

Dungeons and Dragons

by Julie Snyder

FAITH STORY

Acts 16:11-40

SESSION FOCUS

Paul and Silas went to Philippi, where they met Lydia and some other believers. As they walked through the city, a slave girl who was demon-possessed kept following them. As she followed them, she announced that they were followers of God and on a mission to proclaim salvation. After several days, Paul was annoyed and cast the demon out. The girl's owners had Paul and Silas beaten and cast into prison. They spent the night in prayer and praising God, and the prisoners were listening. Suddenly, an earthquake broke the doors and the chains, effectively releasing all the prisoners. The jailer, realizing this, was about to kill himself. Paul stopped him, announcing that all the prisoners were still there. The jailer responded to this by asking what he must do to be saved. The jailer and his household believed in God, and they were baptized. Word came the next morning that Paul and Silas had been released. Paul demanded that their rights as Roman citizens be honored. After visiting with Lydia and the believers, they went on their way.

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Study the materials and passage prior to class
- Newsprint and markers, chalk board or dry erase board
- Bibles for each student

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS

Welcome students and ask them to divide into small groups. Ask them to think about this situation: "You have been put in jail for helping someone, and you had a chance to walk away from prison without much chance of getting caught. Think of one reason why you might decide to stay there. The reason doesn't have to be serious... be imaginative!"

Ask the students to come up with a short skit or dialogue to present their reason for not leaving prison.

CONNECT

Bring the groups together. Perform the skits, and talk about the reasons to stay in prison. Enjoy the absurd reasons, and discuss the more serious reasons.

Ask: "Would you stay if it meant that you could save someone's life? What if that someone was the guard?"

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Read Acts 16:11-40. Discuss what the students think is the main point of this story. Talk about the familiar parts of the story. Then read it again, specifically looking for things that you may have missed the first time. Some questions to consider are:

- Why were they singing while they were in prison? Which was more strange: them singing after a *really* bad day, or staying in prison when they had a chance to leave?
- What are some of the "dragons" that Paul and Silas faced in this story?
- Why do you think Paul and Silas stayed in prison when they could have easily escaped? What affect did their actions have on those around them?
- Why do you think the other prisoners stayed? What was their motivation?
- Why do you think the jailer responded the way he did?
- Do you think that Paul and Silas' willingness to give themselves for the jailer's well being may have contributed to his conversion?
- How did Paul and Silas begin living their faith before they were faced with the bigger question of whether to leave the prison or not?
- Paul chose to put his life on the line (he didn't know that he would be released the next day) in order to save the life of the jailer. Does that have any implications for how we should interact with those who wish to harm us? Are Paul's actions in agreement with Jesus' actions?

APPLY

Say: Most of us may not find ourselves in actual prisons, but we all have "dungeons" in our lives—bad days, bad situations, bad circumstances. What are some of those dungeons in your life? What are the "dragons" that you face?

Make a list of the dungeons and dragons that the youth face in their lives.

Say: Paul and Silas must have had a huge impact on those already in the prison before the earthquake, if all the prisoners remained in the prison after the earthquake. How can we live our lives proactively? What can we do before we face dungeons and dragons to prepare us for those times?

Make a list of the proactive things we can do to help us face the tough times.

Say: Silas stuck with Paul through some incredibly difficult circumstances. Do you have people who will “sing with you in the dungeon,” stay behind with you, even when they have a chance to leave? Do you have people who help you tackle the dragons? Who are your “Lydia’s”?

Ask students to decide how they can thank the people who are “there for them” in tough times. Each student should come up with at least one person and one thing they will do. Options could include a note, a text message, flowers, taking them out to eat, doing something nice for them. Ask students to commit to thanking at least one person in the next week.

RESPOND

Ask students to look at the list of “dungeons and dragons” and the list of proactive things to do. Invite them to choose one thing from each list to spend time praying about—a dragon they need to slay, and something they can do to prepare for the dragons in their life. Ask them to find a quiet space away from the rest of the group. Have each student take a Bible with them and use Psalm 86 as part of their quiet time. This Psalm expresses a cry for help in “slaying the dragon” and also gives us the assurance that walking with God is the best way to prepare for the times in the dungeon.

Bring students back together and read Psalm 86:11-13 as your closing prayer.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE

Paul and Barnabas have just parted company, which must have been a very painful thing for both of them. After a sharp disagreement regarding their traveling companions, Barnabas and John Mark set out towards Cyprus, while Paul embarks with Silas to continue ministering in Syria. Timothy joins the group in the first part of chapter 16. In verse 11, the pronoun “we” appears for the first time in the book. Luke apparently joins the band at this point, and has a front row seat for the drama that is about to unfold.

As the band of believers travel, they meet Lydia at the church in Philippi. The circumstances of their meeting make it sound like Lydia is a leading member the church. Ten Jewish heads of families were required to have a synagogue in a given city. When that number was not available, the Jews would often meet by a river to worship. Paul and his friends go down to the river to speak with the Jews, and Lydia’s heart is open to “listening eagerly” to Paul’s teaching.

The trouble in Philippi begins when a slave who is possessed with a spirit enabling her to tell the future annoys Paul with her incessant declaration of their purpose. The chapter doesn’t give much insight as to why Paul was irritated—whether it was the annoying person following them around, or the undue attention she was drawing to them, or perhaps the fact that the slave’s owner

profited from her demon-possession. Whatever it was that annoyed Paul, he drove the spirit from her in Jesus name.

The slave owner, quite angered, sputters with anti-Semitism. The feelings of resentment towards the Jews living amongst Roman citizens were quite clear. Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in the innermost cell of the prison. They were praying and singing praises to God in the middle of the night when an earthquake—no doubt a natural occurrence perfectly timed by God—releases Paul, Silas and the other prisoners from their chains. The guard was bound to keep the prisoners captive at the risk of his life. When he saw the doors open, he was certain that the prisoners had all escaped. He was about to kill himself when Paul interrupts him and declares that all the prisoners are still there. The jailer embraces the gospel based on Paul and Silas' representation of it. Their living out the essence of the gospel is what brought the jailer to Christ.

Paul and Silas remain in prison, along with the other prisoners. When they are released the next morning, Paul demands that their rights as Roman citizens be honored. It was a serious offense to inflict beatings on Roman citizens without a trial. The very tenants of Rome rode on its prestigious religious system. The magistrates of Philippi probably ran the risk of having Philippi's privileged position of being a Roman colony revoked, which would cause them to lose things like tax exemption and the ability to own land. When Paul threatens to expose them, the magistrates asked them very nicely to leave the city.

Paul and Silas said goodbye to Lydia and the believers there, and they went on their way.