# Trust God to Do More!

**Acts 16:16-40**

# INTRODUCTION

I’m always fascinated by the role of the mind in athletic success. You often hear the greatest athletes in the world speak of a mental edge they have over their opponents. Golf, perhaps more than other sports, has a way of getting in your head. When you aren’t playing well, it’s easy to start second-guessing your swing. You quickly lose sight of the shot you want to hit because your head is all tied up in mechanics. Few golfers rival Tiger

Woods in mental toughness. Tiger even said himself, and I quote, “I am the toughest golfer mentally.” Even as a young kid, his dad would heckle him on the course and shout during his backswing to build laser focus on what he wanted to do. When looking back on his success, Tiger said, “People don’t understand that when I grew up, I was never the most talented. I was never the biggest. I was never the fastest. I certainly was never the strongest. The only thing I had was my belief that I could be the best, and that’s been what has gotten me this far.”

Now I’m obviously not advocating today that we all need a large dose of belief in ourselves. What I am advocating is that belief plays a significant role in the outcome when it’s placed on the proper object. In Christianity our object of belief is not ourselves. We all know that solely trusting in ourselves leads to dismal and discouraging results. But if God is the sole object of our belief, there is literally no limit to what may result!

You see, I think our belief in what God can do is often colored by our understanding of what we can do. It’s challenging for us to look out into the natural world and instantly see ways God can create supernatural results. We are just not naturally inclined to think this way. Our own limitations end up limiting the results we believe are possible.

But our focus today is on learning to break through our barriers of belief in order to trust God for more. Do you believe God is calling you to trust Him

to do more in you and through you? Such a challenge as this wouldn’t be worth hypothesizing if God was an unworthy object of our trust. Yet God has more than shown His faithfulness in the midst of our faithlessness; His unconditional love in the midst of our conditional love; His mighty power in the midst of our weakness; His all-sufficient sacrifice in the midst of our sin. How ironic it is that we trust Him with our eternal destiny but we struggle to trust Him for the everyday events of our lives. Oh, how I hope you want to trust Him more!

And as we come to the book of Acts again today, we encounter a God of boundless ability. All throughout the book there are touches of God’s transcendent work. Some of us are tempted to think that such mighty, miraculous acts can’t happen today. Now, it’s important to keep in mind that with the genre of narrative, individual stories are not ground to claim as normative. But the entirety of the book speaks to God’s miraculous ability to do more than we thought possible! The book of Acts was written so that we might trust God to do the same acts today!

The mighty act we will see today is that of the earthquake that broke open the Philippian jail cell that held Paul and Silas captive and the Philippian jailer’s unexpected conversion! Of course we aren’t to conclude that God intends to miraculously burst open every “prison” we find ourselves in, but it does give us reason to believe He is willing and capable of doing far more than we usually expect.

So let’s dive into our text for today in Acts 16 so that God can teach us to trust Him to do more in us and through us. We will see three ways we can trust God to work in our lives. They are as follows:

## Trust God to work a solution out of your setback.

1. **Trust God to work a song out of your silence.**
2. **Trust God to work salvation out of your skepticism.**

# BODY

## Trust God to work a solution out of your setback.

We will begin with trusting God to work a solution out of your setback. Following the miraculous conversion of Lydia in Acts 16, Paul and Silas faced a significant setback in their progress of the Gospel. It says in v.16, *“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by*

*fortune-telling.”* We can see this poor girl is bound twice over - both by her owners who receive great economic gain by her fortune-telling and by the demonic spirits laying hold of her soul.

Yet this girl decided to follow Paul, crying out (literally, “shouting”), “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaims to you the way of salvation.” It seems at first take that this girl is helping Paul, but such a message among Gentiles likely did more damage than good. In such a territory as Philistia, it was common to be polytheistic - to believe in multiple gods, such as Zeus or Baal. For them to hear of a single supreme deity built frustration and confusion in their hearts. I’m sure Paul enjoyed the crowds being formed, but there was much clarification needed to calm the confused crowd. Imagine your desire to go into a new city with the gospel. Would your preferred tactic be to blast a random true statement about God for all to hear? Just like Paul, I’m sure you’d prefer a more discreet and strategic method.

As a result, Paul performed an exorcism on this girl and released her from her demonic control. Yet because of this, her owners lost their key

money-making method. This led them to convince the crowds and magistrates that Paul and Silas were disrupting the peace of the city with their strange customs. So Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and thrown in prison. And notice they were put into the inner prison with their feet fastened in stocks.

