



WEEKLY STUDY

The Book of Acts - Week Nine

This week we considered what it means to continually say “yes” to Jesus. This constant response was modeled for us by the early disciples. Eve Southworth shared with us this week that James and Peter never lost sight of their conversion, they never lost sight of their calling, and they never lost sight of their comforter. May the same be said of us as we continue to live into what it means to follow Jesus.

Please note our prayer focus for the week in the box below. Join us in seeing what God will do as we unite in prayer.

Peace of Christ,
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from your own daily reflections and consider the Group Discussion questions below. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for those who are feeling led to say “yes” to Jesus. And for those who are continually saying “yes” so that they remain focused on their calling and their comforter.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: ACTS 12.4 (NIV)

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.² He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.³ When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.⁴ After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

- There seems to be little reprieve from the persecution of the early Christians. This King Herod was the grandson of Herod the Great. There is some history here, and for the most part King Herod (Agrippa I) tried to please the Jews because of that history. Like many other leaders in the early Christian story, he was influenced by the crowds and the religious leaders more than a sense of righteous duty. We know that there is still persecution that takes place around the world. Instances of martyrs losing their lives for their faith are often unnoted and unknown. Here James' life comes to a swift end, almost on a whim. What does it make you feel to hear of James' death? How can a sacrifice like that carry meaning for our church today?
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- **Prayer Prompt: If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. (1 Peter 4.14-16)**
- *God, I give thanks for the heroes of faith that remained faithful to Jesus Christ even in the face of persecution. May their sacrifice speak to any timidity that is in me. Amen.*

TUESDAY: ACTS 12.5-7 (NIV)

⁵ *So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

⁶ *The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.*

- "But the church was earnestly praying to God for him." There is nothing like the knowledge that someone is praying on your behalf. It's humbling and hope-producing. Notice the connection between the prayers of the church and the intervention of God. For Peter, it led to freedom. It has been said that there are very few things God does apart from prayer. When have you seen God respond amidst the prayers of His people? Have you seen God move in your own life as the result of others' prayers?

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- **Prayer Prompt: This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 John 5.14-15)**
 - *God, Help me to remember that I depend on you, and that you hear our prayers. You want me to want what you want, and you want to give it to me! Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: ACTS 12.8-10 (NIV)

⁸ Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. ⁹ Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”

- Sometimes God’s actions to rescue us can be disorienting. “Is this really happening?” Peter wasn’t sure what to think and had to be snapped back to reality. “Grab your coat and let’s go!” Peter walked past the guards and through a gate that opened by itself. God got him into the city and the angel left him. Then Peter “came to himself” and realized what God had just done to save him from death. Have you ever had a moment when you “came to” and realized that God had done something amazing for you?
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- **Prayer Prompt: Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (Psalm 34.8)**
- *God, every time I fail to notice your goodness and mercy, will you wake me up—over and over again? For you are good to me and bring me into the city! Amen.*

THURSDAY: MATTHEW 4.18-22 (NIV)

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them,²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

- James and Peter are two people who never lost sight of their identity in Christ—their conversion. They knew that their lives were heading in one direction before Jesus and now they were following Jesus. In their case, they went from fishers of men, to fishers for people. They became disciples of Jesus. Think about your own story. If you are a follower of Jesus, what are some of the dramatic changes in direction that have taken place in your life because of your discipleship? If you are not yet following Jesus, what changes would you hope to see in your life?
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- **Prayer Prompt: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2.8-9)**
- *Jesus, you have called me to take on my true identity which is in you. Help me not to forget that above everything else, I belong to you. Amen.*

FRIDAY: ACTS 1.8 (NIV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

- Jesus called his disciples to this world-changing mission of witnessing around the world to his life, death, and resurrection. Peter knew that as long as he was alive, this was his calling—this is what he had to do. For us to live out this same calling, might be as simple as sharing what we know to be true about Jesus in every circumstance. When was the last time you were able to, in the Spirit of Christ, speak the truth about salvation in Jesus? Maybe you can pray for more awareness of such opportunities and even the words themselves.
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- **Prayer Prompt: Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4.15)**
- *God, I know that my calling is to share you with others. I want to speak well to who you truly are and to the transformation that faith in your Son can bring. Amen.*

SATURDAY: JOHN 14.16-17 (NIV)

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth.

- The disciples never seemed to lose sight of their comforter. They knew where their help came from. Jesus promised them that he would send them such a comforter and advocate in the Holy Spirit. They witnessed it happen! And they were at their best when they remembered that they depended on the Holy Spirit to sustain them even in times of trial and persecution. That promise is true for every disciple who has ever lived, and it can be true for you. What is your source of comfort in times of trials? Where do you need to see God bring peace to your circumstances?

- **Prayer Prompt: I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?**
² **My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 121.1-2)**
- *God of peace and comfort, I lift up my eyes to see that you have sent me a Comforter. Meet me in my joy and in my sorrow today. Amen.*

GROUP DISCUSSION

- What stood out to you about this week's reading? (Acts 12.1-11)
- Do you recall the first time you said "yes" to Jesus? Describe what led to your "yes". Was it a dramatic moment in your life?
- Do you recall the most recent time you said "yes" to Jesus?
- What practices might help you to continually say "yes" to Jesus every day? What difference might that make in your faith and in your life?