



Unit .32

Session .01

The Church Is Sent to Trust God

Scripture



Acts 12:1-17

1 About that time King Herod violently attacked some who belonged to the church, **2** and he executed James, John's brother, with the sword. **3** When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter too, during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. **4** After the arrest, he put him in prison and assigned four squads of four soldiers each to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. **5** So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was praying fervently to God for him. **6** When Herod was about to bring him out for trial, that very night Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while the sentries in front of the door guarded the prison. **7** Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. Striking Peter on the side, he woke him up and said, "Quick, get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. **8** "Get dressed," the angel told him, "and put on your sandals." And he did. "Wrap your cloak around you," he told him, "and follow me." **9** So he went out and followed, and he did not know that what the angel did was really happening, but he thought he was seeing a vision. **10** After they passed the first and second guards, they

came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened to them by itself. They went outside and passed one street, and suddenly the angel left him. **11** When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's grasp and from all that the Jewish people expected." **12** As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was called Mark, where many had assembled and were praying. **13** He knocked at the door of the outer gate, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer. **14** She recognized Peter's voice, and because of her joy, she did not open the gate but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the outer gate. **15** "You're out of your mind!" they told her. But she kept insisting that it was true, and they said, "It's his angel." **16** Peter, however, kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were amazed. **17** Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. "Tell these things to James and the brothers," he said, and he left and went to another place.

What are some unhealthy ways we respond to crisis and difficulty?

What can we learn about responding to crisis from the believers in this story?



99 Essential Doctrines

Prayer and Providence

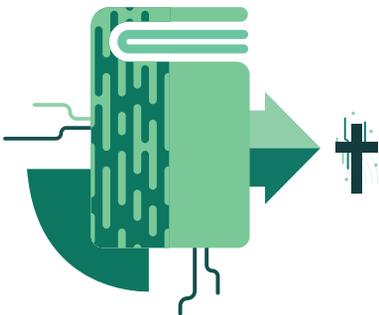
If God is in control and already knows the future, why pray? The Bible teaches that although God has a plan for this world that He promises to fulfill, prayer is often the means God uses to accomplish His divine purpose. Even though God knows the end result, the means that lead to that end result will be accomplished through prayer. In this sense, it is true that “prayer changes things,” and it is also true that God uses prayer to change our hearts so that our will comes into conformity with His.

Main Point

God responds to prayer even when we have difficulty seeing Him at work.

What are some simple ways you can obey God that could make a big difference in your life and the lives of others?

What can we do as a group/church to be a safe place and refuge for each other when someone is in need?



Christ Connection

When Peter was arrested and put in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for his release. God delivered Peter miraculously, but the church failed to believe he had been rescued at first. In a similar way, Jesus taught His disciples that He would die and come back to life, but they, too, failed to believe at first. When they saw and experienced the resurrected Savior, their faith increased.

What can we learn from Rhoda's example as a young person in the church?

In Defense



One apostle is martyred while the other receives a miracle, but surely the early Christians prayed for James, just as they prayed for Peter. So, are we to conclude that they lacked faith when James was in prison? That God wasn't hearing their prayers before? Our response to both of those options should be a resounding, "No." This is a story where we find that God is not like a genie, and prayer is not us attempting to twist God's arm to do what He has not willed. Rather, prayer brings our will before God, with earnest plea, and then surrenders to His rule and wisdom.



Head

How can trusting in God's providence motivate you to pray more?

How might your prayer life change if you remembered God's ear is open to you?



Heart

What are some reasons we can trust God even when He does not answer a prayer like we hoped He would?

What are some areas of life where we're tempted to please others instead of pleasing God?

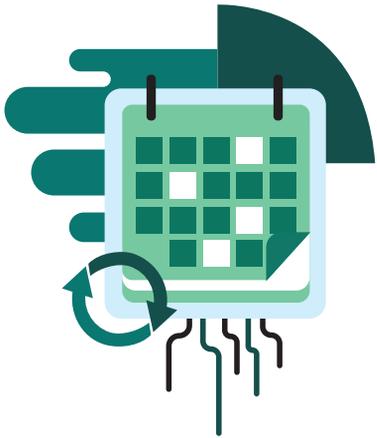


Hands

What are some practical steps you can take to develop a deeper lifestyle of prayer?

What are some areas of life you need to move from prayer to action?

