

# Shaken Free: From Self-Centered to Selfless

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## INTRODUCTION

Today we continue our series **Ignite**—and what a journey it's been! Last week we talked about removing the noise. We learned that when we fast, we're not just giving up food; we're removing distractions that keep us from hearing God's voice clearly. We create space. We tune in.

But here's the question: What happens when you've removed the noise, you're hearing God clearly, but suddenly everything falls apart? What do you do when obeying God lands you in the worst situation of your life?

 ILLUSTRATION: THE SNOW GLOBE (THE CLARIFYING SHAKE)

**Object:** A beautiful, settled snow globe.

Hold up the snow globe. It's pretty, still, and clear. "This is our life when things are going well—peaceful, settled in our routines and comforts."

Now give it a vigorous shake. "But then life happens. God allows the shake."

Point to the swirling snow. "Look! The shake reveals what was actually inside the whole time. When God shakes your world, He's not trying to break you—He's trying to reveal you."

"Today we're going to see how Paul and Silas and the slave owners acted when their world was shaken. The same shake revealed completely different hearts."

# SCRIPTURE READING

Turn with me to Acts chapter 16. We're going to start with verses 16 through 18.

*"Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.' She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her."*

**Acts 16:16-18 (NIV)**

## 1. THE CONTEXT: SIMPLE SPACES, MIGHTY GOD

It's the early 50s AD. Paul is on his second missionary journey with Silas, Timothy, and Luke. After the Jerusalem Council said Gentiles didn't need to follow Jewish Law to be saved, Paul is taking that good news across new territories.

In verse 13, Paul says they went to a "place of prayer." Since there wasn't a synagogue in Philippi, believers met outdoors by the river. No fancy building. Just water, sky, and people seeking God.

And notice this: Just like Jesus often withdrew to pray, Paul and his crew took time to retreat. Even in the middle of their mission, they prioritized prayer. Why? Because **prayer makes you more selfless as you learn to depend on God**. Prayer shifts your focus from "me" to "Him."

**Here's the takeaway:**

- God meets people in simple spaces. You don't need a cathedral. You don't need a building at all.
- The Spirit led Paul to a riverside prayer circle, and Lydia—the first European convert—believed right there by the water.
- Your walk with God isn't about sacred sites or special places. It's about union with Christ wherever you are.

Church, hear me: **God wants to use you out there!** At your workplace, houses, community! The Holy Spirit lives in your heart, which means the "prayer place" can be anywhere—your workplace, your

neighborhood, the grocery store. God can meet people through you anywhere you go. What would happen if we all reached one person this month in March! Pray the Holy Spirit leads you! Find a way to share love with them, tell them how much God loves them!

## Yesterday's Outreach Report

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Speaking of God using us anywhere: Yesterday after prayer, we had 4 groups of 5 people that went out into our city. Check out what happened:

*[Pastor: Share specific testimonies here - healings, prayers, conversations]*

## 2. TWO TYPES OF HEARTS: SELF-CENTERED VS. SELFLESS

Now let's get into the heart of this passage—literally. In this story, we see a stark contrast between two types of hearts. And every single one of us has to choose which heart we're going to live with.

### The Self-Centered Heart (The Owners)

As Paul and his team are heading to that prayer place again, they encounter a slave girl with some interesting characteristics:

- She's possessed by a spirit of divination—a demon that gives her the ability to predict the future
- Her owners are making a fortune off of her—she's their cash cow
- For days, she follows Paul around shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God!"
- That's technically true, but it's a demon saying it

### Paul's Response:

- Paul becomes "greatly annoyed"—the Greek means deeply disturbed in his spirit
- Finally, he's had enough
- He turns around and says to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!"
- Boom—at that moment, the spirit left

**Quick note:** Mediums, fortune tellers, psychics, tarot cards, palm readings—all of these are tied to impure spirits. But remember this: **You have authority in the name of Jesus!** The same power that delivered that girl is available to you.

*"When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, 'These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.' The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks."*

**Acts 16:19-24 (NIV)**

**Now here's where it gets ugly. The Owners' Reaction:**

- When the girl was set free, the owners were furious
- Not because they cared about her spiritual condition
- Not because they were concerned about the demon
- They were furious because **their hope of making money was gone**
- They cared more about their profit than her personhood
- They saw a human being as a revenue stream

That, my friends, is the spirit of *Mammon*—and we need to talk about it.

