**How to be a Disciple according to the ACTS of the APOSTLES 16: 25-32**

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*“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night, he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay.”*

Have you ever been in jail? Have you ever visited someone in jail?

Have you ever been hospitalized? Have you ever been hospitalized against your wishes?

These are all questions that ring true *and uncomfortable* for most of us. Even if we have never been inside a jail, most of us know and love someone who has been incarcerated. Some of us have professions that require us to serve as correction officers or prison guards as they are referred to in the Bible. Some of us are police officers and some of us are arrested.

Some of us are doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists and clergy. Others of us are patients, in-patient and out-patient, in recovery from operations or addictions, in recovery from abuse or domestic violence, in recovery from childhood trauma or neglect.

Some of us aren’t recovered yet. We are still struggling to get healthy. We have been radiated for six weeks, we have been incarcerated for several years, we have been hospitalized for a few weeks, we have been at home, home-bound due to immune compromised bodies, we have been ill, we have been depressed and demoralized.

**What does the Bible even have to offer those of us who are broken hearted?** We feel like the jailed not the jailer. We feel like the inpatient in the ICU and are body is rejecting the lifesaving new stem cells. We feel like the caregiver being kicked out of the safety net of Hope Lodge because our patient has died, and we are suddenly taking up the space needed for the next person. We are the wounded Vietnam vet who can’t get in-patient care at the VA hospital because new cost-saving measures requires that all psychiatric care is now telemedicine and that person is not the psychiatrist who has helped you stay alive for over twenty years. We are the plant deemed not worth saving and tossed into the woods. We are the poet that writes poetry no one reads. We are the college graduate full of promise and unemployed. We are the employee at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health grateful to still have employment as many people have lost their jobs as NIH and USAID and CDC funding has been slashed and burned. And we find out that cost of living and merit-based raises are all gone. And we cannot complain, for we are the lucky ones still standing.

**This is a terribly unsettling time in America and globally.**

If you feel like you are Whistling in the Dark like Frederik Buechner coined long ago, you are not alone. When I thought about how to approach this text about being jailed and being freed from prison, this slim volume that I found in the early years of my studies in seminary at Harvard Divinity School leapt from the recesses of my mind to the front. It’s funny how I can imagine how the weight of a book, the color of the spine, the cover, the folded pages and carefully underlined pages bring me back to an exact moment in time like an old song on the radio. I was young. Maybe 24, scared, afraid of losing my scholarship, quite poor subsisting on a diet of bad food and peas and potatoes from Café India. And I read all day, every day, in libraries, in my room, at breakfast, outside under trees, looking out at the Charles. I read for assignments, I read to write papers, I read poetry to be cool, and I found a few small books to stay alive. Words that gave hope to a discouraged and disillusioned twenty something year old who was afraid I might lose God at Harvard does not find God.

So, Whistling in the Dark, what is it about?

**BOOK DESCRIPTION**

A book cover with text

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In *Whistling in the Dark: a doubter’s dictionary*, Frederick Buechner casts a spiritual eye over the varied terrain of our everyday language.

The third installment of his much-loved lexical trilogy, *Whistling in the Dark* pauses to consider ‘just plain words’. From ‘Adolescence’, ‘Anxiety’, and ‘Jogging’, to ‘Narcotics’, ‘Tears’, and ‘Youth’, Buechner journeys through the landscape of life’s common occurrences, thoughts, and feelings, through faith and doubt, and through loss and joy. As ever, his unique way of looking at the world acts to elevate the ordinary and demonstrate the presence of God in the mundane moments of life:

***TEARS:***

*You never know what may cause them. The sight of the Atlantic Ocean can do it, or a piece of music, or a face you've never seen before. A pair of somebody's old shoes can do it. Almost any movie made before the great sadness that came over the world after the Second World War, a horse cantering across a meadow, the high school basketball team running out onto the gym floor at the start of a game. You can never be sure. But of this you can be sure. Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go to next. [[1]](#footnote-1)*

 What does Buechner have to say about a different kind of jailer, the jailer we encounter in the story of the early church, here it is under the dictionary definition for HELP.

**Here is Buechner’s description of a different type of jailer, first published in** [***Whistling in the Dark***](http://www.frederickbuechner.com/whistling-in-the-dark-a-http:/www.frederickbuechner.com/whistling-in-the-dark-a-doubters-dictionarydoubters-dictionary) **(later also published in** [***Beyond Words***](http://www.frederickbuechner.com/beyond-words-daily-readings-in-the-abcs-of-faith)**):**

HELP

As they're used psychologically, words like *repression*, *denial*, *sublimation*, *defense*, all refer to one form or another of the way human beings’ erect walls to hide behind both from each other and from themselves. You repress the memory that is too painful to deal with, say. You deny your weight problem. You sublimate some of your sexual energy by channeling it into other forms of activity more socially acceptable. You conceal your sense of inadequacy behind a defensive bravado. And so on and so forth. The inner state you end up with is a castle-like affair of keep, inner wall, outer wall, moat, which you erect originally to be a fortress to keep the enemy out, but which turns into a prison where you become the jailer and thus your own enemy. It is a wretched and lonely place. You can't be what you want to be there or do what you want to do. People can't see through all that masonry to who you truly are, and half the time you're not sure you can see who you truly are yourself, you've been walled up so long.

Fortunately, there are two words that offer a way out, and they're simply these: Help me. It's not always easy to say them—you have your pride after all, and you're not sure there's anybody you trust enough to say them to—but they're always worth saying. To another human being—-a friend, a stranger? To God? Maybe it comes to the same thing.

Help me. They open a door through the walls, that's all. At least hope is possible again. At least you're no longer alone.”

Today, we are invited to ask for help. It’s hard. It’s hard to say, help. I’m drowning. Help, I’m tired. Help, the load is too much.

Help, who can take the wheel? Maybe, Jesus? Jesus, take the wheel. I need a nap. And I need to stop trying to be God. You, you can be God. And me, I can be my own right size.

Amen.

1. <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/whistling-in-the-dark-a-doubters-dictionary#:~:text=Book%20Description,to%20pay%20the%20closest%20attention>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)