Was it not God earlier in this chapter that clearly directed them away from Asia and to Macedonia, where they now are? Yet here they are locked up in prison. What good could God work here? Perhaps even Paul was questioning his boiling over frustration that led him to address his issue with the slave girl. Should he have in patience allowed her to continue? Maybe

he recalled David’s patience with Shimei in 2 Samuel 16:5, who repeatedly shouted curses at him, but David refused to respond, even saying that God was one who told Shimei to shout such evil things!

We, too, can be quick to conclude that our setbacks are a result of our mistakes and surely couldn’t be a part of God’s plan. We begin to question God’s sovereignty in the midst of our shortcomings, in the midst of our short-fuses, even in the midst of our sin.

Yet here we see that nothing was happening by mistake. Rather, it was skillfully planned! God had a plan to work out of the setback. Here in this prison God was at work even when all of Paul and Silas’ work was done. It was that very night that God caused an earthquake to shake the foundations of the prison and to release Paul and Silas! It was as if the bonds were given to them just so that they could be bursted. It reminds me of the Israelites captivity in Egypt for 400 years. Surely, that was a mistake! But actually even then God planned that captivity primarily so that He could burst the bonds of their captivity and prove to them all, including the Egyptians, that the Lord alone was God!

There was no doubt that such a miraculous work as this in Philistia would quickly be known to all and Paul and Silas’ God would get the credit! Up to this point, they were having little Gospel progress, but now God used this setback as a solution to their cold hearts. God chose to use the breaking of the jail cell as His preordained way of breaking through their hard hearts!

Not only did this mighty work break through the crowd’s hearts, but it also broke through the jailer’s hard heart. He came to know Christ by way of being a first hand witness to His power!

***Our pain is God’s way of positioning us for Gospel impact.*** When we don’t get that promotion we desired, it could be God’s way of saying I have more work for you here. When our car problems lead us to be stranded on the side of the road, it could be God’s positioning of us to share the Gospel with the tow truck driver or the mechanic. When we

God even uses the experiences of our pain as avenues to compassionately reach the hearts of others going through similar pain. Paul expresses this truth in 2 Cor 1:3. ***3****Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,* ***4*** *who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

Some of you know Dan and Michelle Rosenburg who attend our church. What you may not know is that their youngest son struggles severely with allergies related to many foods and things in the outdoors environment. He was officially diagnosed with asthma at the age of two. Because of this, he couldn’t run outside the way most kids do. On a couple of occasions, his extremely labored breathing landed him in the hospital to get immediate help. I’m sure you can imagine the added stress this brings to Dan and Michelle. Thankfully now though he gets the medicine and shots he needs to just about live a normal life.

***But even this pain brought God’s good purposes along with it.*** The Rosenburg’s found out earlier this year about a Muslim friend whose 3 year-old son faces the exact same struggles. To add to their surprise, they found out just this past week that their Hindu neighbor, who lives across

their street, has a 5 month old baby also struggling with the same breathing issue! Dan and Michelle view this as God’s special way of connecting them at the heart level with the lost in their lives. ***There is no doubt that God has purposefully placed them with their pain to be pointers to the one, true God!*** Let’s be praying that both these couples come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior!

The key in all this is our need to change our focus. ***We must learn to focus on God’s promises, not our problems.*** God’s promise is Romans 8:28 - *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* God promises to work *His good* out of every situation, including our setbacks. It doesn’t mean He always works what we deem good, but what He deems good. Do you trust Him to do this? Will you choose to trust God to work His good

purposes out of your pain? Will you trust Him to work a solution out of your setback?

## Trust God to work a song out of your silence.

***Another way we can trust God is to work a song out of our silence.*** Notice in v.25 what Paul and Silas were doing at midnight while bound in this jail: Praying and singing hymns to God. I think I would be tempted to silence in the midst of this setback. Would you agree? The crowds were against them, the Gospel was not spreading, their bodies were aching after being beaten with rods, and they were locked in prison….yet they were singing! Such a scenario is altogether unexpected and other-worldly. It’s the kind of response that builds curiosity and questions among onlookers: Are these men mentally unstable? If they aren’t, what is the source of their peace and joy? These questions had to be running through the minds of their fellow prisoners because it says in v.25 that they were listening! Even the jailer must have observed this with spiritual suscipision. Joy in the midst of sorrow is oddly attractive.

