation, Uganda, about 15 years ago. The country was still recovering from the devastation left by Idi Amin and was still under a threat from the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army), whose power relied on building their army of child soldiers through abduction. None of my extended family was excited that we were going there. I prepared myself mentally and physically by getting my affairs in order, just in case. But, we were all in, ready to see what God needed us to do--where we could be of help. It was that nervous, excited kind of energy you have. The kind I think we all had at one time when we accepted Christ and were ready to go and change the world. On our trip, we found out there was a great need that God wanted us to meet. You as a church got involved financially in a big way and we were able to help in Gulu Town to support the former child soldiers. As I look back on those days and the risks we may have been taking, I wonder if I would as readily step into those same opportunities now. If I look at the disciples they seem to be always ready for whatever God puts in front of them. We can learn much from their example.



Paul and Silas, as we see in this chapter, were still within the Roman Empire. As Roman citizens, they should have had protection, but they didn't. This was because they didn't have a chance to reveal their Roman citizenship until after their release. Paul and Silas were seen as trouble-makers because they had cast out a spirit from a female slave who made her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. Her owners were not too happy and dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace to face the authorities. Their vague charges were enough. The crowd and the magistrates were biased against Paul and Silas because of their Jewish appearance--they assumed that because they were Jews, they were not Roman citizens. In the Roman Empire, there were two different laws: one for citizens of the Roman empire, and one for those who are not citizens. Roman citizens had specific, guarded civil rights. Non-citizens had no civil rights. As the story continues, crowds of people joined in to witness the spectacle. Paul and Silas were beaten, thrown into prison, and, to add insult to injury, they "fastened their feet in stocks." We are told these stocks had more than two holes for legs, which could thus be forced apart in such a way as to cause the utmost discomfort and cramping pain.

They are in prison and what do they do? They, "sing praises to God". Guess what? When you sing in prison after you've just been beaten, people take notice! That's exactly what the other prisoners did. Then an earthquake happens. What I love about this chapter is the earthquake part of the narrative. As I read this I thought "there was an earthquake large enough to free them and that's not even the point of the chapter!" The jailer knew this was it for him--because the earthquake would enable all of his prisoners to escape--so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. Now, I don't know about you, but I would take this as a sign from God and run as fast as I could to get as far away as I could possibly go. But not Paul and Silas. Others' spiritual needs were more important than their own personal freedom and comfort. They showed tremendous discernment. One author put it this way, "Stay for the sake of this one soul." What a powerful



## GROW AT HOME

## DAILY DEVOTION

## DAY 54

## REFLECTION from PASTOR CONNIE SURRATT (CONT'D)

statement! This jailer was more affected by Paul and Silas' love and grace than by the earthquake and asks, "what must I do to be saved?" He instantly wanted the kind of life that Paul and Silas had.

Can that be said of you and me? We're not even in jail--although as the quarantine goes on (especially if you are a parent of young children), it may feel like you are in jail. But are we surviving? Or are we thriving? God is using this time to point out some things I need to work on. It has not been easy to see. There is an old song titled "Restore the Joy." A line in the song says, "restore the joy of my salvation." As part of that joy, I think there has to be a willingness to do whatever is required in order to help others come to Christ. For us, it may simply be reaching out to our neighbors and our family with kindness.

## QUESTIONS

- HOW ARE YOU DOING? WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE KEYS TO YOU SURVIVING THIS SHUTDOWN?
- WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR YOU TO THRIVE IN THIS SITUATION?
- WHAT HAS GOD BEEN REVEALING TO YOU THAT NEEDS WORK IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE?