



C3 Devotionals

“When the Walls Are Closing In”

A devotional by Jen Goins

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I heard from a realtor friend that one positive outcome for her during this “shelter-in-place” time is that people would discover their houses were too small. Of course, she would be available to show you something a little bigger when all this is said and done!

Do you feel your walls are closing in on you yet? Are you ready for a bigger house? As Americans, we get our first real taste of freedom around age 16 when we get our driver’s license. We love the fact we can go where we want when we want. And we never really look back. Currently, I want to go to: work, school (and drop off these kids!), whatever restaurant sounds good to me at the moment, and of course, Target. I miss randomly roaming Target. And don’t get me started thinking about the fact I am missing my son’s junior year of sports, activities, banquets, and ceremonies. The walls are closing in on my time as well. I’m sad, a little mad, and really frustrated at times. When the walls are closing in, what do I do?

I was recently reading about two Bible characters who had their freedom taken away and had walls closing in on them - literally. The story is about Paul and Silas being arrested in Philippi (Acts 16). The men were missionaries, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they were directed to by the Holy Spirit. They went to Philippi and were doing something they usually did: going to the place of prayer. A servant girl started following them, taunting them. Paul, who was “greatly annoyed” ended up casting an evil spirit from her. Unfortunately, the girl's owners were not so happy (she made money for them by telling fortunes). They took Paul and Silas before the magistrates and the two men were beaten and thrown in prison. The text gives us some interesting details: they were in the inner prison and their feet were fastened in stocks. Doesn’t that sound pretty claustrophobic?

What happens next is a wonderful example for us. It’s around midnight and Paul and Silas are, get this, *praying and singing hymns to God* (16:25). That stopped me in my tracks. What kind of people can be in those circumstances and still pray and sing to the Lord?

People who know God.

Only people with a deep faith in the Lord can have this attitude. Admittedly, when times are tough, I tend to question God and His goodness. But even in the toughest of circumstances, Paul and Silas had deep faith. Why? Because they had made it a habit to trust and obey God - in good times *and* bad. In Acts 16, the Bible mentions Paul and Silas going to “the place of prayer” at least twice. Furthermore, when the Spirit directed them, they obeyed immediately. Their habit was to seek and obey God. And when you set a rhythm of seeking and obeying God, your strong faith serves you well during difficult times.

People who know their mission.

These men had been given the great commission: go and make disciples! This mission fueled them. They had already seen some fruit (a woman named Lydia had just been saved and baptized) and would continue to bear fruit (read the rest of Acts 16 to see what happens!!). Do you know your mission? You may have a personal one, but our church also has one. ***We are a community transformed by grace sent to transform the world for the glory of God.*** It's worth it for all of us to revisit that mission and allow it to fuel us - maybe now more than ever.

People who live in community.

While Paul and Silas had very little, they did have each other! We aren't told who started this mini church service, but someone had to utter the first prayer and hum the first notes of the hymn. As we try and figure out what our new community looks like during COVID-19, we can be the ones to start the prayers and turn on the worship music. We were meant for community and we are in this together!

At the writing of this, I'm glad it's sunny today - I need a break from the four walls of my home and I'm going to sit in the sun for a bit. But I also pray I am the kind of person who seeks God, remembers my mission and grabs a few friends along the way. I can hear the music now!

Deeper Study

Further Reading:

Bible: Acts 16; Psalm 119:62

Quote:

“Beautiful music is the art of the prophets that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us.”

-Martin Luther

Article: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-singing-church/>

Conversation

1. What are some rhythms you could start now that could affect you positively later?
2. Take a look at our church's mission statement. Write what you think it means. How can you contribute to it?
3. Is there anyone you could encourage today through prayer or song?

Prayer

1. Pray that we as churches and families seek God during this time.
2. Praise God for the mission He has given us. Ask Him to make it a passion of our hearts to be on mission for Him.
3. Ask God for a renewed love for prayer and singing as a community.