

GROWTH + GROUPS

NAVIGATE LIFE TOGETHER

Maranatha Chapel Sermon Based Study Guide
SB 10.11.20

PRAYER IN A TIME OF CRISIS – ACTS 12:1-17

Receiving the Message and Relating to the Study

What insights, principles, or observations stood out to you from this week’s message? Discuss with your group.

The early Church in Jerusalem had been experiencing rapid growth as the Holy Spirit’s power was unleashed through the believers and the Gospel was boldly proclaimed. This growth also brought fierce opposition and in this week’s passage, we see the Church suffering great persecution. The apostle James--one of the original twelve chosen by Jesus--has been killed by King Herod Agrippa who sought to gain favor with the Jewish leaders who disliked “The Way”. Hoping to please them even more, he arrested Peter during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the week-long celebration directly following Passover). Now Peter was in prison, awaiting trial and likely to suffer the same fate as James. The Church was on the verge of being snuffed out. This was a time of crisis and the response of the Church was to pray constantly and earnestly. As they celebrated God’s deliverance from Egypt and the freedom from bondage, they cried out to the very same God to do what only HE could do in this desperate time. Let’s get into our study...

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

1. What struck you most or spoke to you from Pastor Shawn’s message this last weekend?
2. What is the most wonderful surprise that you have experienced or been a part of planning? What made it so special?
3. This has been a very unusual year so far and has impacted us all in varying ways. At this point in 2020 how would you describe yourself, which words would you choose?

Digging Deeper in God’s Word: Life Lessons

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 12:1-17

1. This is Peter’s third imprisonment and second “escape”. How does his experience here compare to and differ from what happened in Acts 4:1-4, 16-21 and Acts 5:17-23?
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:9. How do Paul’s words apply to Peter’s situation in today’s passage?
3. Both Peter and Paul were held prisoner at various points in their ministry – literally chained up for the gospel. Why do you think that persecution and imprisonment couldn’t prevent the gospel from spreading (see Acts 12:24)?

“PREPARE” in 2020

4. What gave Peter the confidence and peace to sleep so soundly when imprisoned during a time of such intense persecution? (See also Psalm 4:8; Isaiah 41:10)
5. The early church was living a time of signs and wonders (Acts 2:43; Acts 5:12) and yet it didn't appear that they initially believed Peter had been released. Why do you think they were surprised to see Peter at their door?

Like these early believers, we can sometimes find it hard to believe the power of God to answer prayers and so we pray “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!” Mark 9:24.

Applying God's Word

What did you learn from this study and how does this personally speak to you? Discuss with your group.

Pastor Shawn talked about the time of crisis we face as a nation as we battle on many fronts (pandemic, staggering unemployment and economic uncertainty, intense political and cultural division, strain on relationships, anxiety and depression, etc.). He described the kind of prayer that moves the hand of God as intense, persistent, and unified prayers for God's intervention. While our personal, intimate, quiet, and contemplative prayers are important, a crisis can call us to a different kind of prayer that is not passive but is fervent prayer in which we “strive with all of our energy”, calling on the Lord for divine intervention.

1. Puritan preacher Thomas Watson said, “The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel.” Is prayer the first place you turn to in times of crisis or need? Why or why not? Why are we sometimes surprised when our prayers are answered?
2. Can you share a time in your life when you were engaged in the kind of intense, fervent prayer described in this passage? What were you praying for? Did you pray alone, with a partner or in a group? What happened? How were you changed by this experience?

In verse 17 Peter testifies “how the Lord had brought him out of the prison”. In a hopeless situation, God showed up. In times of crisis, human effort is not enough and the only way things are going to change is by prayer. God is waiting and longing for us to cry out to Him. “Lord, do what you have promised...do what you've done before...do it again!”

3. Have a volunteer read Ephesians 6:10-18. What does this passage reveal about our opposition in battle and the weapons we can call upon to resist and overcome?
4. A spiritual war is always won in the Spirit, not in the natural. Read 1 Peter 5:6-10. Pastor Shawn reminded us that the enemy seeks to devour, destroy, and wreak havoc in our lives. He also shared that Satan had asked about Peter by name (Luke 22:31-32). Because he can't touch God, he goes after His children. What should our response be to the knowledge that Satan roams the earth looking to harm us?
5. The church had experienced the death of James (probably in spite of their prayers for God to save him) and yet they continued to pray earnestly (fervently) during Peter's imprisonment. What lessons can we learn from their example?

“PREPARE” in 2020

6. Have there been times when you have been discouraged in your prayer life to the point that you stopped praying, or prayed with no real faith or intensity? Why does this happen to believers?
7. What encouragement regarding prayer can we take from 1 Kings 18:41-45 and from Daniel 10:2-3, 10-13?

Pray like it matters! Don't quit, things are happening!

The same God that delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and delivered Peter from chains is the God that is STILL at work today. He is a chain-breaking God! If we would only pray and cry and call out to God, there is...

**“No addiction that God's power cannot break.
No struggle that God's power cannot enable you to overcome.
No sin that the power of God cannot defeat.
No fruit that God's power cannot produce in your life.”**

8. What does this week's passage teach us about our prayer life and God's response?
9. The importance of an active and engaged prayer life is evident in today's passage. (Read Matthew 7:7-8; Luke 18:1; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thess. 5:17.) What will it take to help “stoke the embers” of your prayer life until it is burning intensely for your family, your church, your city, your nation and the world, in the way Pastor Shawn describes?

Acts chapter 12 begins with the apostle James dead, Peter in prison, and Herod triumphing. From a human perspective, the situation seemed grim and no human effort or plan would solve it. But the believers knew that the battle belonged to the Lord and so they prayed for God to move. And He does, as the chapter ends with Herod dead, Peter free, and the work of God triumphing!

PRAYER -Thank You God for your care for us and Your miraculous intervention in our lives. May You light a desire in each group member to become ever more engaged in intercessory prayer for their families, their church, their community, for San Diego and for our Nation. Lord God you promise that when we call upon You and come and pray to You, You will listen to us. That we will seek You and find You when we search for You with all our hearts. Let us be a church that constantly asks You to move in our world; constantly seeks after You and constantly knocks at the door of Your throne room. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

***“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks;
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”***

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18