

A Jailer's

Bad Day

The Point: God desires action, not just words.

Scripture Connect: Acts 16:25–33

Supplies for all Session 13 activities options: pencils, prepared poster, \$1 bill per 2 children (bills will be returned!), Bible, 1 pair of adult-size tube socks for each child (clean, various colors, will be returned)

The Basics for Leaders

No one knows if the jailer who locked Paul and Silas in stocks enjoyed his job, but we do know he took it seriously. Good thing too, because he worked for the Romans, and they took prisoners very seriously.

So seriously, in fact, that Roman law held that jailers shown to be careless and let prisoners escape, were killed.

Imagine then how the Philippian jailer felt when he awoke to an earthquake that sent walls tumbling and broke open his prisoners' stocks.

A bad day for the jailer? A horrible day!

He drew a sword, prepared to take his own life before the Romans could reach him. Drawing back the blade, he heard Paul's announcement from the rubble that no prisoner had escaped. The prisoners had time to run away, but they hadn't done so.

What had been the jailer's worst (and almost last) day of his life took a sudden turn. He not only kept his job, but the actions of Paul and Silas convinced him that the Jesus they followed was worth a careful look.

It wasn't Paul and Silas's preaching that brought the jailer to Jesus; it was their actions ... and actions speak louder than words.

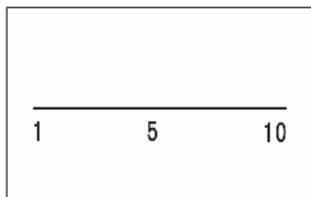
OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

HOWZITGOIN'

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: pencils, prepared poster

Before kids arrive, draw a line on a poster. Write a 1 on the left end of the line, a 10 on the right, and a 5 in the middle. As kids arrive, ask them to pencil in their initials on the line.



Say: If this past week was so awful you wish you'd slept through it, place your initials by the 1. If it was a great week you wish you could repeat, put your initials by the 10. Place your initials anywhere on the line that shows how you feel about this past week—except exactly on the 5. Because there's no such thing as a week that's exactly half good and half bad!

After kids have signed in, give them 30 seconds each to explain why they placed their initials where they did. Be sure to include your own initials and explain your placement on the line. Kids will begin to express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this lesson to make it relevant to your kids' lives.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

MOVE FAST!

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: \$1 bill per 2 children (you'll get the bills back!)

Ask children to pick partners. Give the partner who has the longest hair in each pair a one-dollar bill—and mention you'll want it back!

Explain that the person with the bill will hold it vertically from one end. The other person in each pair will hold his or her thumb and index finger four inches apart, several inches below the bill, and will attempt to catch the dollar bill when it's dropped. It takes quick, catlike reflexes—or a bit of luck!

After several tries to catch the bill, reverse roles so each partner can both drop and catch (maybe!) the bill.

Collect the bills and then discuss:

- Which role did you prefer: dropper or catcher?
- What helped you catch the bill, if you did?
- If you could stretch time and have all of it you wanted for any activity that's usually rushed, what activity would you pick? Why?

Say: **Sometimes it helps accomplish a goal if we move fast and sometimes if we move more slowly. Today we'll consider a situation where there was time to do something you'd expect people to do but nobody moved. Curious? Let's find out more!**

Bad Days Game

HUMAN LOCKER ROOM

Time: 8 minutes or more, as desired

Supplies: none

Say: **Anybody can build a human pyramid—you just pile people on top of one another. We're going to do something far more challenging: we'll build other kinds of structures using just our bodies!**

If you have very few children in your group, that's fine, just modify your list. Most of the suggestions provided work well for two or more people. Give children just 30 seconds to "build" each structure you mention. Be encouraging and applaud creativity. Suggest that children work together to build some of the following using their bodies. Be sure to build a jail first.

- a jail
- a tepee
- the Leaning Tower of Pisa
- the Eiffel Tower
- a shower stall
- the Statue of Liberty
- a locker room

When kids have finished building their structures, applaud their efforts. Then ask them to discuss these questions:

- If you could move your room to any famous building and live there, what building would it be, and why?
- Of the buildings we built, which do you think would hold up best in an earthquake? Why?