Paul and Silas knew that no earthly circumstance could steal their joy. That’s the nature of being a Christian! Their hope was not in this world. Their hope was not in earthly gain but in a heavenly inheritance. For this reason there was still a song worth singing to break the silence.

***You see, the Christian always has a reason to sing.*** The resurrection of Jesus gives voice to our silence. When He rose from the grave, the mute was taken off our mouths and our songs rose with Him! Unlike any other religious people, Christians are a singing people. Singing is built into the fabric of what we do every time we gather. The Muslim does not sing; the Hindu does not sing; the Buddhist does not sing; the Atheist does not sing, but the Christian does sing! Psalm 33:1 says, *“Praise befits the upright.”* In other words, it’s appropriate and right that we should praise such a great God.

I found a story on the ChristianPersecutionBlog.com about a group of Christians captured during the time of Joseph Stalin’s reign in Communist

Russia in the 1940s. *“When we were in prison we sang almost every day because Christ was alive in us. The Communists knew we liked to praise God with musical instruments, so they gave every Christian in prison a musical instrument - our chains. These chains they put on our hands and feet. They chained us hoping to add to our grief. Yet we discovered that chains are splendid musical instruments! When we clanged them together in rhythm, we could sing, ‘This is the day (clink, clank), this is the day (clink, clank), which the Lord has made (clink, clank), which the Lord has made (clink, clank).’” What a joyful noise it was to the Lord! They thought the prison and chains would make us realize our freedom was gone, but all they did was further clarify how untethered our freedom was!”*

Just as Paul and Silas found a song to sing in their new circumstance, ***I believe God gives us new songs to sing for each of our new circumstances.*** This is the promise of Scripture. Psalm 40:3 says, *“He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.”* More than providing a new song, God commands that we sing it to Him! Psalm 96:1 says, *“Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name.”* If God gives you a song to sing, He wants you to vocalize it! Why?

***Singing allows our discouraging emotions we feel in our heart to be persuaded by the encouraging truths we know in our minds.*** How often our hearts feel disconnected from what we know to be true. Truth that we love up here struggles to settle down here. God said, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it?” There are complexities and nuances of emotions flowing through our hearts that we can’t always make rational sense of. Grief, for example, is almost impossible to verbalize after a significant loss. It hits us like a wave and makes us feel like we are sinking in something out of our control.

***Yet choosing to sing even in our sadness has a unique way of connecting us to God when our minds still feel lost at sea.*** We can’t make sense of our emotions, but our singing is still capable of building a bridge to the God we know and love.

I remember a particular time of grief in my life when I was still at the University of Toledo in my first year of college. In the course of a week, I had severely dislocated my shoulder, my relationship with my girlfriend who I thought I might marry ended, and I was realizing God had different plans for my future. When all this hit me like a wave at once, I remember going into my dorm room after class, grabbing my keys, and going for a long drive. And of course, it was pouring down rain. In such a time like this, I couldn’t think straight, but God gave me a song to sing. Ironically, the song God gave me was the song from MercyMe, “I Gotta Keep Singing.”

The lyrics go like this: *Another rainy day I can't recall having sunshine on my face, All I feel is pain, All I want to do is walk out of this place, But when I am stuck and I can't move, When I don't know what I should do, When I wonder if I'll ever make it through, I gotta keep singing, I gotta keep praising Your name, Your the one that's keeping my heart beating, I gotta keep singing, I gotta keep praising Your name, That's the only way that I'll find healing, Can I climb up in Your lap, I don't want to leave, Jesus sing over me, I gotta keep singing.”*

***Singing is not a matter of ability; it’s a matter of necessity.*** We must learn to sing to God! It is not a matter of gifting; rather it’s God’s gift to all of us. It persuades our hearts to align with the God we love. So what is the song you are singing right now? Have you asked God for a new song to sing? Whether you are in a time of sunshine or rain, God gives us songs for every season. The worst you can do is remain silent. Your silence will subtly suffocate your soul. But God made you to be a singer! You have too many reasons to lift your voice. Trust God to work a song out of your silence.

