



# john 15:4 A B I D E in ME



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 1 - Number 17

## Praying in a Crisis

Acts 12:1-19

### THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT

**HUMILITY** - Followers of Jesus Christ should emulate him by considering others above ourselves, if we consider ourselves at all.

Thomas À Kempis (1380-1471) spent most of his life in a Dutch monastery. He had extensive knowledge of classical philosophy and immersed himself deeply in the Scriptures. He is best known as the author of the highly influential Christian classic, *The Imitation of Christ*. The following chapter is an excerpt from this book:

#### *“On Humble Submission to God”*

*Do not be concerned overmuch who is with you or against you, but work and plan that God may be with you in all that you do. Keep a clean conscience, and God will mightily defend you; for whoever enjoys the protection of God cannot be harmed by the malice of man. If you learn to suffer in silence, you may be sure of receiving God's help. He knows the time and the way to deliver you; so trust yourself entirely to His care. God is strong to help you, and to free you from all confusion. It is often good for us that others know and expose our faults, for so we may be kept humble.*

*When a man humbly admits his faults, he soon appeases his fellows, and is reconciled to those whom he had offended. God protects and delivers a humble man: He loves and comforts him. To the humble He leans down and bestows great success, raising him from abasement to honour. To him He reveals His secrets, and lovingly calls and draws him to Himself. Even in the midst of trouble, the humble man remains wholly at peace, for he trusts in God, and not in the world. Do not consider yourself to have made any spiritual progress, unless you account yourself the least of all men.*

### This Week's Complementary Passage

#### I Corinthians 10:23-11:1 (ESV)

<sup>23</sup> “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. <sup>24</sup> Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. <sup>25</sup> Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>26</sup> For “the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.” <sup>27</sup> If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>28</sup> But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— <sup>29</sup> I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? <sup>30</sup> If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

<sup>31</sup> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. <sup>32</sup> Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, <sup>33</sup> just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

<sup>1</sup> Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Marking Guide for Acts  
(not all words occur in the passage)

appointed

baptized

Caesar

enemy/demons/Satan

eternal life

fathers & children [in one color  
different from Moses]

Gentiles

gospel

grace

Holy Spirit

in the name of Jesus Christ

Jesus

Jews

Law (of Moses)

men of the council

Moses [in different color from  
fathers & children]

prayer

repent (repentance)

resurrection (raised up)

salvation

suffering

the Way

the promise of the Father

witnesses

word of God

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STEP ONE . . .

READING what the passage says  
(Read it at least three times)

Acts 12:1-19 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. <sup>2</sup> He killed James the brother of John with the sword, <sup>3</sup> and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. <sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. <sup>6</sup> Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. <sup>7</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

<sup>12</sup> When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. <sup>13</sup> And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.

<sup>14</sup> Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. <sup>15</sup> They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" <sup>16</sup> But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. <sup>17</sup> But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

<sup>18</sup> Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

**STEP TWO . . .**

**OBSERVING** how the passage moves

Return to the passage and **mark key words, phrases and movements:**

- Circle all of the words in this passage that speak of the Triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit, etc.).
- Underline the significant verbs/action words in this passage.
- In Acts 12:1, highlight the phrase “Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.”
- Highlight Acts 12:5.
- In Acts 12:7, highlight the phrase “an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell.”
- In Acts 12:9, highlight the phrase “He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.”
- In Acts 12:11, highlight the phrase “Peter came to himself.”
- In Acts 12:12, highlight the phrase “many were gathered together and were praying.”
- Highlight Acts 12:16.
- In Acts 12:17, highlight the phrase “he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.”
- Highlight Acts 12:18.

**STEP THREE . . .**

**Ask the five “W” questions and the one “H” question:**

1. **WHO** is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters? And, to **whom** is it speaking?
2. **WHAT** is the subject of the passage? What does the passage say about the subject?
3. **WHEN** do or will the events occur? When did something happen to a particular person, people, or nation?
4. **WHERE** did or will this happen?
5. **WHY** is something said or mentioned? Why would or will this happen? Why at this time? Why this person?
6. **HOW** will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

## STEP FOUR . . .

### UNDERSTANDING what the passage means

*This commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.*

#### Commentary on Acts 12:1-19

**12:1 - “Herod.”** This refers to Herod Agrippa I. He reigned over different areas of Palestine from 37-44 AD. He was raised in Rome and became friends with Gaius, who followed Emperor Tiberius and who later became the Emperor Caligula. He was a strict follower of Judaism (but possibly for political reasons).

