Session material: October
Paul and Silas by Claire Dawe

Go to messychurch.org.uk/getmessysep20 to download all templates at A4 size, including a session planning sheet

If you are using these sessions for a Messy Church at home, look out for this symbol! These are easier activities that can easily be adapted to the home.

Bible story

Acts 16:25–34 (NRSV)

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptised without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Pointers

- Paul and Silas find themselves jailed in Philippi because Paul stepped in to stop a vulnerable young woman being exploited. Have you ever stood up for something that you knew was wrong? What happened?
- Instead of arguing about why Paul couldn't have minded his own business, the men start singing hymns and praying out loud in their cell. How easy do you find it to turn to God when your situation is uncomfortable or sad?
- It would have been dark and very unpleasant chained up, but through their hope in finding refuge in God, they shared that with the other prisoners and ultimately the jailer and his household. Hope is contagious. Have you seen this happening in the lives of those who come to Messy Church?

#discipleship: team

Messy health check

How responsible are you with the leftover food from your meal?

Messy team theme

- The jailer asked what he needed to do in order to be saved. What was the answer? Do we always make it that simple for people?
- Who actually saves people?
- How do we celebrate milestones in people's faith lives in Messy Church?

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

The story of Paul and Silas is really the story of the jailer, his family and the other prisoners. It encourages us to know that our prayers and hymns are effective, even when we don't realise it and often in unexpected ways. The Holy Spirit will not be tamed or contained – and it is God alone who saves people, not us.

#discipleship: families

Mealtime card

- Where can you see the Holy Spirit moving and working in the world?
- Why didn't Paul and Silas run away when they had the chance?
- Share about baptisms you've seen or even your own if you can remember it.

Take-home idea

As a family, decide which one thing you are going to do this week or month to tackle climate change. This could be something small (such as turning off lights) or big (such as cutting down on meat consumption or using public transport instead of the car). Use the ideas you came up with in activity 6 if you are stuck.

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Question to start and end the session

So… who actually does the saving?

#discipleship: extra

Run a Pumpkin Heroes event. World Vision's Pumpkin Heroes is a free Christian alternative for Halloween. The free resources help church leaders encourage children aged 4–10 to have a fun yet meaningful time and to be global citizens, shining light into that time of year by sharing God's love with others. Pumpkin Heroes 2020 includes Patch the Pumpkin's new and exclusive story and film with new games, crafts and activities too.

This year, the theme of 'Choices' runs through the pack, which also gives children the chance to make and send Buddy Bracelets to the most vulnerable children that World Vision serves. Go to pumpkinheroes.com to order your free pack today.

Social action

Have some pre-addressed postcards for people to write message to support prisoners (Amnesty International have a Write for Rights campaign on their website every December, so you could write over the next couple of months).

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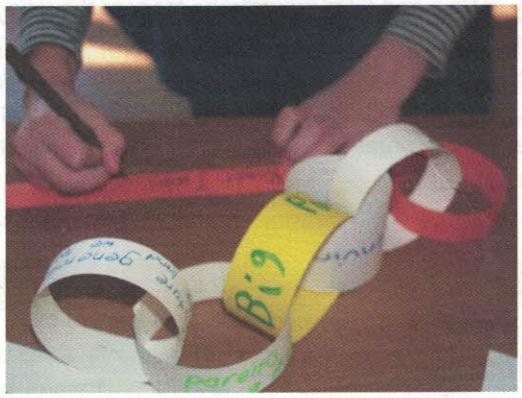

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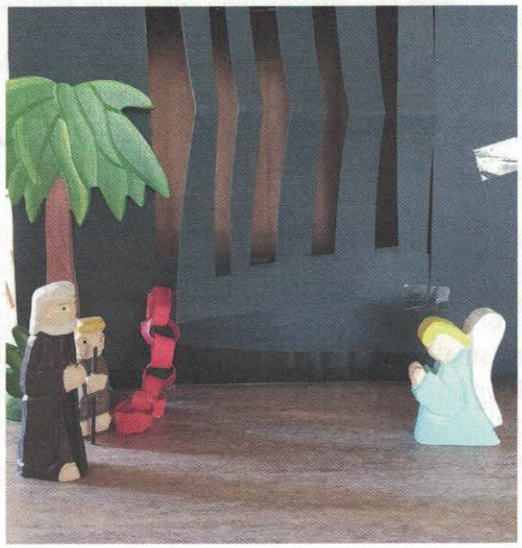

Activities

1. Prayer chains

You will need: pens; strips of paper; stapler or sticky tape

Who or what do you know that needs prayer? Write or draw people or situations in the world that need prayer on the strips of paper and create a paper chain of prayers. Our prayer chain will be strong because we join together with others.

Talk about how our prayers are like prison chains – they are strong when they join together with the prayers of others, so that those in trouble can feel the power of being lifted up and supported by our community of faith.

2. A prison diorama

You will need: shoeboxes; a selection of pens and crayons, coloured paper and card; lolly sticks; any recycled small bits of card, plastic, etc.; strong safe glue

Make a diorama of the prison where Paul and Silas were kept – remember it was dark and cold and very unpleasant. Paul and Silas would have been held in chains. The window had bars to keep them in. -Don't forget to add some people and make sure everything is stuck firmly in place so you can move it and take it home.

Talk about how the prison where Paul and Silas were kept would have been dark and cold and dirty. Some prisons around the world are still like the Roman prisons, despite international laws which call on people to be treated with respect no matter what they have done. This is hard when we remember the crimes they have committed, but following Jesus' example of justice has never been easy.

3. The story in Lego

You will need: boxes of Lego; cameras or phones (optional)

Can you retell the story using the Lego? You can take photographs or videos to be used in the celebration on the screen or on your Facebook page, church magazine or website. If you are struggling, think about these as the main points of the story:

Talk about what the prison would have been like. What does it mean to come to faith? It doesn't always have to be a big event like this that jolts us into believing. It can be a slower process which takes place over time.

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Paul and Silas by Claire Dawe

4. Sound effects

You will need: handheld instruments (optional); recycled materials to make instruments, e.g. plastic bottles or yoghurt pots, gravel (not food) for shakers, rubber bands, anything that can be banged (like old saucepan lids), old spoons

The noise of the earthquake would have been enormous. No wonder the jailer woke up! What do you think an earthquake might sound like? Make instruments using the recycled materials, or play with the instruments provided and see what different types of noise they make.

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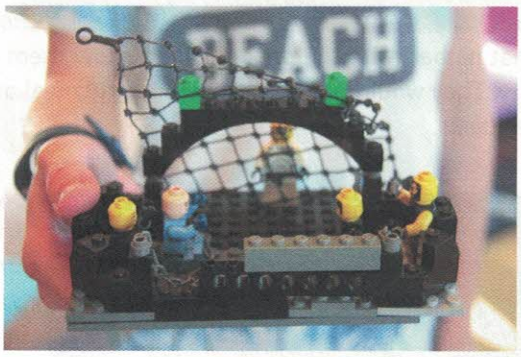

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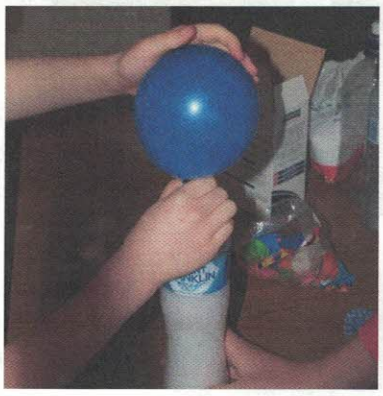

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Talk about how earthquakes are very scary and dangerous – some people say it sounds like a train. They make the ground shake, buildings become unstable, trees are lifted out of the ground and people are thrown around. It can feel very unsafe. When do you feel unsafe? How does God help you when you feel like this?

5. The Holy Spirit working

You will need: clear bottles; balloons; white vinegar; measuring spoons; bicarb; funnels; spoons; towels

First, fill a bottle to a third full with vinegar. Using a funnel, put 2 teaspoons of bicarb into a balloon. Carefully place the balloon over the neck of the bottle. When you're ready to go, lift the balloon and empty the contents into the bottle, but remember to hold the balloon on the neck of the bottle! The bicarb will react with the vinegar and fizz, inflating the balloon with gas. (Be very careful how you empty the bottle and dispose of the balloon properly.)

Talk about how the Holy Spirit, like the bicarb in this activity, definitely got to work in that prison. I wonder how those prisoners reacted to what they heard. The Spirit moves in our hearts so that we are inspired to go out and show God's love to everyone, the whole of creation.

6. Climate change commitments

You will need: a clear glass bowl half-filled with water; pebbles

What can you do about climate change? For example: turn off lights, don't buy food in plastic packaging, use reusable cups and plates, walk or use public transport rather than drive. Make your commitment as you drop a pebble into the water. As each pebble is placed in the water, the level of the water rises like the sea. The ripples symbolise our climate change commitments.

Talk about how Paul and Silas experienced an earthquake, but there are other extreme natural events which can be very destructive and dangerous. Some extreme natural events, such as some flooding, take place because of climate change. We can reduce the impact we have on the environment in order to prevent some of these taking place.

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7. Reflecting on prisoners around the world

You will need: a person template (download online); card or paper; scissors; pens; felt-tip pens; a table cross

Concertina-fold your card into three and use the template to cut out a person, making sure the arms go right to the edges. Unfold the card so that you have three people. Draw faces and clothes to symbolise people who are in prison – let's not leave them faceless. Collect them around the cross to show that, even though we may not know them, God does not forget them.

Talk about how some people are imprisoned because of their nationality, religion or political beliefs, or for many other reasons. Too often, these people are forgotten or ignored, or we never find out about them.

8. The meal at the jailer's house

You will need: bread, cheese and olives on plates; pens; paper; bandages or strips of fabric

Eat some of the food and write down as many stories or teachings of Jesus as you can remember. These all add up to tell us what we need to do to be followers of Jesus, including: love God; love everyone (even the people we don't like!); care for those who are poor, sick, in prison or excluded and ignored by others; live justly and love mercy.

