

SILAS - THE PARTNER IN CHAINS

Scripture References: Acts 15:22-41; 16:16-40; 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12

Quick question: Who was Paul's most important ministry partner? If you said "Barnabas," you'd be close. But wrong. If you said "Timothy," you'd be closer, but still wrong.

The answer is Silas. If you've never heard of him, you're not alone. Silas is one of the most overlooked figures in the New Testament, even though he was with Paul during some of his most important missionary work. Silas was there when Paul planted the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. He was there when Paul and Timothy wrote letters to those churches. He was there when Paul was beaten, imprisoned, and left for dead. Through it all, Silas remained faithful, steady, and unshakeable.

Let's meet the man nobody remembers—but everybody should.

Silas (also called Silvanus in Paul's letters) first appears in Acts 15, right after the Jerusalem Council. The church was facing its first major theological crisis: Did Gentile converts have to follow Jewish laws like circumcision and dietary restrictions—to be saved?

The apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to decide. After much debate, they concluded that Gentiles did not have to become Jews to follow Jesus. They only needed to abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, and eating blood or strangled animals. Someone had to deliver this message to the Gentile churches. The Jerusalem leaders chose two men to go with Paul and Barnabas:

"Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers." (Acts 15:22)

Silas wasn't just a random guy. He was a leader. He was respected. He was trusted. The letter from the Jerusalem Council describes Silas and Judas as *"men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:26).*

Silas had already proven himself. He'd faced persecution. He'd suffered for Jesus. He was battle-tested. When Silas and Judas arrived in Antioch and delivered the letter, the believers rejoiced. But Silas didn't just drop off the letter and leave. He stayed and encouraged the believers.

"Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers." (Acts 15:32)

Silas was a prophet—someone who spoke God's word with authority. He used his gift to build up the church.

When Paul and Barnabas parted ways over their disagreement about Mark, Paul needed a new partner, and he chose Silas.

"But Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord." (Acts 15:40)

Think about that. Paul could have chosen anyone. He could have picked someone younger, someone more educated, someone with more charisma, but he chose Silas. Why? Because Silas was solid. He was mature. He was a leader in his own right. He was a prophet, a Roman citizen (like Paul), and someone Paul could trust completely. Silas wasn't flashy. He wasn't famous. But he was faithful, and sometimes, faithfulness matters more than fame.

Paul and Silas' second missionary journey started well. They traveled through Asia Minor, strengthening the churches Paul had planted on his first journey. Then, following a vision Paul had of a man from Macedonia begging for help, they crossed into Europe and arrived in the city of Philippi. In Philippi, they met a woman named Lydia (we'll learn about her later in this series), and she became a believer. Things were looking good.

Then trouble started. A slave girl who was possessed by a demon began following Paul and Silas around, shouting, *"These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved!"* (Acts 16:17). She did this for days. Finally, Paul got annoyed and cast the demon out of her.

This girl's owners had been making money off her fortune-telling abilities. When they realized their cash cow was gone, they were furious. They dragged Paul and Silas to the marketplace, brought them before the magistrates, and accused them of causing trouble. The crowd joined in the attack. The magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped and beaten with rods.

Let's pause here. Beating with rods was brutal. It wasn't a slap on the wrist. It was a severe, painful, humiliating punishment. After they were beaten, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison, and the jailer was ordered to guard them carefully. So, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in stocks. Most people in that situation would have been angry, bitter, or despairing. They'd been falsely accused, severely beaten, and locked in a dungeon for doing nothing wrong.

But not Paul and Silas.

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them." (Acts 16:25)

Read that again. They were praying and singing hymns. At midnight. In a prison. After being beaten. With their feet locked in stocks. This is one of the most powerful images in the New Testament. Paul and Silas didn't just endure their suffering. They worshiped through it. They didn't complain. They didn't demand their rights (even though they were Roman citizens and shouldn't have been beaten without a trial). They didn't curse their captors. They sang, and the other prisoners heard them.

Then, suddenly, an earthquake shook the prison. The doors flew open. The chains fell off. And the jailer, thinking the prisoners had escaped, was about to kill himself.

