

Those who were praying for Peter were probably hiding in fear that they would be arrested too. They dismissed the claim that he was there, preferring to believe Rhoda was crazy or had seen a ghost. And when they finally let Peter in, they were astonished.

Even in fear and without knowing what might happen next, the church prayed. They obeyed and trusted the details to God. Whatever the circumstances we face, no matter the odds, we can entrust our prayers to God.

What are some of the prayers you have seen God miraculously answer in ways you never imagined? Are there prayers you are continuing to bring to God for which you are still awaiting an answer? If so this would be a good time to share them with others so that together you can bring your requests to the God of miracles.

WRAP-UP

Under the hand of King Herod Agrippa, the church in Jerusalem suffered. After the execution of James, Peter's life was in jeopardy as he awaited trial in prison. But the church prayed fervently for him and God miraculously moved to release him to take the gospel beyond Jerusalem. As the persecution of the church intensified, and believers were losing their lives for their faith, they would be scattered. But it was God's plan to use this to spread the good news of Jesus to the uttermost parts of the earth. And through it all, God's people prayed.

Memory Verse

17 Never stop praying. 18 Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

-1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: _____

Challenge- There are many issues that need our prayers right now. Join with a friend or with your group, for a time to lift up some of the many things that only God can solve. He is God, and He can do miracles.

“When God’s People Pray”

Book of Acts – Week #13

INTRODUCTION

It wasn't an easy journey for the early church. The persecution that had begun, continued to gain momentum in Acts Chapter 12. King Herod Agrippa focused his malice on the believers in the church. In verse 2 of this chapter we see he has executed James the son of Zebedee; one of the first three disciples of Jesus and one of the twelve who walked with Him during His earthly ministry. Seeing how that pleased the Jews he moved on to arrest Peter, planning to put him on trial and most likely execute him as well. Threatened and persecuted, what was the church to do? They prayed. And even in the face of unanswered questions, doubts and fears, they were fervently in prayer for Peter as we see God move miraculously. Their actions are an example of how we should also respond when our circumstances may cause us to doubt and fear. Even then we join together, and we pray.

Key Passage

ACTS 12

STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)

1. Prayer after Discouragement

Acts 12:1-5 NLT - 1 About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. 2 He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. 3 When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.) 4 Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover. 5 But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.

The persecution of believers intensified, James was killed, and Peter arrested (again). Things couldn't get much worse. Although this chapter doesn't explicitly say so, it is safe to say the church had been praying the

whole time. Why would we think this? Because we saw a pattern of prayer had already been established.

Acts 4:23-24, 31 NLT - 23 As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. 24 When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: ... 31 After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

Although it's likely the church had been praying, God still allowed James to be executed. This had to be a crushing blow to the church. James was one of the Apostles and a respected leader.

Have you experienced a major disappointment when you thought you had done everything right and still you didn't get the answer to the prayer you expected? What are some of our natural responses in those circumstances?

It can be difficult to reconcile the power of prayer with the sovereignty of God. Sometimes we suffer setbacks in our faith as we grapple with challenges of life that God does not remove from our path.

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 NLT - 17 Never stop praying. 18 Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

What direction and encouragement do we find in 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18? How does that apply to prayer when we are discouraged?

2. Our Prayers and God's Plans

The night before Peter was to be put on trial God sent an angel to his prison cell.

Peter had witnessed the deaths of Stephen and James and was awaiting his trial. How do you think he spent his time while in prison?

Acts 12:7-9 NLT - 7 Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. 8 Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered. 9 So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening.

On his final night in prison Peter was asleep when the angel appeared to him. How did he respond to the angel's appearing?

So even though he undoubtedly prayed to be delivered, when God came to his rescue, Peter had a hard time accepting the deliverance was real. Peter might have thought he was having a vision because of the vision on the rooftop about unclean animals. But for whatever reason, he had chains fall off, guards not notice him leave and an iron gate open by itself before he came to and acknowledged that God had set him free. Most of us would probably also find it difficult to accept a miraculous answer to our prayers. We want to believe but doubt creeps in.

After experiencing many miraculous events to get him out of the prison, what was Peter's statement in response to God's deliverance?

Acts 12:11 NLT - 11 Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"

How do you think this experience affected his faith? What did he gain from this experience that he wouldn't have gained by not being arrested at all?

Share with your group some of your life's experience that have contributed the most to your spiritual growth. Would you say they were God's deliverance before affliction, God's deliverance during affliction, or God's deliverance through the affliction?

3 Earnest Prayer

Acts 12:5 tells us the church prayed earnestly for Peter. That word means intensely or diligently. Even though they had seen tragedy of others being martyred, they intensely prayed for Peter. So, you would think they would be expecting some news about Peter. *What happened when he arrived?*

Acts 12:12-16 NLT - 12 When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. 13 He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!" 15 "You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel." 16 Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed.