

# PRAYER

Acts 12:1-17

**INTRO:** Please prepare to read with me from Acts 12. Acts, the 5<sup>th</sup> book of the New Testament. You have the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, then the book of ACTS. Most people never stop to think about the name, Acts, and what it means. It's a little unique for a name of a book. In some Bibles, the Introduction to the book gives us some understanding to what is meant when it says, "The ACTS of the Apostles". Acts means, those things performed by. In Acts, we see the early church come into being, and the Apostles are busy carrying out the commands of Jesus to preach the Gospel and to live their lives as witnesses to the cause of Christ. It's these very ACTS of obedience that are recorded in this great book, and from which it gets its name. Now, it has been said, by some, that the book actually records the ACTS of the Holy Spirit at work through the lives of the Apostles. And no one I know would argue against that. We see the Spirit of God mightily at work in this awesome book!

Today, I want to preach on the topic of PRAYER. The Apostles, and those of the early church, were people of prayer! And the Book of Acts has a lot to say about it. I hope you were able to watch our live stream this past Wednesday night as our panel discussed the subject of prayer—between actually praying for your request that you posted during the stream. It was a really good conversation. I enjoyed it. And I hope you did as well. Today, and maybe next week as well, I want to take a closer look at prayer.

If you are like me, you might admit that prayer is sometimes difficult. There are people who find it intimidating! I know men who will talk to anyone and everyone who will listen, but ask them to pray, and they become a nervous wreck or get lock jaw all together. Some people think they don't know all the right words in order to pray effectively. Some think they have no right to pray because of certain sins they harbor in their lives. There is a myriad of reasons why some people find it difficult to pray.

Children don't seem to have difficulty praying. Here are some actual prayers I found that children have prayed...

Debbie, 7 years old - "Dear God: Please send a new baby for Mommy. The baby you sent last week cries too much."

Jimmy, 6 - "Dear God: Who did you make smarter, boys - or girls? My sister and I want to know."

Norma, 8 - "Dear God: How many angels are there in heaven? I would like to be the first kid in my class to know the answer."

Hank 7 - "Dear Lord: Thank you for the nice day. You even fooled the TV weather man."

David 7 - "Dear God: I need a raise in my allowance. Could you please have one of your angels tell my father. Thank you."

Angela, 8 - "Dear God: This is my prayer. Could you please give my brother some brains. So far he doesn't have any."

Our prayer life, and how we view prayer, says much about a Christian.

**John Piper** - "Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. Prayer is an expression of faith in God's power, fueled by a desire for more of him."

I have asked that all of you start praying with me about revival. I hope you have been doing that. If so, don't stop. Prayer is the key to every successful ministry.

**ILLUS:** When Jim Cymbala began his ministry at the Brooklyn Tabernacle, in 1971, he was an ill-equipped, under-educated, time-strapped preacher who led a second congregation in New Jersey. The Brooklyn church had no money to pay him, was meeting in a ramshackle of a building, and barely enough attendance to bother with weekly meetings.

Today, the Tabernacle hosts around 10,000 spirit-filled worshippers each week. The difference came when Jim, in a moment of desperation, set aside his planned message and called the church to pray. The weekly prayer meeting, not the Sunday worship, became the focal point of the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

Jim's belief that "God can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him" guides his work. "It is Prayer, not preaching that brings Revival."

Lets take a moment to see what prayer meant to the young infant church of the N.T. Read with me a few verses from Acts 12, beginning with verse 1...

**Acts 12:1-8** *"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. 6 The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Other soldiers stood guard at the prison gate. 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."*

Well, that's just about the coolest thing you will ever read :

This event took place during the Passover season. James, the brother of John, had just been killed by Herod. James, was one of the three disciples that made up the inner circle of those closest to Christ during His earthly ministry (Peter, James, and John). Notice, that the Church in Jerusalem is at prayer during a time of crisis. The crisis being, that the church is under attack spiritually and physically. One of their great leaders is now dead, and another is in prison, and it appears, he is about to die. So they do what every church should do, and every Christian, when we find ourselves in a crisis, they prayed!

I believe we can learn a lot from this great example. Notice...

