

Explore the Bible: Value All

January 2, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 21 focuses on Acts 16:16-19; Psalm 139:13-16.*

In an earlier lesson, we discussed the jailing of Paul and Silas and how their prison stay resulted in a changed family. This week's text was mentioned briefly in that session's introduction, and I welcome you to refer to that discussion.

We see this slave girl's plight as a hostage both to human owners and a controlling spirit. Luke's placement of this account is interestingly located after the conversion of Lydia. So, we see back-to-back examples of women who desired freedom and would be granted it by divine rescue.

Consider beginning with a story that centers on the theme of "Sanctity of Human Life" to begin your session, specifically seeking a modern story that will transition easily to this story of a troubled young girl who was seen as mere property.

Freedom Gained (Acts 16:16-18)

Ask your group: *What made this girl seek after Paul and his companions?* Clearly, she was quite an entrepreneur, making use of her time by fortune telling and making her owners rich. Yet, she desired to follow these evangelists, proclaiming whom they followed.

Keep in mind this young girl was not rich. The text says: "She earned a great deal of money for her owners." This was forced labor. *In our present times, what kinds of forced labor do we see young women taking part in and making their 'owners' rich?* In light of this, we see the devaluing of

such people.

While we are not told that this spirit was a demon in particular, we see it clearly troubled Paul with the consistent harassing. This was not a good spirit, and Paul took action in the name of Jesus to rescue this girl from the spirit's possession.

Compare this brief exorcism to other times in the Bible where we see the healing and removal of spirits and demons. Take notice in these other accounts of how the one who rescued the possessed spoke their command, and also to how the witnesses responded to the exorcism. You will see some interesting comparisons.

The Complaint (Acts 16:19)

The greatest issue we see here is how greed drives people to violence when it is not satisfied. These owners were only near satisfaction when their greedy lust for wealth was being fed; this changed drastically when the money stopped and the girl ceased earning for them.

If you look at verses 20-21, you see how they tried to justify their accusation, yet we can tell the root issue had nothing to do with a spiritual debate. In fact, the girl's improved spiritual health was seen as a hindrance to their physical desires.

Ask your group: *How do we allow our physical wants to win over our spiritual needs?* When we do this, we devalue life. The greatest tragedy against justice seems to be when physical gain is made by lives being devalued and even snuffed out.

Valued by God (Psalm 139:13-16)

Before we focus on this portion of Psalm 139, we need to read Psalm 139:1. In this introductory verse, we see the vital fact that God knows us. The value of a person is based on bearing God's image; thus, God knows us and knows us intimately.

When we consider this meaningful passage as a theme of "Sanctity of Human Life," we must acknowledge this psalm speaks to the overall valuing of life. Unfortunately, we often limit this passage to the tragedy of abortion, because it speaks to the divine formation in a mother's womb.

Yet, we read this section following the unjust slavery and usurping of a young woman's life, noticing that she was as meaningful to God both as she was formed and as she grew. Valuing all life at all life stages is critical to seeing people through God's eyes.

Verse 15 is encouraging because we know such injustices against life are "not hidden" from God. Ask your group: *How do you process such terrible slavery and injustice in light of the truth that it is not hidden from God?* It may be good to encourage your group members to share how this discussion makes them feel emotionally.

Conclusion

Emotionally responding to this topic of valuing human life should only be the start for those of us fortunate enough to not be captured as slaves. Consider prodding your group about how to take emotion and turn it into helpful action.

How should we respond in action to modern issues that devalue human life? With many organizations now working against issues such as abortion, human trafficking and drug dealing, there may be local opportunities to

take action.

In closing this discussion, perhaps Psalm 139:23-24 would be the best prayer and meditation. We need God to search us and reveal himself to us. To change for the better, our real selves must be acknowledged so we may be led "in the way everlasting."

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