But Paul shouted, *"Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"* (Acts 16:28)

The jailer fell trembling before Paul and Silas and asked the question that would change his life: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul gave him the simplest, most beautiful answer in all of Scripture:

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." (Acts 16:31)

That night, the jailer and his entire family were baptized. They went from captors to brothers in Christ in a matter of hours. All because Paul and Silas chose to worship instead of complain.

After Philippi, Paul and Silas continued their journey, planting churches in Thessalonica and Berea before Paul moved on to Athens and Corinth. Silas was there for all of it. He wasn't just Paul's sidekick. He was his co-laborer, his partner, his brother. In fact, when Paul wrote letters to the churches, he often mentioned Silas alongside himself and Timothy:

"Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians..." (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

"Silas, Timothy and I were not 'Yes' and 'No,' but in him it has always been 'Yes.'" (2 Corinthians 1:19)

Silas co-authored letters that would become part of the New Testament. He preached the gospel alongside Paul. He suffered with Paul. He rejoiced with Paul. He was Paul's partner in every sense of the word.

The last time we see Silas in Scripture is in 1 Peter 5:12, where Peter writes:

"With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it."

Silas had moved on from traveling with Paul and was now helping Peter. He was the scribe - the one who physically wrote Peter's letter as Peter dictated it. Even in his later years, Silas was serving quietly, faithfully, without fanfare. That's the kind of man Silas was. He didn't need the spotlight. He didn't need credit. He just needed to be faithful, and he was. To the very end.

In your walk with Christ, you'll have midnight moments. Moments when everything feels dark, when your prayers seem unanswered, when you wonder where God is.

Silas' story teaches us that worship isn't just for the mountaintop. It's for the valley. It's for the prison. It's for the moments when everything is falling apart.

Paul and Silas didn't sing because they felt like it. They sang because they chose to trust God, even when their circumstances screamed that God had abandoned them. You can do the same.

When the darkness closes in, when the struggle feels unbearable, when you're tempted to give up your faith—sing. Pray. Worship. Not because you feel like it, but because God is still good, even when life isn't.

And who knows? Your worship in the darkness might be the very thing that draws someone else to faith.

Discipleship means worshiping God not based on our circumstances, but based on His character. It means choosing praise over complaint, trust over doubt, and faithfulness over feelings. True worship happens when we choose God even when we don't get what we want.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - CHAPTER 5: SILAS

1. Silas was described as a leader and a prophet who had "risked his life for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." What does it mean to risk everything for Jesus? Have you ever had to make a costly decision to follow Him?
2. Paul chose Silas as his ministry partner after parting ways with Barnabas. What qualities do you think Paul saw in Silas that made him the right choice? What qualities make someone a good ministry partner or discipleship partner?
3. Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned in Philippi for casting a demon out of a slave girl — for doing good. Have you ever suffered for doing the right thing? How did you respond?
4. At midnight, in prison, with their feet in stocks, Paul and Silas sang hymns. How is that even possible? What do you think was going through their minds?
5. The jailer heard Paul and Silas singing and ultimately came to faith. Who might be listening to how you respond to suffering? How can your response to hardship become a witness to others?
6. **DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS:** Silas remained steady and faithful through extreme circumstances. In our walk with Christ, consistency is essential. How can you cultivate the kind of steady faithfulness Silas demonstrated, even when following Jesus is costly or difficult?

Faithful Father,

Thank You for Silas, the steady companion who stood beside Paul through beatings, imprisonment, and hardship. Thank You that even in the darkest prison, at midnight, with bleeding backs, Silas and Paul sang hymns of praise to You. Thank You for his example of worship in suffering and faithfulness in obscurity.

Lord, we confess that we often complain in small discomforts and question You in minor trials. We want to serve You only when it's convenient, comfortable, and recognized. Forgive us for our conditional commitment.

Give us Silas's steadfast faith that doesn't waver when circumstances become difficult. Teach us to worship You not just when life is good, but especially when it's hard. Help us to be faithful friends and reliable companions who don't abandon others when the going gets tough.

Remind us that You see our service even when no one else does, that You honor faithfulness even when it's never applauded. Help us to be content as supporting players in Your kingdom, knowing that every role matters and that faithful service—seen or unseen—brings You glory.

May we sing Your praises at midnight, trust You in the dark, and remain faithful wherever You place us.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.



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