## Trust God to work salvation out of your skepticism.

***Lastly for this morning, we must trust God to work salvation out of our skepticism.*** The most significant part of this story in Acts 16 is the dramatic conversion of the Philippian jailer and his family. He goes from

attempting suicide to accepting salvation in the matter of minutes! After experiencing the earthquake and the prison doors opened, he assumed all the inmates were already gone. He failed at his sole job and it would surely cost him his life. To be kept from such shame, he decided to end it all right there, but that’s when Paul cried out, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”

Paul did not have to do this. The most advantageous choice would have seemed to have been to avoid the jailer at all costs and get out of that prison scot-free! Yet Paul was not seeing him in that moment as an enemy of the faith but a potential convert to the faith. Instead of quickly getting out of his pain, Paul looked for the purpose in the midst of the pain. Was there more to be done in the jail cell before he launched out to where he thought the real ministry was?

Well it turned out that Paul’s call of assurance to this jailer might as well have been his call to salvation. The jailer in his fear realized this earthquake was the miraculous work of a mighty God, a God who up to this point he was at odds with. He desired this to no longer be the case, so he cried out to Paul and Silas, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* They shared the simplicity of the Gospel response in one word, *“Believe.”* The jailer proceeded to take Paul and Silas back to his home to share the word also with his family, and they all believed and rejoiced together! What an amazing story of Gospel redemption!

***But the key to this story is Paul’s willingness to be God’s conduit of salvation.*** You see, in order to be used for salvation, we must believe that salvation is possible. Isn’t it easy to write people off distant or uninterested in God? We can see the way they carry themselves at work and conclude they don’t need or want God’s involvement. That may be true for a season, but who are we to truly know what’s going on in a person’s heart? There may be significant questions eating at their souls, and they can only keep the macho man image up for a little longer. Proverbs 20:5 says, “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water…” There are internal longings, strivings, and questions that linger deep within unbeliever’s hearts that only

rarely surface. But here’s the second part of that verse: “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep waters, but a man of understanding will draw it out.”

I think here in our situation in Acts 16, the understanding man is the man who understands God that can save anyone, even the most unlikely of sinners. ***We must believe God can save the most unlikely of sinners.*** Do you truly believe that? ***What’s most going to convince you of your belief in this is not your mind’s agreement but your hand’s activity.*** Will your compassion move you to action? When Jesus looked out on the crowds and had compassion on them because He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, He proceeded to provide for their physical need of food with the Feeding of the 5,000. Jesus sacrificed more of his time in loving them where they were at with physical bread so that they might learn to come to Him for spiritual bread. Jesus believed His sacrifices would lead to their salvation.

This couldn’t be exemplified anymore than in His greatest sacrifice on the cross. Jesus’ death represented His belief that anyone could find their way back to the Father, even the man dying next Him on the cross. And this isn’t just about Jesus’ belief; it’s about what Jesus’ death accomplished! His sacrifice tore the veil to the Most Holy Place, symbolizing that access is now for anyone and everyone, no matter what they’ve done! ***If God was willing to sacrifice His only Son, then surely He is more than willing to work salvation for anyone.***

And He often does this when we can’t seem to do anything else ourselves. The jailer in our story was sleeping as Paul and Silas sang their songs to Jesus. What else could they do to convince Him of His need for the Savior? ***But when our work seems finished, God’s work continues!*** When our work seems to bounce off people’s skin, God’s work enters into the heart!

God made salvation in Jesus alone attractive to this jailer because of the miracle He performed in opening the stocks and prison doors. God opened his heart by opening those doors!

Are you praying for God to do His special, miraculous work in the heart of that one person in your life? It may have gotten to a point where your belief is faltering because there doesn’t seem to be anything else you can do. But this is where your belief can bounce back because of two things: 1) Jesus already accomplished a work at the cross, and 2) Jesus continues to work today. → The question is do you trust God to work salvation out of your skepticism? I challenge you to change the way you pray and change the way you serve the lost in your life. It was Augustine who said, “Pray as though everything depended on God, but work as though everything depended on you.” Trust God to overcome your skepticism so that you might serve and pray like you’ve never done so before!

## CONCLUSION

This morning we began by saying our focus today is on learning to break through our barriers of belief in order to trust God to do more in us and through us. ***Belief is the necessary beginning of any great work of God.*** Our belief is what leads us to our knees, and our belief is what leads us to action. ***What belief barrier do you need to break through today?*** Do you need to:

## Trust God to work a solution out of your setback.

1. **Trust God to work a song out of your silence.**

## Trust God to work salvation out of your skepticism.

We should never be satisfied with our current level of belief. We should always be striving to trust God for more! Don’t let a barrier hold you back any longer. Take it to the Lord right now in prayer. Trust Him to start something new in you, and may it begin with your belief.

## CLOSING PRAYER