**“The king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.”** Herod did this to gain support and approval from the Jewish leadership. Roman leaders did the same thing.

**12:2 - “He killed James the brother of John with the sword.”** This refers to the Apostle James, who was the brother of John. He was a member of the inner circle of disciples. Why James should die and Peter be spared is a mystery of God. Beheading with a sword was the normal method of capital punishment for Roman citizens, but it apparently was odious to Jews.

**12:3 - “And he proceeded to arrest Peter.”** This is Peter’s third arrest. Christians are not spared from persecution.

**“During the days of Unleavened Bread.”** This refers to the Passover Feast, combined with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted eight days. Both celebrated Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage. It was celebrated on Nissan 14–21, which would be our March or April, depending on the Jewish lunar calendar.

**12:4 - “Four squads of soldiers.”** This would mean four squads of soldiers four times a day, or sixteen men. The number shows Herod’s concern over Peter’s possible escape.

**12:5 - “Earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.”** The church is praying, but was surprised when God answered their prayers!

**12:6 - “Between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.”** This verse shows the impossibility of Peter’s escape. It is almost as if they expected an attempt to release him.

**12:7 - “An angel of the Lord stood next to him.”** It is unusual that the supernatural interventions of the angel of the Lord and the Holy Spirit are interchanged throughout the book of Acts. Apparently the Spirit speaks intuitively, but the angel is an outward physical manifestation.

**12:11 - “When Peter came to himself.”** Peter was uncertain whether this was a vision, dream, or reality. Luke used a similar phrase in describing the Prodigal Son. Suddenly the reality of the experience and its implications dawned on Peter.

**12:12 - “He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark.”** This refers to John Mark’s mother. The early church met in this family’s house in Jerusalem. It was also the site of the Lord’s three post resurrection appearances and the coming of the Spirit.

**“Many were gathered together and were praying.”** The grammatical forms of these verbs reveal that the church had gathered and intended to remain in prayer.

**12:15 - “You are out of your mind.”** The church was praying for God to act, but they were extremely surprised when He actually did.

**“It is his angel!”** Apparently the Jews believed that one’s guardian angel could take their physical shape (for a discussion of Jewish sources and beliefs about guardian angels, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2, p. 963). However, there is no scriptural basis for this belief.

**12:17 - “He departed and went to another place.”** No one knows for sure where Peter went from here. Even though God supernaturally delivered Peter, this did not imply that he could be reckless or expect this miraculous intervention every time. Remember James had been killed!

## STEP FIVE . . .

### SUMMARIZING the message

You don't have to be a Christian for very long before you realize that Satan enjoys hitting the church when things seem to be going well. Paul reminds us that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Rather, we are engaged in a life-or-death struggle against principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places, who are able to unleash a vicious attack against the church—just when we think things are going well (cf. Ephesians 6:10-12).

It was the Passover season, mostly likely around A.D. 44. In Acts 12 the church has been growing, so the enemy attacks the church in Jerusalem by instigating King Herod (Agrippa I) to kill the Apostle James and then imprison the Apostle Peter, with the obvious intent of killing him too. Satan moves Herod to behead James with the sword. James was the first of the Apostles to be martyred. His death terrified the church. So when Herod apprehends Peter, everyone is worried. The church realizes that this was a call to earnest prayer.

Herod details four squads, sixteen soldiers, to stand guard over Peter. Peter, however, was unafraid. He is expecting to be executed but he's sleeping like a baby. He is trusting that God will glorify Himself either by his death or by delivering him. But when the angel appears, Peter is surprised. The angel ignores the guards and strikes the chains from Peter's arms. The angel then guides a bewildered Peter step by step into the city streets. Peter is not sure what is going on. When he gets outside and sees the gate open, he suddenly realizes that God has set him free.

Next, we have this amazing scene at Mary's home (the mother of John Mark) where many had gathered for prayer. When Peter knocked at the door a maid named Rhoda answered. She recognized Peter's voice but failed to open the door. Instead, she told the others that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, "You're crazy!" But she insisted. They said, "It's his angel!" Peter kept knocking. When they finally stepped outside and saw him they were amazed. They were praying for Peter's release but they just didn't believe God had answered their prayers. They believed God could do it. But when He did it, they could hardly believe it!

Meanwhile, sixteen soldiers are put to death because of Herod's cruelty. Later, when Herod traveled to Tyre and Sidon (modern day Lebanon) he came out, dressed in his royal robes, and the people flattered him. This proud man believed his press clippings—that he had become a god. So he was struck by an angel of the Lord, eaten by worms, and died.