Daily Devotions



Day 1

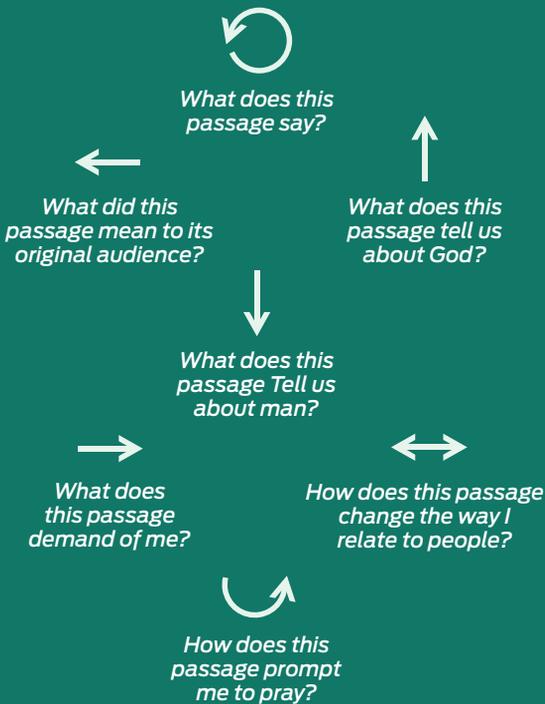
Acts 12:1-5

I'm sure you've heard the saying, "When it rains, it pours." It's an idiom we use to describe a situation that just keeps getting worse. At the beginning of Acts 12, a terrible situation has gotten even worse. Herod had already killed James, the brother of John, and now he has arrested Peter with the same goal in mind. It wasn't looking good for the early church.

Did they respond with violence? Did they repay evil for evil? No; instead, they cast themselves upon the mercies of God and made their appeal with the Judge of all the earth. How do you respond when things go wrong or when you are mistreated? What can you learn from the Christians in Acts 12?

Don't take matters into your own hands or stoop to someone else's level. Take your worries and fears to God and trust that He will vindicate you—either in the present or in eternity.

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



How do you respond when things aren't going your way? What can you do to respond with faith?

Acts 12:6-11

Peter was awaiting what was sure to be an unfair trial and unjust execution. Like James, Peter was targeted by the Jewish authorities and Roman government. His fate seemed inevitable; humanly speaking, no other outcome seemed possible. But with God, all things are possible.

God is able to open doors that no one can shut and shut doors that no one can open (Rev. 3:7-8). He delivered Joseph, divided the Red Sea, and brought the walls of Jericho to the ground. We don't believe in an age of miracles, but in a God of miracles. The same God who has done all this and more is the God who has revealed himself in Jesus. Are you trusting Him today with whatever obstacle, sin, or issue seems impossible to overcome?

What door has God opened in your life that you need to follow Him through?

Acts 12:12-17

Jesus had already told Peter that he was going to be martyred (John 21:18-19). Peter must have thought this was his time to die and that this angelic deliverance was just a dream. Suddenly, he realized it was no dream; he had truly been miraculously saved. But when he got to the house and knocked on the door, Rhoda forgot to let him in.

Rhoda was so excited that she didn't think to open the door for Peter. We don't want to be too hard on Rhoda; after all, she did believe when the rest doubted, and she kept insisting even when they were ignoring her.

But maybe we can learn this small lesson from her today—your excitement is no substitute for simple action. God works the miracle, but He still leaves something for us to do. It may be as small as opening the door, but God can use your simple obedience to complete His miraculous work. Expect God to move and be ready to do your part when the opportunity comes.

In what ways do you need to move from excitement to real action in your walk with Christ?

Acts 12:18-23

A few years ago, I went fishing with my father-in-law and brother-in-law in a canoe at a local creek. Imagine three grown men in one canoe; yes, we looked funny. We were catching fish left and right and could hardly get one fish off the line before one of us was catching another. We were enjoying an almost perfect scenario, when, out of nowhere, it began to rain. It wasn't just a little rain; it was a downpour! In an instant, the situation had turned on us, and we were trying to make it back to the boat ramp before our canoe was full of water.

In Acts 12, Herod experiences a dreadful turn of events as well. One day he is popular with the Jews and executing Christians, and the next he is killing his own guards. One moment he is enthroned with honor and being praised by people, and the next he is struck with the judgment of God.

People pleasing and pride are dangerous sins. Herod seemed to be getting away with it for a short time, but God will not be mocked. Herod's story serves as a comfort that evil will not triumph in the end and as a warning to humble ourselves before God and to seek to please Him above anyone else.

Are you motivated to please people or to please God? How might pride keep you from focusing on honoring God?

Acts 12:24-25

While Herod was dying, the church he had opposed so violently was multiplying. He certainly had more earthly power than they did, but God was with His church, and God's purposes would not be stopped. We might lose heart and be short sighted, but may Acts 12 be a lesson in eternal perspectives. Herod is a mere footnote in history, but the church he tried to destroy is a global movement still multiplying today.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." In the short-term, things may look grim. Evil may seem to be winning. The church may appear to be hopeless. But when you belong to the One who is writing the story, you can trust Him with the ending. Yes, the forces of evil are big and powerful, but the purposes of God will prevail, and His mission will go on. Living for Him will never be in vain, so press on to serve His kingdom with confidence that He will win.

How would you live differently if you had full confidence in God's power to win?