

# The Power Of Prayer

Acts 12: 1-16

**INTRO:** You may have heard about the woman who was walking along the beach and found a bottle. She picked it up, wiped the sand off, and—poof!—a genie appeared! He said “I will grant you one wish!” She said, “I thought genies granted three wishes.” “Times are hard lady; we’ve had to cut back. One wish! Take it or leave it.”

She pulled out a map of the Middle East and said, “I want these countries to stop fighting and to get along. In fact, I want peace and harmony in all of the world!” The genie looked at the map and said, “Lady, be reasonable! These countries have been fighting for hundreds of years, and every peace treaty they sign is broken. This simply cannot be done. Wish for something else!”

The woman thought for a minute and said, “Well, I’ve never found the right man. You know . . . a man who’s considerate and fun, likes to cook and help with the house cleaning. A man who would get along with my family, and not sit around and watch sports all the time. A man who will smother me with love and affection for all of my life. That is what I wish for: a good man!” The genie let out a sigh and said, “OK, you win. Let me see that map again!”

Some things just seem impossible. But with God, nothing is impossible. He can even turn the United States of America around.

Today I want to talk about the POWER OF PRAYER. Now, let me make something clear, PRAYER is not a wish, and God is no Genie. God is real! And prayer, because of God, has the power to change the world.

This Thursday coming up, May 6th, is the National Day of Prayer. A day our country has set aside to recognize our Sovereign God, and to ask, collectively, for His guidance and intervention on our behalf. If things keep going the direction they are at the moment, we don’t know how much longer this day will even be observed. But as for now, we are still being asked to join our hearts together and pray to our Heavenly Father above. I hope you are making plans in your day, Thursday, to stop and pray for our great nation. Now listen to me, we are not as great as we used to be, even with our past failures and sins, and the direction we are headed is NOT going to make us better.

Historian Will Durant in his book on the history of Rome, Caesar and Christ, said, “A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has first destroyed itself from within. The essential cause of Rome’s decline lay in her people and morals.”

The difference between Rome and the US, however, is that America was founded on Ju-deo-Christian values. We’ve strayed from that original vision of our founding fathers, and what was once “freedom of religion” has now become “freedom from religion.” We have succeeded in pushing God out of our schools, sporting events, public venues, and work-places.

Then there is the breakdown of the family. So many of our social ills today can be traced to broken homes and, more specifically, fatherless homes. Most children born in the US today, are now born out of wedlock. I have read that...

- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes.
- 85% of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in fatherless homes.

It's been said, "A family can survive without a nation, but a nation cannot survive without the family." We need to turn to God in prayer and turn back to His Word.

Peter Marshall, former Chaplain to the US Senate, once said, "The choice before us is plain: Christ or chaos, conviction or compromise, discipline or disintegration."

America has known several revivals in its past, called "awakenings." The first was during the 1700s, and was led by such men as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. During just two years of this revival (from 1740 to 1742) some 50,000 people were added to New England churches. This, out of a population of only 300,000!

The second great awakening (1790s to 1840) was led by many, including Charles Finney. It was during the time of the "wild west." The law was disregarded and sexual sin was rampant. The "camp meetings," where crowds numbered as high as 15,000, would be held for several days at a time. Thousands came to faith. More than 10,000 in Kentucky alone, between 1800 and 1803.

The third great awakening in America started in 1857. How this revival began is unique. A 48-year-old businessman named Jeremiah Lanphier began a prayer meeting on Fulton Street in New York City. It began slowly but soon exploded. The New York Stock Market crashed around that time and Lanphier's prayer meeting saw remarkable growth.

Prayer broke out all over New York City, filling churches, and theaters on Broadway. Within six months, 10,000 people gathered daily for prayer throughout the city! It is reported that 50,000 New Yorkers came to Christ from March to May. And for the next two years, the number of reported conversions, throughout the country, reached an average of 50,000 a week. Over one million people were saved, born again, in this brief period.

There was not another real awakening in the United States after 1859, until the Jesus Movement in the late 1960s and early 70s. The Welsh Revival of 1904 had some impact in America, but was not considered by most, to be a national awakening.

The Jesus Movement was a genuine American revival. The church was actually influenced globally by what God did in the Jesus Movement. But that was over 40 years ago; the kids of that movement are now grandparents!

Now we look at the current generation and we realize we need another revival. Our hearts cry out, "Lord, do it again!" The prophet Habakkuk understood this when He prayed the prayer recorded in Habakkuk 3:2, *"I have heard all about you, LORD, and I am filled with awe by the amazing things you have done. In this time of our deep need, revive your work, as you did in years gone by. Show us your power to save us. And in your anger, remember mercy."*

America needs God's intervention. We saw many turn to the Lord after 9/11. Remember those prayer vigils on street corners, and the packed churches? Remember the members of Congress spontaneously singing "God Bless America"? These things give me hope that there could be at least one more great revival in America's future.

By the way, the song "God Bless America," written by Irving Berlin in 1938, is a prayer.

While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,  
Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free.  
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,  
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer:

God bless America, land that I love,  
Stand beside her and guide her  
Through the night with a light from above.  
From the mountains, to the prairies,  
To the oceans white with foam,  
God bless America,  
My home sweet home.

Yes, I have hope for America!

The Bible tells us about another time when things looked very bleak, a time that appeared to be hopeless for believers: Read with me Luke's account from Acts 12.

**Acts 12:1-5** *"About that time, King Herod reached out to harm some who belonged to the church. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 And seeing that this pleased the Jews, Herod proceeded to seize Peter during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 4 He arrested him and put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out to the people after the Passover. 5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was fervently praying to God for him."*

Things did not look good for the young fledgling church. King Herod had murdered James. And as a consummate politician, when Herod saw that it pleased his constituents, he then had the leader of this new church, Simon Peter, arrested. It looked like Peter was next in line for execution. So what did the church do? Organize a protest and storm Herod's palace? Hold a boycott of all products made in Rome? Pull out their swords and smite Herod and his soldiers? No! Instead, the church used their "secret weapon." Though all other doors were closed, one remained open: the door of prayer! So often we think of prayer as the last resort when it should always be our first!

There is great POWER IN PRAYER when we pray the way scripture teaches us to. Notice with me a few things real quickly...

**I) THE OBJECT OF PRAYER:** v 5 *"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was fervently praying to God for him."* Prayer is only as powerful as the object of the prayer! Isn't all prayer offered to God? Not necessarily. Often in prayer there is very little thought of God. So many times, our mind is taken up with the thought of what we need instead of our Heavenly Father, and honoring Him. Sometimes, sadly, people are concerned with how they sound or look to others when they pray, and God is not even a thought. In Matthew 15:8, Jesus spoke of those who *"honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me."*

For prayer to be powerful and effective, there needs to be acknowledgement of who it is exactly that we are speaking to. The key is to get our will into an alignment with God's purpose. And how do we know what His will is? By the careful study of Scripture.

**I) THE OBJECT OF PRAYER:** v 5 CONTINUED 1 John 5:14-15 “This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us . . . and we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”

Knowing God’s will also comes from living in communion with Him. Jesus said in John 15:7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”

Nothing lies outside the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God. God only answers the requests which He inspires. Yet there are times we think we know God’s will, but we are not sure, so we pray, “Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done.”

Does God want to send a spiritual awakening to our country? Yes! Notice secondly...

**II) THE OBSESSION OF PRAYER:** v 5 “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was fervently praying to God for him.”

Here, we see the church was “fervently praying” for Peter. That phrase carries the idea of “earnestly” or “continually with agony.” This was not a flippant “Lord, (yawn) please save Peter, or whatever.” This was a storm-the-gates-of-heaven prayer: “Oh Lord, deliver Peter!” Have you ever prayed like that for your family or a friend? Have you prayed like that for your church, your pastor, or your country? The early church prayed with intense desire. Most of the prayers I hear today aren’t prayed with much intensity. They’re not prayed with a lot of heart! And if we are not praying with our whole heart, how can we expect God to put much heart into answering our prayers? God promises that His people will find Him when they search for Him with all their heart! (Jeremiah 29:13)

Notice lastly...

**III) THE ONENESS OF PRAYER:** v 5 “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was fervently praying to God for him.” But the church... the church, was fervently praying for him. There is POWER in united PRAYER! Jesus said in Matthew 18:19, “If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.” This speaks of two people with the same God-given burden praying together. When you have a prayer need, get other believers to pray with you about it.

We should be praying together for the needs of America. National Day of Prayer is this Thursday. How exciting to think of thousands and thousands of American citizens praying for our great nation on this very day! We will be praying this Thursday from 12-1 PM in the parking lot of the church. From 11-12 we will be waving signs asking those who pass by to come back at noon to join us. There may be 3 or 30 or 300, who knows, but whoever comes will be praying for our nation. And we need it! I’m asking you to join us! Make a way! Be obsessed with getting here! Let’s make a statement in this community that we are a people of prayer, and that we are not ashamed of our Christian heritage! Will you join me?

**PRAYER IS POWERFUL!** Read with me the rest of this story... vv 6-16 “On the night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, with sentries standing guard at the entrance to the prison. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his wrists. 8 “Get dressed...

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

**II) THE OBSESSION OF PRAYER:** v 5

**III) THE ONENESS OF PRAYER:** v 5 *“...and put on your sandals,” said the angel. Peter did so, and the angel told him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.”*

*9 So Peter followed him out, but he was unaware that what the angel was doing was real. He thought he was only seeing a vision. 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city, which opened for them by itself. When they had gone outside and walked the length of one block, the angel suddenly left him.*

*11 Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from Herod’s grasp and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.”*

*12 And when he had realized this, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered together and were praying. 13 He knocked at the outer gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer it. 14 When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed that she forgot to open the gate, but ran inside and announced, “Peter is standing at the gate!”*

*15 “You are out of your mind,” they told her. But when she kept insisting it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.” 16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astounded.”*

**OH, THE POWER OF PRAYER!!!**

**CONCLUSION:** Have you ever prayed? Let me ask this, Have you ever prayed and asked Jesus to save you? Let’s do that today!