

Acts 16:25-26 (NKJV)

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.



Lesson
THREE

Birthed in Suffering

Discussion >>>

- 1. Tell about a time God birthed something in you through intense suffering.*
- 2. What made Paul and Silas start singing amid being imprisoned?*
- 3. How does God use Christian suffering to open doors of ministry?*
- 4. What does it mean for the Spirit to intercede for us "with groanings"?*

Every inch of Paul's body was hurting. The stocks were tight around his ankles, making it nearly impossible to try to ease any of the pain by a change in position. When he closed his eyes, he could still see the hate in the men's faces who had stripped and beaten he and Silas with their rods, all because Paul and Silas had freed a slave girl from the demon that had her bound. Her owners were not happy to know that the fortune-telling spirit that possessed her had been cast out, especially since that meant their source of income went along with it. Paul groaned in pain as he looked over at Silas, and it hit him that his friend's head had been hanging low for a while now. He was about to call out to him when he heard a tired voice say, "Amen". Silas had been praying, as Paul had been before the pain had taken over his mind again. Knowing that his faithful friend was still with him and seeking God on their behalf raised Paul's spirits.

Ironically, a song began to stir in Paul's heart. He started singing it first as a whisper, and then The Spirit strengthened his lungs. When Paul heard Silas began to sing with him, it was like someone put a fire under them both. They would not let the enemy win. They would proclaim the Gospel, even if it was only the prisoners who heard them. They sang louder and louder, and suddenly realized the ground beneath them was shaking. A mighty earthquake shook the jail, and before they realized what was happening, every prisoner's chains fell off, and the prison doors flew open. The jailer awoke at the commotion, and thinking all of them had escaped, would have taken his own life if Paul would not have stopped him. In the hours that followed,

5. *What do you think kept Paul pressing on in the faith, despite his long list of sufferings?*
6. *Are you in a time of spiritual labor? If so, what do you sense God birthing in you?*
7. *What does Romans 8:23 mean when it says we have the “first fruits of the Spirit”?*
8. *If we know “all things work together for the good for those love God,” why do we fret over life’s circumstances?*

Paul could scarcely believe what he was experiencing. God had set them free physically, but more than that, He had provided the gift of spiritual freedom. He and Silas were given the opportunity to lead the jailer and his entire household to Christ. Paul understood now that their temporary suffering had set the stage for an eternity of salvation for the jailer and his household, not to mention the prisoners’ lives that were changed by the miracle they witnessed.

We learn from Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:22-33, that there were many more instances of immense suffering in his life as God unfolded His plans through him. Surely, in all that Paul went through, there were moments where he groaned in physical pain because of the persecution he experienced. Surely, there were other moments when the Spirit groaned for Paul, because the emotional, physical, or spiritual pain was too great for him to endure. Imagine the times that Paul in his weakness didn’t know what to pray. He knew without a shadow of a doubt, that he was walking in God’s will, but at the same time, he was constantly finding his life in utter chaos because of his circumstances. It was in those times that The Spirit of Truth interceded for Paul, as He will for each of us, when we don’t know what to pray for or how.

As our pastor spoke about this morning, every birth comes with its own share of pain. Groaning and suffering gave way to glory in Paul’s life, when a jailer fell on his knees and a whole family came to know Christ. We can look with hope to a future where our groaning will give way to glory in us as well. When we receive our glorified bodies, they will be void of suffering, pain, sickness, and most of all the power of sin. Meanwhile in our present situations, we can trust that when God allows suffering in our lives, it is because he is birthing miracles in us and those around us. We may cry out during the birthing process and think the pain is almost too much to bear, but rest assured, something beautiful and glorious is being born inside of us. In Paul’s words, our present sufferings will be worth it all.