

Following God in the face of the unknown takes faith. And faith is not based upon what we can see (Heb 11:1) or understand (Prov 3:5).

*Hebrews 11:1 NLT - 1 Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.*

*Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT - 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. 6 Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*

*God knows we will have doubts. What would you say are areas in which you struggle between doubt and faith? How can you exercise trust in God even while you acknowledge your doubts?*

There may be members of your group who you can partner with as you walk obediently together in the tension between doubt and faith. Consider agreeing to regularly check in with one other person for prayer and support.

### **WRAP-UP**

Sometimes the circumstances in our lives can feel overwhelming. When they do, we have a choice; we can react in fear, frustration and anger, or we can allow God to direct us in purposeful thoughtful response. We might not see what is coming next or fully understand what God is doing, but if we have the faith to trust God one step at a time. He is able to direct up and even do miracles as His plan is revealed.

### **Memory Verse**

*5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths* - Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV

### **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- Take a step in faith this week, even if you don't know where it is leading you and let God take it from there.*

## **“Respond or React”**

### **Book of Acts – Week #14**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Last week we saw how the church faithfully and fervently prayed for Peter. This week we focus on the difference between responding and reacting to challenging circumstances. When we face challenges, as Peter and the church did in this chapter, we can choose to respond or to react. The difference is that a response is a thoughtful action, grounded in purpose, whereas reactions are an expression of our anger, stress or frustration at being overwhelmed. If we have been filling ourselves with God's Holy Spirit then what flows from us in times of stress is a purposeful, thoughtful response, not an angry and frustrated reaction. In chapter 12 we see what it looks like to respond under pressure rather than react to it.

### **Key Passage**

#### **ACTS 12**

### **STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)**

#### **1. Response of the Church**

*Acts 12:5 NLT - 5 But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.*

Chapter 12 finds the church in dire circumstances. There was a famine in the land, one of their members (Stephen) and one of their leaders (James) had been killed and now Peter, another leader, was facing trial and execution.

*If the church had allowed themselves to be overcome by these events what might their reaction have been to the fear and stress that they faced?*

*Last week Pastor David spoke about the Lord's prayer. If the believers were using that prayer to guide them, how do you think they might have worded it to earnestly pray for Peter?*

- Father hallowed be they name...
- Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done...
- Forgive those who trespass against us...
- Deliver us from evil...

The difficult circumstances facing us today can feel overwhelming: Quarantine, Masks, Homeschool, Racism, Riots, Political Disagreements with friends/family, Job loss, closing businesses, can't gather inside to worship, can't sing, natural disasters.

*What types of earnest prayers are you praying right now? How can the Lord's prayer be applied to those situations you are facing?*

## **2. Response of Peter**

*Acts 12:6 NLT - 6 The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate.*

Peter was able to respond to his situation by resting in God's peace, even sleeping between the guards on the night before his trial. He hadn't always been able to do so. Peter learned how to sleep in the storm by experiencing it with Jesus.

*Matthew 8:24-26 ESV - 24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. 25 And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." 26 And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.*

As we experience the storms of life Jesus doesn't panic along with us. He is at peace because He has power over the storms in our lives. Peter learned this on the Sea of Galilee.

*In what storms of your life have you seen Jesus take control?*

As you face challenging circumstances, remember to stand in the faith you've developed during the times Jesus calmed the storms.

*Acts 12:8-10 ESV - 8 And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." 9 And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.*

Peter's faith enabled him to obey step by step as the Lord led. Although the outcome of his actions was unclear, Peter followed each step as he was directed. And as he did, God's miraculous power was revealed.

God often calls for obedience of His people before he reveals His power; parting the Red Sea, crumbling the walls of Jericho, healing Naaman of leprosy.

It is easier to react fearfully than to walk in obedience, especially when you haven't seen God move yet. But when you are in a place of faith you respond with obedience even when you don't know the itinerary.

*God doesn't always send an angel to kick us in the side when it is time to move. What has God used in your life to move you to act in obedience?*

## **3. The Tension of Response**

Even when we choose to respond in obedience there is a tension we find as we wrestle with doubt. Responding in obedience requires us to anchor ourselves in our faith and not our feelings. The church prayed for Peter but likely doubted it would happen based on James death. Likewise, Peter trusted God enough to sleep before his trial, but when He sent an angel Peter thought he was having a vision.