

March 2025 – Peter and Paul: In prison, at sea, Peter's denials and Jesus on trial

Please note Bible stories and themes may occasionally differ from this overview.

During March we'll be looking at times people in the New Testament were in really difficult situations but were able to do the right thing and keep their faith in God.

Paul and Silas worship God in song and prayer as they practise **patience** while enduring prison and an earthquake. A storm and a shipwreck can't stop Paul's **faithfulness** in listening to God and trusting what he says. Jesus shows **kindness** to his friend, Peter, after being denied by him; and then we witness Jesus exercising **gentleness** and **self-control** while being falsely accused and hurt in every way.

This month's sessions give us the chance to explore how it's possible to persevere in difficult times – and with the help of the Holy Spirit – still to live in ways that God would want.

Session 1

March 1/2

Session Aim: To know we can be close to God in difficult times

Bible Ref: Acts 16:16–40

Today's fruit

Paul and Silas knew that God is good and that God is always with us. This helped them be **patient**, even while they were in prison.

Paul and Silas in prison

Paul and Silas were in a city called Philippi with other Christians where they wanted to preach the gospel (the good news about Jesus) to the people.

When they performed a miraculous act – ordering a spirit to leave a woman's body – some people who didn't like the disruption to their normal lives and their chance for profit had Paul and Silas put in prison.

Paul and Silas were treated badly. They were stripped and beaten, and they even had their feet tied together. However, that didn't stop them singing and praying.

Suddenly, an earthquake came, and all the prisoners' chains came loose. Paul and Silas could have escaped at that moment, but they stayed where they were and told all the other prisoners to do the same. This gave them the chance to tell the jailer all about Jesus, leading to his whole family becoming Christians too!

Paul and Silas were then released from prison and told to leave the city. So they went to see the other Christians to encourage them, and then they left.

Think about

Paul and Silas were punished and put into prison. Had they done anything wrong? How do you think they felt when this happened?

In prison, Paul and Silas were singing and praying. What kind of songs might they have sung? What might their prayers have been? And what do you think the other prisoners thought when they heard them?

Why do you think Paul and Silas didn't escape when they had the chance?

Have you ever been treated unfairly? Do you know of people in the world who are treated unfairly? What can help us to be patient in these situations? What do you want to say to God in these situations?

Paul and Silas knew God enough that they could trust him, even in difficult times. What do we know about God that can help us trust him when things are not going well?

2 March: Self-Denial Sunday

This is a Salvation Army event, a time to consider the needs of others around the world and when people give financial gifts to help Salvationists overseas to flourish in their work.

This year The Salvation Army is highlighting its work in Indonesia, nurturing the next generation by running schools and hospitals, its youthwork and cadet training. Encourage every child to think about giving. What are they thankful for and what would they give away to a child in one of these countries?

6 March: World Book Day

The Bible contains a variety of information. Discuss the different types of books within it.

Session 2

March 8/9

Session Aim: To explore what it means to have faith in God, even in difficult times

Bible Ref: Acts 27:13-44

Today's fruit

Paul could have been afraid and doubted that God would protect him. However, he showed **faithfulness** by still believing, even during a really difficult time.

Paul at sea

Paul, along with other prisoners, was on a boat being taken to Italy. The journey was long and dangerous, and to make things worse, a storm began – a gentle wind at first, which soon turned into a huge and terrifying storm with hurricane force winds.

People on board threw many things overboard to try to make the boat lighter. They were so worried that the boat would be broken that they tied ropes around it to try to hold the pieces together.

Paul told the people on the boat that God had sent an angel to him, telling him that everyone on board would be saved. They really had to trust in God and believe what Paul told them. Some did try to use a lifeboat to get away, but Paul reminded them of what God had promised; if they stayed with him, they would be saved.

After two weeks on the boat, they realised they were coming to shallower water and eventually the boat ran into some sand by an island. The boat was broken apart, but everyone on it swam to the land and they were all saved, just as Paul had told them.

Think about

Have you ever been in a storm, or seen or heard a storm? What was it like? How did you feel?

Paul told the people on the boat, 'Keep up your courage, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me' (vv22,25 NIV). What does it mean to 'have faith' in God? How easy do you find it to have faith in God? What helps or doesn't help you?

Today could be a lovely opportunity for leaders in the group to share some of their own story – a time when they had to have faith in God, and how God showed his faithfulness.

Sometimes we go through difficult times in life. We might call this a 'storm'. Can you remember what the people on the boat did to try to save themselves? What did Paul tell them to do? (They threw things overboard and they prayed – sometimes we need to pray and take action.)

Paul knew he could trust God in the storm because he knew God and he had seen God do amazing things before. He had practised being close to God in good and bad times. What can we do to help us stay close to God? What has God done before that helps us trust him how?

Session 3

March 15/16

Session Aim: To learn that God uses people who aren't perfect in the Church and in the world

Bible Ref: John 18:15-18,25-27; 21:15-17

Today's fruit

Despite Peter denying Jesus, Jesus showed **kindness** by accepting him back and even giving him a role in the future of the Church.

Peter denies Jesus

Jesus was in serious trouble. The people in charge were looking for a way to catch him out, and eventually have him killed. Peter had been with Jesus for a long time. He knew and loved Jesus.

But when the people in charge asked Peter if he knew Jesus, he said no. He denied it.

Peter didn't deny knowing Jesus just once, or even twice, but three times. Jesus had told him that this would happen, and when the moment came, Peter still denied knowing him.

However, the story doesn't end there for Peter. Later, after Jesus was resurrected, he had a conversation with Peter where he asked him: 'Do you love me?' Three times he asked, and Peter said yes. And each time Jesus told Peter, 'Take care of my lambs' and 'Take care of my sheep.'

Jesus had forgiven Peter for denying him; and not only that, he also wanted him to have a crucial role in caring for God's people when Jesus had gone.

Think about

Why do you think Peter said he didn't know Jesus? If you were under pressure, or you could get in trouble for being friends with Jesus, what might you do? Do you have any sympathy for Peter?

How do you think Peter felt after this had happened?

How many times did Peter deny knowing Jesus? How many times did Jesus say, 'Do you love me ... take care of my sheep'? What does this tell us about the kindness of Jesus?

What would you say is one of the kindest things that's been done to you? What was that like, for you?

Jesus wanted to use Peter in the growing of the Church after he had gone. Did Peter deserve this? Discuss the idea that God uses people who aren't perfect to work for him in the world. How does that make you feel?

21 March: Red Nose Day

There will be much kindness shown this week on Red Nose Day as many people will be helping others in need.

Session 4

March 22/23

Session Aim: To learn that God chooses gentleness over violence

Bible Ref: Luke 22:47-53, 66-71

Today's fruit

In a desperate situation Jesus showed **gentleness**, even to people who chose to be his enemies.

Jesus on trial (part one)

Jesus had been praying with the disciples in the garden, knowing that he would soon be arrested and killed. Suddenly, a crowd of people came to him, and Judas, one of the disciples, betrayed Jesus, giving away his identity for money.

In that moment another disciple tried to defend Jesus and cut off the ear of one of the High Priest's servants. Jesus, however, didn't want violence and he healed the man's ear, before challenging the people who had come to arrest him.

In the morning they took Jesus to be questioned, and they asked him repeatedly if he was claiming to be the Son of God. When he didn't deny it, they took him away to be questioned by Pilate, the Roman governor.

Think about

Do you have any questions about what happened in this part of Jesus' story?

Why do you think the people in charge were so against Jesus?

The man who had his ear cut off was part of the group who were trying to arrest Jesus and have him killed. Did Jesus have to heal him? Why do you think he did it? What does that tell us about God?

Jesus' followers were ready to use their swords against the crowd who came to arrest Jesus. That crowd had also come with swords and sticks. What possible ways could Jesus have responded in that moment? What did he choose to do?

How easy do we find it to be gentle, especially in times where we're really stressed? And what if people around us are using violence?

Can you think of a time you have been gentle, even if it wasn't easy? What helped you?

How do you think Jesus managed to stay so calm? What can we learn from this, that might help us in our own lives?

22 March: World Water Day

This awareness day celebrates water and raises the awareness of people living without access to safe water.

Session 5

March 29/30

Session Aim: To know that the Holy Spirit can help us with self-control in difficult situations

Bible Ref: Luke 23:1-25

Today's fruit

Jesus showed **self-control** when all around him people were accusing him and harming him.

Jesus on trial (part two)

The Bible passage today continues from last week, where Jesus was arrested.

Jesus was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor, who asked about who Jesus really was. Jesus didn't give a straightforward answer.

Pilate then sent Jesus to Herod, the ruler of Galilee. Herod tried to get Jesus to perform a miracle, and then Herod, the religious leaders and the soldiers accused him and made fun of him, even dressing him up for fun.

Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate, who told the crowd he would free one prisoner that day – either Jesus, or Barabbas (who had caused riots and was a murderer). The crowd chose to free Barabbas and shouted that Jesus should be killed. Pilate gave in to the crowd and sent Jesus off to be crucified.

Think about

Why were people trying to get Jesus to say outright that he was the Son of God or the King of the Jews?

All the time this was going on, people were accusing Jesus and trying to provoke him. However, Jesus remained calm and quiet. He didn't shout at them or lose his cool. How do you think he did this?

What could Jesus have done to save himself? How many options can you think of? Why do you think he didn't do any of these things?

Can you think of a time you have had to show self-control? What was that like, and how did it go?

Talk about how the Holy Spirit helps us and gives us the ability to show self-control, even in difficult situations. What do we need to do to receive that help?

30 March: Mother's Day

Today many people take the time to show their appreciation to someone who cares for them – often a woman like a mother/grandmother/carer. It can also be a tricky day for many, who may not have a positive relationship with this person or have a female presence in their life. So let us spend time giving thanks for the people in our lives who, a bit like the Holy Spirit, are always there for us and give us help and guidance.