**I) THE PEOPLE OF PRAYER:** v 5 *"But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him."* Prayer is a privilege reserved for THE CHURCH. Prayer belongs solely to those who have a relationship with the Almighty God.

You will, at times, see this played out on social media. Someone will share a life crisis on their page, and the comments will start populating. Inevitably, some will say, I'm praying for you. Or, prayers for you and your family. But if you read far enough down the comments, you'll see it. Someone will say, "Sending good vibes your way". That's the language of one who does not know God. PRAYER BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD!

**I) THE PEOPLE OF PRAYER:** v 5 CONTINUED Our text says that prayer was made by “the church.” When the church prays Satan trembles. He hates to see a church on its knees, assembled in prayer, because he knows that the power of God is available to those who pray.

The result, of the early church in prayer is seen in Acts 2:46-47 “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

But before that happened, notice what took place... Acts 4:31 “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

When a church agrees in prayer concerning a certain matter great things will take place in the community and for the church to witness. The miracles in the Book of Acts manifested because there were praying people who were praying daily and without ceasing.

**The WORLD needs a praying CHURCH!**

If we ever see real revival, it will come because of prayer. But, let me share something else with you. Hear me...If your children ever get saved, or your grandchildren, that too will happen because of prayer. Don't just think because you bring your kids to church, they will be saved. If you want to see your loved ones come to know Christ as their Savior, you need to pray for them! PRAYER IS A NECESSITY! We need some PEOPLE OF PRAYER!

**PEOPLE OF PRAYER... Now Notice**

**II) THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER:** vv 3-5 “When Herod saw how much this (killing James) 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.”

This was a crisis – a time of desperation – a great need for God to show Himself strong.

Notice that the people relied on their prayers. The people of the church didn't appeal to the civil authorities. They took their case directly to the highest court where Jesus “ever lives to make intercession for us. (Hebrews 7:25)

And Peter rested upon the promises of God in that he did not try to pick the lock or tunnel his way out. But instead, he went to sleep. Look at v 6 “The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers...” He was resting in Him who “neither slumbers nor sleeps.” (Psalm 121:3-4). He knew God was in control of his life and because of that, he could rest easy with complete confidence.

I hope Christ First Church can get back to being a people that rattles the doors of Heaven with our prayers! We need to be praying for a REVIVAL that will change us. We need to be praying for those we know and love who are lost and on their way to hell. We need to pray for a holy boldness that will lead us to be the witnesses we ought. WE HAVE A REASON TO PRAY! What is the PURPOSE to your prayers!

**I) THE PEOPLE OF PRAYER:** v 5

**II) THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER:** vv 3-5

**III) THE POWER OF PRAYER:** vv 5-11 *“But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him. 6 The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Other soldiers stood guard at the prison gate. 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. 10 They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him. 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!”*

Wouldn't you like to see God work like that in your life? Some of you have! Some of you know what it's like to have God answer your prayers. Hunter & Josh, Bre Carter, Chris & Taylor; Some know the POWER of PRAYER in a time of crisis.

Look at this. Peter was bound with chains – there were 16 guards around him and he was sleeping between two soldiers at the time this event took place. The prison door was guarded by a sentry. Peter was in a maximum security prison. No prison breaks happened there. But then, the chains fell off Peter. God is the chain breaker. The doors opened before Peter and the angel. God has the keys for all the locks that Satan tries to bind us with. There is no door that God cannot open. They locked the preacher in, but they couldn't lock God out!

OH MY, this is when the church is suppose to get up and give God a standing ovation! HE IS WORTHY!!! Oh, the power of prayer! Lets look at the last thing real fast...

**IV) THE PLEASURE OF PRAYER:** vv 12-17 *“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. 17 He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison...”*

Prayer can be difficult at times, but there is great PLEASURE in answered prayer!

**CONCLUSION:** Why don't you pray? Why don't you pray more? Why don't you pray more earnestly? What is it you're afraid of? ISN'T THERE THINGS IN YOUR LIFE, PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE, THAT NEED YOUR PRAYERS? Please decide today you're going to pray. Not just thanking God for your food, or thanking Him for a good day at work, I'm talking about taking time to get away alone, and confessing sin, asking God for revival, pleading with God to save your children and grandchildren! Who knows, God may break every chain!