## Understanding Mammon

"Mammon" is an Aramaic word for wealth or riches. But here's what's important: Jesus doesn't just talk about money—He personifies it as a rival master. In Matthew 6:24, He says, "You cannot serve God and mammon."

**Key truths about Mammon:**

- Money is a tool; Mammon is a master—one serves you, the other enslaves you
- Mammon promises security but can never deliver righteousness or peace

- In Christ, you're already secure—money returns to its proper place as a servant, not a savior

### 3. THE RESPONSE: PRAISE IN THE PRISON

Now the Scripture continues. The owners were so furious they dragged Paul and Silas to the authorities. Without investigation, they were beaten with rods, severely flogged, and thrown into the inner cell with their feet locked in stocks.

Now, let me ask you: What do you do when you're in a place like that? When you've done the right thing and everything goes wrong? Do you complain? Do you blame God? Do you give up?

*"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them."*

**Acts 16:25 (NIV)**

Midnight. The darkest hour. Their backs are shredded. Their feet are in stocks. And what are they doing? They're worshipping. They're singing. And here's what's powerful: **The other prisoners were listening to them.**

Your response in your darkest moment becomes a testimony to everyone around you.

#### ILLUSTRATION: CONCERT IN A CAVE

Their prison cell became a worship concert venue. The acoustics of suffering amplified their praise. When you praise God in your darkest place, it doesn't just reach heaven—it reaches everyone around you. Your "midnight" can become someone else's breakthrough moment.

The Selfless Heart (Paul and Silas)

*"Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!'"*

**Acts 16:26-28 (NIV)**

Then, suddenly—*boom!*—a violent earthquake shakes the foundations of the prison. Every door flies open. Every chain falls off. This is a supernatural jailbreak. God just opened the door for them to escape.

But watch what happens next. This is where you see the difference between a self-centered heart and a selfless heart.

The jailer wakes up, sees the doors wide open, and assumes the prisoners have escaped. Under Roman law, if you lose a prisoner, you pay with your life. So he draws his sword, ready to kill himself.

And then Paul—who could be halfway down the road by now—shouts out from the darkness: **"Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"**

Think about that. What's the difference?

- **A self-centered person** would have bolted: "God opened the door! This is my miracle! I'm out!"
- **A selfless person** stays—not because they enjoy suffering, but because they care about the soul of the jailer more than their own comfort

**And because they stayed, everything changed:**

*"The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household."*

**Acts 16:29-34 (NIV)**

- The jailer rushed in, fell trembling before them, and asked, "**What must I do to be saved?**"
- Paul and Silas shared the gospel with him and his entire household
- The jailer washed their wounds—repentance in action, serving those he had imprisoned
- That very night, he and his entire household were baptized
- He brought them into his home and fed them. The Bible says he was **filled with joy** because he had come to believe in God

One selfless decision. One family saved. That's the power of staying when God could have let you leave.

## CONCLUSION

Church, here's what I want you to hear today: **Every action you take bears testimony.** People are watching how you respond when life gets hard. They're listening to what comes out of your mouth at midnight.

Sometimes God places you in scenarios that are uncomfortable, even painful. But you must persist. You never know who can be won for Christ right where you are.

### Where is your "prison" today?

- Maybe it's your workplace
- Maybe it's a difficult family situation
- Maybe it's a health or financial challenge

### Don't run. Stay. Worship. Let your selfless love speak.

Paul and Silas moved from the self-centeredness of the world to the selflessness of the Kingdom. They didn't just get free from prison—they got free from *self* so they could serve others. And that's the call on every believer's life.

### Today, God is asking you:

- How is your heart?
- What kind of heart will you have? Selfish or selfless?
- Will you see people as transactions, or will you see them as souls?

- Will you run when the door opens, or will you stay because someone needs Jesus?
- Will you worship at midnight, or will you complain in the dark?
- Remember Jesus at your conversion gave you a new heart and spirit live from that heart not your old flesh!

**Let's pray.**