Find a friend and wrap their pretend wounds, just as the jailer cared for Paul and Silas.

Talk about how the jailer took Paul and Silas to his house to share food with them. While they ate, they would have talked about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. What stories about Jesus would Paul and Silas have told the household?

9. Dove mobile

You will need: firm paper or card; a simple dove template (download online); pens; scissors; craft feathers (optional); glue; a hole punch; string; recycled wire hangers

Using the template, cut out a dove shape. Stick on some feathers if you like. Make a hole in the top and attach some string. Tie it to the hangers with other doves to make a mobile for the worship time.

Talk about how the jailer's whole family were baptised. When Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. Have you been baptised, or do you know anyone who has been baptised? What did it mean to them?

10. A hospitable meal

You will need: old food magazines; paper plates or recycled paper cut into cirles; scissors; glue

Look through the magazines and find pictures of food you'd like to eat. Cut them out and stick them on to your plate. What do you eat at home when guests come to your house for dinner or a party? What else do you do to make people feel like welcome guests?

Talk about how the jailer was so happy that he wanted to share what he had with the prisoners and show them true hospitality. They would have eaten a wonderful meal as his welcome guests.

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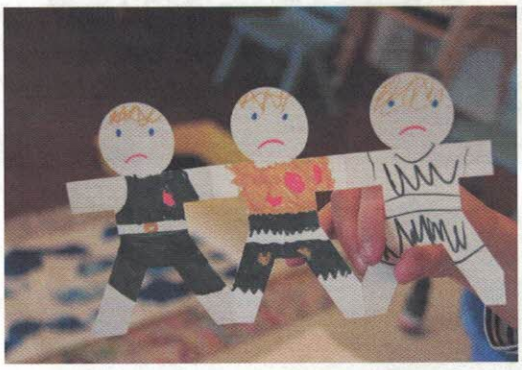

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10

Celebration

You will need: the story in Lego (from activity 3), if it can be moved or photos/video projected; musical instruments for sound effects (from activity 4); Holy Spirit science experiment (from activity 5). You may also want to have the dove hanger mobiles (from activity 9) to decorate your celebration space.

If the Lego is a static model, place it in the middle of the worship space and ask someone to tell the story using it. The model is a good prompt for the story.

Paul and Silas found themselves in jail in the Roman colony of Philippi. Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns while the other prisoners listened – the words they spoke and sang brought hope to everyone in that prison. Suddenly, there was an earthquake.

Use the instruments here to make sound effects.

The earthquake was so violent and loud that everyone was deafened, the doors of the prison were flung open and all the prisoners' chains fell off.

The jailer woke up with all the noise, and when he realised the prison doors were open, he despaired, as he knew he would be punished by the Romans for losing prisoners. But Paul shouted to him, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all still here!'

When the jailer heard this, he rushed in and fell down before Paul and Silas. He said to them, 'What must I do to be saved?' They told him, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' The jailer tended their wounds and took them to his house, where they ate and celebrated all that had happened. And they spent time with his whole household sharing stories and teachings of Jesus so that all present were baptised and became believers.

We are told in the rest of Acts 16 that the magistrates came to apologise and free Paul and Silas, and they returned to the home of Lydia, another new believer, so they could continue to follow God's call.

Prepare the elements of activity 5 before you start.

Before meeting Paul and Silas, and before the earthquake, the jailer was a like a flat balloon. His life wasn't full. He was a cruel man, scared to stand up against his Roman masters, so he took out his feelings of frustration on the prisoners, whom he regarded as worthless.

But then, through the faith and sharing of Paul and Silas, the Holy Spirit broke through.

Carefully place the balloon over neck of the bottle.

And through the drama of the earthquake, he was inspired by the Spirit so that he overflowed with joy.

Lift the balloon and empty the contents into the bottle, but remember to hold the balloon on the neck of the bottle! The bicarb will react with the vinegar and fizz, inflating the balloon with gas.

Just like this inflating balloon, the Spirit filled the jailer and his life was filled. Through listening to the stories shared by Paul and Silas, he was moved to learn more about God.

So who actually did the saving of the jailer? It wasn't Paul and Silas. It was God – only God can save.

Prayer

Show some examples of prayer chains (from activity 1) and cut-outs of prisoners (from activity 7). Use this to lead you into prayer.

Merciful God, Paul and Silas were imprisoned by chains just as some prisoners around the world are still held. We bring today all of our prayers, joined together as a strong chain of hope, and we bring the faces of prisoners around the world. You know each and every one by name, just as you know the needs of every person. We hold them gently before you in hope. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Song suggestions

'I see God in you' – Heather Price
'The peace of the earth' – John Bell
'Song of prayer' – Heather Price
'May you find peace' – Fishy Music

Meal suggestion

Invite people to bring with them a dish or food that they have at home when celebrating. Add to this to make sure there's enough for whoever comes along.

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