

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE: WEEK ONE**

### **Devotional #4 (Sept. 27)**

**Joy, even in jail:** Prison praises in the midst of suffering.

**Acts 16:22-40**

**Explore:** The apostle Paul and Silas are in prison....again. It's hard to imagine that two great men who are disciples of God would find themselves in prison so much, but over and over again it happens. Our reading today finds them in prison after having cured a girl who was being possessed. It's interesting to note that they have never been thrown in jail for doing something wrong. It's always for doing the Lord's work. This time they are not just thrown in prison, but they are beat up. Not wanting them to have any chance of escape, the guards are commanded to put them into the inner prison and bound their feet in the stocks. You can imagine that the room they were kept in was dirty, dark, and had no windows. Not only were they locked in this room, but they also had their feet bound so that they could not move. How do you think you would feel in a situation like this? I would be terrified and miserable, but do you want to know what the Bible says Paul and Silas did? THEY WERE SINGING!

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4-7)

**Application:** Paul and Silas, beaten and thrown into prison for no reason, are praying and singing praises to God! In the same situation, do you think you would be doing that? Why do you think they were singing praises to God? (Good answer, they probably were singing because they were finding joy in suffering for God. Also they knew that other prisoners around them would hear their words.) The great lesson we can learn from this story is that no matter what situation we find ourselves in, we should always be able to thank God and find joy in our faith in Him.

**Discussion for the family:** What are some rough situations where you could praise God? (Read Romans 5:3-5.) How can our joy in times of hardships be a testimony to those around us?

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to be brave and to learn how to praise You in hard times. May our lives be a testimony for Jesus to those around us....a testimony of your presence and comforting love.

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE: WEEK ONE**

### **Devotional #1 (Sept. 22)**

**Humble Beginnings:** Jesus was humble—Are you?

**Matthew 1:18-25**

**Explore:** Close your eyes, and imagine you are living over 2,000 years ago. Your clothes are different, your shoes are different, and you have a donkey in the stable out back. You are the owner and keeper of an inn located in a little town called Bethlehem. One dark, windy night, a young couple knocks on your door and asks you for a room. "I have no rooms available," you tell them. Then you notice the young woman is pregnant. You feel sorry for the couple, and you offer to let them stay in your stable. Later you learn the young woman had her baby, not just any baby: the child was Christ the Savior, God's Son. "Oh, no," you say. "Had I only known I would have given you my room. I would have thrown a party in your honor!"

When you start to seek praise and honor for your accomplishments, or believe you haven't received the recognition you deserve, just remember this: Jesus, who is God's Son, our Lord of Lords, our mighty King, ruler of everything, and was with God from the beginning (John 1:1-4), didn't come to this earth for praise and glory. He didn't come with trumpets sounding. The red carpet was not rolled out. He came quietly and humbly, placed in a manger, fleeing from danger—not to receive recognition, but to die on a cross for our sins.

"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

**Application:** Christ, who was the only one with every right to be arrogant and prideful, chose to humble Himself. (Read Philippians 2:5-8) Our attitude should be the same as that of Jesus. Jesus Christ has set the perfect example for us to follow—in life, in marriage, and in our family. Becoming more like Christ in our lives will not happen overnight. It will take persistence. It will take flexibility. And, most of all, it will take love. A love that shows others that we are more concerned with their needs than our own. A love that serves without an attitude. A love that forgives.

**Discussion for the family:** How can we demonstrate humility and value to others? (That's right! Serve others and put the needs of others ahead of our own. Read Philippians 2:5-8.)

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, please help us to have the same heart of humility that Jesus had when He came down from Heaven to be born and die for our sins.

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE: WEEK ONE**

### **Devotional #2 (Sept. 23)**

**Wisdom & Love:** It is important to deal with problems as they arise and work towards resolving them in a Christian way.

#### **Acts 6:1-15**

**Explore:** As we read through the early part of Acts, we learn about God's church in its early stages and how it continued to grow. Today, we learn of a problem that the church was facing. There was a threat to their unity. The Christians who lived outside of Palestine felt that their widows were being neglected. As with anything new, problems will arise and obstacles will need to be overcome. This was the case, even with the early church. But, part of our reading today is not that there will be problems, but how to deal with them when they do arise. Rather than let this problem grow, the apostles acted quickly. They instructed the church to choose men among them to handle the task. The church acted accordingly and was stronger and more fruitful than it was before. And with their unity restored, the Bible says, "The number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem." (Acts 6:7)

**Application:** When Christians act the way the apostles did and solve differences with wisdom and love, others will come to know God and the church will grow!

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

**Discussion for the family:** When we face problems today, whether in the church or just with our friends, what is the best thing to do? (That's right! We need to go to them and work it out! Read Matthew 18:15.) When is the best time to work on a problem with others? (That's right! Now is the best time! Read Ephesians 4:25-32.)

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, so often petty things stand in our way of having healthy relationships with others. Help us to be assertive in resolving our differences with other people, but to always do things in Your love.

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE: WEEK ONE**

### **Devotional #3 (Sept. 26)**

**A Sheepentdove:** Sheep that are wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

#### **Matthew 10:1-16**

**Explore:** Before we read today's devotional text, see if you can solve this riddle: What do you get when you cross a serpent, a dove and sheep? A Sheepentdove? Not exactly. Give up? A Christian! When Jesus was preparing His disciples for service, He gave them some very important instructions about the world, and how to deal with those they encountered. Jesus said, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves." In other words He says, I am sending you out helpless and unarmed among those who want to harm you. Do you think the disciples were nervous? Jesus knew their job would not be easy, so he told them to "be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves." What did He mean? How can someone be a serpent and a dove at the same time? Think for a moment about the qualities that Jesus gives each of these animals. To be shrewd means to be wise or prudent. A serpent is described as having the ability to do the right thing at the right time. And to be innocent means to be harmless and pure of heart, like a dove. So the disciples were to be wise and prudent, but harmless and pure of heart.

**Application:** When you become a Christian, you also become a disciple of Christ. Is there a reason to be nervous? Sure there will be wolves among you! Some may wish to hurt you and make fun of you for who you are and what you stand for. If so, use wise judgment. Don't lash back at them, but be as a serpent and avoid those situations. And most of all, have no fear. For we are but sheep and the Lord is the Good Shepherd. Let Him be your guide.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." (Psalm 23:1)

**Discussion for the family:** How can we keep a tender heart while developing a tougher hide? How can we everyday commit to the Lord as "my Shepherd" when we face opposition? (That's right! Look to Jesus as our example and model. Read 1 Peter 2:21-25.)

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to be as "wise as serpents" about the world's opposition to us, but "harmless as doves" in our response. May we commit to keeping our soul to you God, for you will be faithful to care for us.