

# AWAKE – WEEK 4

Don't Leave Too Early

1.24.2021

## **START**

To get things started, go around the circle and answer the following question:

What is your most memorable meal?

## **STEP 1**

“Dream Big.”

As we begin a new year, we all have dreams of what we hope it will become. Last year was unlike anything we have ever experienced, we all anticipate what is next, it is human nature. For some of us, this year, we are dreaming of that promotion that we have worked so hard to see materialize. For others, it is an opportunity on the horizon, but we just need some things to line up, maybe it will be any day now.

We have big plans and we set our gaze on that big idea...that distant formless hope, when right in front of us is a tangible reality we can touch and embrace. Right smack in front of us are actual people, oxygen to breathe, friendships, family members, resources, giftedness, and a God that wants you to get to know Him and His plans for you, right now.

There is nothing wrong with dreaming big dreams and to pursue the God given ones, but the moment we make the dream more important than the God who gives them, we create a lifeless idol for ourselves and grow distant from the living God who loves us. Our dream job is the one we have right now, that dream spouse is the one you live with, that dream opportunity is the one you have each day you walk out your front door.

We can dream big but live better.

As Christ followers, we need to be wide awake to the reality all around us. Instead of believing that there must be something better way out there in the future, we can live with purpose, power, and joy today through the power of God at work within us. We can live awake to life in all its fullness each and every day.

Taking a look back:

Last week we took a look into Paul's life as he had learned how to be content in all circumstances. Was there one way this week that you found yourself more aware of the comparison trap and you were able to avoid it? In what way?

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## **STEP 2**

Read Acts 16:16-24

Paul and a few others were confident that they were where God had sent them. They wrestled with God on this one but still went ahead in faith. They went to this town and are followed by this girl who was said to be possessed by “the spirit of divination.” She was the money-maker for her family and did so by telling people’s fortunes. As always, when the gospel begins to deeply root, the enemy takes notice and becomes active in opposition.

We must believe that the demonic presence in this girl felt threatened and then called Paul and others out on being ministers of Jesus Christ. This went on for a few days and Paul got annoyed with her, so he cast the spirit out of her. They could have dusted their feet off and traveled to the next town but as Josh said this weekend, “they didn’t leave too early.” They knew they were commissioned to this place by God, for those people. So, they stayed.

What if they had chosen to leave early? Imagine what they would have missed. Imagine what the people would have missed.

Have you ever left something early and found that you missed out on a whole lot? Or are you one to have FOMO (fear of missing out) and thank God you did not leave early? Either way. Share your experience.

Let’s jump back in. As they stayed, pretty sure they did not expect what had happened next. Paul and Silas were publicly beaten and thrown into prison. They acted in obedience to go to this place, to these people and they end up there?! Imagine what may have been running through their minds at the time: Was it doubt that they made the wrong decision? Were they questioning God in that moment?

Being human, they could have had every thought go through their minds, BUT they chose to thank God and worship. Their faith in who God was, trumped every human thought in that moment. Through the physical pain and the mental and emotional exhaustion they trusted in the One who sent them. They fully knew that there was a purpose to be had and people to be reached. Jesus was their “why;” their “why” so they didn’t leave too early.

Put yourself in their shoes as best as you can. Imagine what they had just been through. Now for you, wherever you are at in life presently, would you be able to find God in this situation?

Is there something in your life where you are struggling to see God’s purpose and worship Him through the confusion? Something that maybe you need to stay a bit longer for.

What is your “why” in your ordinary, everyday life?

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## **STEP 3**

Read Acts 16: 25-38

All throughout scripture we can see God's presence bring this peace that only He can bring. We can try to wrap our heads and hearts around it, but often this peace just does not make sense to our human minds. It is the peace that Paul speaks of in Philippians 4:7 "...the peace of God that passes all understanding..." It is the peace that comes when we find ourselves aware of Gods "with-ness" and the faith to move forward because we know God is able and He is working.

We see this peace experienced in this story as Paul and Silas are worshipping in the middle of the night in the dungeon of the prison. Paul and Silas knew God to be true to His character. This was not their first "rodeo." They knew that God was with them. They knew they had not been forgotten. They were confident that there was a purpose for all of this. With every breath they had left, they worshipped.

Think of this for a moment. They were just stripped down and beaten. Bloody, open wounds, most likely hungry and thirsty and chained next to the worst of the worst criminals. This is not what they signed up for. This was not on their agenda as they were sent to bring the Good news to others. But they worshipped! They had this indescribable peace when the circumstance screamed otherwise. And the other prisoners took notice.

Think of a time in your own life or (someone you may know) when you experienced peace from God that did not make sense within the circumstance. What did this bring to you? Questions? A deeper trust? A Steadfast Faith?

Paul and Silas had this peace because they knew God always has a purpose in all things, good or bad. God sent the earthquake, broke open the jail doors and because the prisoners took notice, they followed Paul and Silas as they remained there. There was purpose. The jailor slept through the earthquake, what?! This does not make sense. Only God! He woke up and saw that the jail doors were open, thinking all had escaped right under him. Because of this, he was about to end his own life. He then heard a shout and realized all his prisoners were still there; there was purpose.

The jailor took notice of Paul and Silas as well. He took them into his home to clean their wounds and it is said that he and his entire family became Christ followers at that moment. This changed their eternity. The jailor was unlikely. The prisoners were on the margins of society and God used Paul and Silas to bring eternal life to the least of these in this very moment; to be the light in the darkness. Only God!

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No matter where you are in life, no matter how stuck you feel, you can have confidence in the One true God who comes down, takes a seat and reminds you that it's all going to be okay. Trust in the bigger picture. In God's perfect story for your life. He is promising you that He is doing "immeasurably more than all we ask or can even imagine (Ephesians 3:20)." Only God!

### **MEMORIZE**

Ephesians 3:20-21

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."