



On your marks

Ever since Saul, who later chose to be called Paul, first met with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was on fire with his God-given mission to take the gospel to as many other countries as he could. He began his mission in Asia Minor - modern-day Turkey - but then was called to Europe, beginning with Greece.

Once Paul landed in Greece, he went straight to the northern city of Philippi, a Roman colony in which ex-army officers from Rome had settled. It was a place of influence and wealth.

Get set

Opening up the story

Look through some holiday brochures about Greece together and discuss what you think attracts people to travel to Greece for a holiday.

Most people travel abroad for the sunshine and a change in routine from everyday life. Paul's decision to travel to Greece came as he was praying about the next step in his mission. He was at a place called Troas, which is where the ancient city of Troy used to be (see Acts 16:6-10). A man from Macedonia in a vision decided Paul's next 'holiday' destination!

Cut out letter shapes from the magazines to create a banner reading 'Come over and help us'.

- How might God guide us today about where to go and who to help each day?
- Is there a particular place or project that comes to mind when you pray about what to do next?

Telling the story

Use the following three objects to help you tell the story - they represent the different people Paul met:

- a piece of purple cloth
- a glass paperweight or clear marble that could double as a crystal ball
- a piece of chain

Where would you go if you landed somewhere new and your job was to try and tell people about Jesus? Paul and Silas decided to find out where the Jewish people from the town prayed - there was no synagogue - and discovered that the congregation was made up of women who met by the river.

- Purple cloth - use this to introduce Lydia - a successful businesswoman in the textile industry. God opened up her heart to hear about Jesus and she opened up her home to welcome Paul and Silas.
- Crystal ball - use this to introduce the slave girl, who had the gift of seeing the future. God

broke into her life so that all she could talk about was how Paul and Silas had come to bring good news. This annoyed her owners who had the two men put in prison.

- Chain - use this to introduce the jailer, who watched over Paul and Silas that night. God broke into this situation too and not only rattled the chains free but shook the whole prison. In fear, the jailor turned to Paul and Silas, who had been singing about Jesus all night, asking how he too could be saved.

These three unexpected first converts to Christianity made up the first church in Philippi. What an interesting collection of people! But God brought them together and, according to Paul's letter to the Philippians that he wrote much later, a strong church grew from these small but unpromising beginnings.

Talking about the story

I wonder how much Paul planned what happened and how much he relied on God to open up the way for him.

- How much are we expected to plan and how much do we let ourselves be led by God?

Being led by God doesn't mean sitting back and doing nothing but setting out and seeing what things God brings into our path. Have a go at retelling the story from the point of view of the three people Paul and Silas met - Lydia, the slave girl, the jailer. You could turn this into a game for your group, with each person adding to the story in turn.

Playing with the story

- Using some pieces of purple cloth/felt and a peg, create a peg doll character to represent Lydia. Create peg dolls for the slave girl and jailer as well but use different colours.
- Using some wooden bricks/building blocks, create a small model of the prison where Paul and Silas were held for the night. Add some chains 'linked' to some of the blocks where Paul and Silas were imprisoned. Shake the whole scene at some point to imitate the earthquake that opened up the doors to freedom.

Reflecting on the story

Psalm 25:4-5 is a prayer asking God to show us the way to go:

Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me... (NIV)

This could have been Paul's prayer as he waited to know the next step in his missionary work. However, it's clear that Paul didn't just sit back and do nothing after he prayed. He tried various ways forward but found none that seemed right until the vision came, when he continued to do things to find the best way forward, and only then did God lead him. God helped him to meet the right people and showed him what to do in the different circumstances.



Use the prayer from Psalm 25 to ask for help to know the best thing to do each day so that you can be where God wants you to be and doing what God wants you to do. Pray for others you know who aren't sure of the way ahead at the moment.