Here is the dominant lesson we can take from this story: ***When a crisis threatens the church, it is always a call to prayer.*** When James was killed and Peter was imprisoned, the church began to pray earnestly. Prayer is what a church does if it is really dependent upon God. If we act as if we don't need God we will not pray. Or, if prayer is just a perfunctory ritual, it means nothing. But if we really believe that only God can turn a crisis around, then we will pray. Prayer to God has the power to influence circumstances. It can delay something that is impending, remove it entirely, or totally stop it.

Prayer can also produce sudden changes, like the death of Herod. I do not think the church was praying for the king to die. We are not told in Scripture to pray that way about those in authority. But the church was praying that God would intervene and work His will. This cruel tyrant was suddenly removed from the scene because His people were praying. When God's people open their hearts and pray, God works in remarkable ways. God still works in powerful ways in the midst of a crisis (i.e., He opens prison doors, He changes a situation, He removes a tyrannical ruler, etc.) all in response to the prayers of His people.

**STEP SIX . . .**

**EXPLORING** the passage through discussion

1. Have a couple of people in your group share a story of how they have clearly seen God answer prayer.
2. God allowed James to be martyred but Peter was rescued. What does this teach us about God's will? What role does prayer play in light of God's sovereign will?
3. How would you characterize the prayer of the church in Acts 12? What does earnest, fervent prayer look like in your life? Our church? Your Growth Group?
4. Why do you think this group of praying believers did not expect Peter to show up at their door?
5. How do we, as a group or as a church, demonstrate that we expect God to answer our prayers? How do we pray (or, act) when we don't expect Him to answer our prayers?
6. Take extra time tonight to pray for our church, our current crisis, and the church's challenges in the world today?





## THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

### 10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

#### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

#### **The Godhead** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

#### **The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ** *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

#### **The Sufficient Atonement of Christ** *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*

We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

#### **The Resurrection and Return of Christ** *Acts 1:3, 9-11*

We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

#### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

#### **The Ministry of the Holy Spirit** *John 14:16*

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

#### **Unity in Christ** *Ephesians 2:14-17*

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **Eternity** *Revelation 21:22-27*

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

#### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

### 10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

#### **Undiluted Worship** *Matthew 22:37-40*

Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor and, my neighbor as myself.

#### **Constant Abiding** *John 15:1-11*

Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

#### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

#### **Desperate Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him and, finding direction for daily life.

#### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives and, in the world.

#### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

#### **Total Forgiveness** *Ephesians 4:30*

Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

#### **Tangible Compassion** *Matthew 25:31-46*

Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

#### **Generous Giving** *2 Corinthians 8:7*

Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

#### **God Space** *Ephesians 6:19-20*

Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES OF A DISCIPLE

### **Love - a sincere affection for others** *1 John 4:10-12*

Love is acting in someone else's interest no matter who they may be, no matter how you feel, and no matter what it costs.

### **Joy - a delight unaffected by circumstances** *John 15:11*

An inner delight in God that is sustained in spite of the changing seasons of life.

### **Peace - an abiding sense of harmony** *Philippians 4:6-7*

Relationships are free from friction. Positively, it describes harmonious relations with others in the church.

### **Patience - a willingness to stick with things** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

Being willing to live with a difficult situation for a long time—even if things are slow to change or never change.

### **Kindness - a sense of compassion in the heart** *Job 6:14*

An inner disposition that puts others at ease and out of which kind actions flow.

### **Goodness - a goodness that flows outwardly** *1 Thess. 5:15*

Choosing to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Faithfulness - an unwavering loyalty** *Psalm 26:3*

Being the kind of people who keep our word to one another.

### **Gentleness/Humility - an attitude of humility without any entitlement; a lack of self-awareness** *Philippians 4:5; 2:3-4*

Gentleness is power and strength under God's control.

Humility is considering others above myself, if I consider myself at all.

### **Self-Control - an ability to direct your energy wisely**

*Titus 2:11-13*

The strength to restrain our desires, emotions, and actions has to come from within rather than from some outside source.

### **Hope - a certainty of what is to come** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

Coping with the hardships of life and with death because of hope in Christ.

Each week this Bible Study will feature either a core belief, practice or virtue vital for growing disciples.



**# OT in 52**  
(52 weeks through the Old Testament)

**OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE READING IN A YEAR**

Monday, February 21 thru Saturday, February 28  
Leviticus 22-23; 24-25; 26-27; Numbers 1-2; 3; 4-5

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