Say: **Our Bible story involves a building we constructed: a jail. It didn't hold up well in an earthquake; the walls fell. But that let the apostle Paul and his friend, Silas, make a big impression on a jailer. Let's see how!**

Bad Days Bible Story

SOCK PUPPET THEATER

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: Bible, 1 pair of adult-size tube socks for each child (clean, various colors, will be returned)

Even if you have just a few children at your meeting, you can still assign every part in this play. Each child can play two parts by putting a sock on each hand!

Ask children to sit in a circle. Cast these parts: Paul, Silas, prisoners, jailer, and the jailer's family. Make extra kids prisoners or the jailer's family.

Say: **Actions speak louder than words, and God desires us to have active faith. Let's test that by doing this puppet show with no words other than the narration. Your puppet can't talk, but it can move. Communicate the actions I describe by using movement. For a stage we'll use our imaginations. Ready?**

Read aloud Acts 16:25–33. Pause after each verse and whenever there's movement described. When finished, encourage the actors to take a bow. Collect the socks and then ask:

- How did Paul and Silas's actions affect the other prisoners?
- Why did Paul and Silas's actions have such an impact on the jailer?

- How do your actions affect people around you? How would you like your actions to affect others?
- How can both your words and actions tell others about Jesus as Paul and Silas's did?

Say: Paul could have told the jailer about how Jesus could save him, and, Paul later did just that. But when Paul showed the jailer what it meant to be saved, that made a huge impact. Paul's actions spoke loudly and then the jailer could hear Paul's words. God desires our faith to be active, not just expressed by words alone. Actions do speak louder than words!

CLOSING PRAYER

EARTHQUAKE PRAYER

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Say: Paul and Silas were locked in a jail, and God set them free, through an earthquake. Usually earthquakes are thought of as natural disasters. Nothing good happens in them, no good comes out of them. But God works through nature in powerful ways. Let's thank God for working through his creation to do his will. Even in the middle of an earthquake, hurricane, or tornado, God can bring about good things.

Think of a natural disaster that scares you, and hold your hands in a shape that reminds you of it. For instance, if you're scared of hurricanes, you might make a giant O—the shape of a hurricane. Ready? Then close your eyes, please, and let's pray.

Pray: God, you see our hands. You see our hearts. You know how much damage an earthquake can cause, but you still used one to help Paul and Silas and the jailer who came to you.

When scary things happen in nature or troubles happen in our lives, help us put our faith into action by trusting your power to help and love us. In Jesus's name, amen.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 1**TWO LIES AND A TRUTH**

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: none

Tell children to think of three facts about their lives that others may not know, such as a middle name or a secret talent or someone famous they may have met. The catch: two facts will be true, and the third will be a lie.

Ask children to form pairs and tell their partners the three facts. The goal is for each child to correctly identify which of the “facts” are true and which one is false.

Ask partners to report how they did and what they learned about each other.

Say: **The jailer who heard Paul’s voice after the earthquake in Philippi thought he was hearing a lie. *The prisoners hadn’t escaped? How could that be?* But he discovered that Paul was telling the truth!**

And not only did Paul tell the truth but he acted on it too. Paul knew that God wants us to put our faith into action and not just words. It’s good to remember that actions often speak louder than words!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 2**SHOW ME, DON’T TELL ME**

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Actions better speak louder than words, because there aren’t any words used in this activity!

Ask children to communicate messages through actions only—no writing or speaking. If desired, form two groups and take turns acting out the following and having the other team guess what’s being communicated.

You can add your own messages, but here are six to get you started:

- Fire! Come with me to safety!
- Don’t drink the water.

- I've got ants in my pants!
- I'm riding a camel.
- I've got 10 million dollars and it's all in quarters.
- I want a glass of iced tea.

INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

Time: 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Gather kids in a circle. Ask: **What action speaks loudest to you if someone is saying, "I want to be your friend"? What actions speak loudest in telling your friend about Jesus?**