



# FOUNDATIONS

*When God Builds His Church*

*Small Group Discussion Guide*

**FOUNDATIONS**



## PREPARATION

### ■ STUDY

Spend the week studying Acts 12:1–19. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

### ■ DETERMINE

Which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

### ■ PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

### ■ LANDING POINT

God shows up in my life when I make prayer a priority.



## GROUP DISCUSSION

■ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

■ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

■ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

■ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



## INTRODUCTION

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

# PRAYER IS THE KEY

Timothy Keller says “prayer is simply the key to everything we need to do and be in life.”<sup>1</sup> We can’t truly know ourselves or God without prayer. Keller goes on to explain that “prayer is the only entryway into genuine self-knowledge. It is also the main way we experience deep change—the reordering of our lives. Prayer is how God gives us so many of the unimaginable things He has for us. Indeed, prayer makes it safe for God to give us many of the things we most desire. It is the way we know God, the way we finally treat God as God.”<sup>2</sup>

Prayer is the key to experiencing the blessings and life change God promises to give us. God wants His church—the place of His dwelling—to be a house of prayer. This week your group will discuss what it means to make prayer a priority and expect God to show up.

🗣️: *What blessings have you experienced through prayer? How has prayer changed you?*

🗣️: *What would it look like if your small group was a “house of prayer?”*



## LEARN

*Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.*

# THE RAGE OF A KING

King Herod had just executed the apostle James and was looking to do the same to Peter. Peter was arrested and thrown in prison. It looked like the end for Peter, one of the most influential disciples in the early church. He was chained between multiple guards with seemingly no way out. How did other believers respond to this situation? The only way they knew how. They prayed.

**READ:** Acts 12:1-19. What does the response of the church in this difficult situation reveal about them?

**Q:** What other ways could the church have responded?

## A PRISON BREAK

Peter awoke to a bright light shining in his face. He heard a voice speaking, “Get up, get up!” This wasn’t the familiar voice of one of the guards. This was an angel of the Lord. Peter looked down and the chains that held him captive were lying on the ground. Peter might have thought he was dreaming, because this was truly bizarre. The angel kept instructing him: “Get dressed. Put your cloak over your face and follow me.” They passed through the guards and out of harm’s way before the angel left him.

Then Peter realized what had just happened. He had been rescued from the grip of the evil king. He was safe. He went to Mary’s house, where a prayer meeting was being held. Peter knocked on the door and Rhoda, a servant girl, answered. Astonished in disbelief, she left Peter standing at the door to tell everyone that he was outside. Peter kept knocking and, eventually, was let in to tell them how God had rescued him.

**Q:** Recall a time when God responded to your prayer in a clear and powerful way.

**Q:** What keeps the church from praying boldly today like these believers did for Peter?



Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

## WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE PRAY

What do we learn from Peter's story? First, we see that the church's prayers for Peter helped to change the situation. God moved in the spiritual realm to change something in the physical realm. All because God's people prayed.

Second, we see *how* the church prayed. They prayed in four ways:

❑ **SPECIFICALLY.**

They prayed for God to deliver Peter.

❑ **PASSIONATELY.**

They understood they had kingdom authority to pray in Jesus's name for God to do something.

❑ **COLLECTIVELY.**

They prayed together through the night.

❑ **EFFECTIVELY.**

They prayed and God showed up in a big way.

🗣️: *What might be missing in how you pray that you can learn from these believers in Peter's story?*

## A LABOR OF LOVE

Prayer is a discipline that, when practiced over time, can become a great joy. Prayer is a labor of love that we are called to do consistently for ourselves and for others. Prayer, like faith, is a muscle. It needs to be exercised in order to grow and develop. Let's not overcomplicate things. The more you pray, the more time you spend with the Father, which means your relationship with Him and your prayer life will deepen.

🗣️: *What's one thing you can do this week to develop your prayer muscle?*

# PRAYING PRIESTS

The apostle Peter says that all believers are “living stones” being built up as a “spiritual house for a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:5). The house God is building through His church is a house of prayer. As a priest, God calls you to offer spiritual sacrifices and to intercede for others through prayer. Time and time again the New Testament calls God’s people to pray for others (see 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 1:19; James 5:14–16).

Q: *Who is God calling you to intercede for?*

## DIRECT ACCESS

If you’re a child of God, you have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. You don’t need to go through someone else—a priest, pastor, or someone more spiritually mature—to get to the Father. You can approach the throne of God *with confidence*, knowing that the Father hears your requests and will answer in the way that aligns with His will (John 15:7; Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 5:14). You may not agree with His answer, but you can trust that His answer is always what’s best for you or someone else.

Q: *Why should you have confidence to go to the Father with your prayers?*



### LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

## HOW YOU SEE PRAYER

*Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?*

*- Corrie Ten Boom*

Corrie’s simple question reveals two ways we can view prayer. Prayer is either the driving force in our lives or something we go to in emergencies and when we face great difficulty. It’s either the first place we go or our last

resort when we've exhausted all other options. How we view prayer matters.

Christians in the early church made prayer a priority. When you read the book of Acts, you see that they were constantly praying. Everything they did, they did by prayer. How did God respond to their prayers? He showed up and did big and impossible things.

God still shows up when we pray and promises to do more than we could ever imagine. We stand to gain so much by being a praying people.

**Q:** *How would you evaluate your prayer life currently on a scale of 1-10 [1-very weak, 10-very strong]? Why did you choose your number?*

**Q:** *Where do you want God to show up in your life or in the life of someone else? Why?*



## PRAY

Spend time talking to God about how you'd like to experience more vitality in your prayer life. What do you want to see God change in you and in others? Sit with the Father and listen to Him, trusting that He longs to give you these things and so much more through prayer.



## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Invite your group to attend The Gathering at your campus in September. The Gathering is an event lead by Pastor Chip Henderson and Pinelake Worship that will teach you and give you the confidence to pray with greater power and expectancy. Visit [pinelake.org](http://pinelake.org) for locations, dates and service times.
- Read 1 Peter 2:4–9 and reflect ways you can be a royal priest and intercede for others this week.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



**PETER'S PRISON** “The prison was probably the Tower of Antonia, which was at the northwestern corner of the temple complex and was the quarters of the Roman garrison.”<sup>3</sup>

**ANGEL OF THE LORD** “The expression ‘angel of the Lord’ (angelos kyriou) stems from the [Septuagint – Greek translation of the Old Testament] and signifies God himself in his dealings with men (e.g., Exod. 3:2, 4, 7; Matt. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; 28:2; Luke 1:11; 2:9; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:23; see also angelos in 7:30, 35, 38; 12:11; 27:23).”<sup>4</sup>

**WHEN GOD CHANGED HIS MIND** God often works through prayer to change things, even His own mind (see Exod. 32:14; Jonah 3:10). Many heroes of the faith—in the Bible and in church history—prayed with boldness for change and so should we. Paul calls believers in Corinth “co-laborers” (or “fellow workers”) with God (1 Cor. 3:9). We work alongside God through our prayers and our prayers make a difference for the future.<sup>5</sup> In the words of Richard Foster, “We are to change the world by prayer.”<sup>6</sup>

**PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS** “The priesthood of all believers is not a reference to ecclesial authority. Rather, believers are to (1) reflect the holiness of God and that of their high priest (1:15; Heb. 7:26; 10:10), (2) offer spiritual sacrifices (here; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15; the New Testament also refers to offerings that include money or material goods [Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:16]), (3) intercede for others before God (Rom. 12:12; 15:30–31; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:1; James 5:16; Rev. 5:8; 8:3–4), and (4) represent God to others (2:12; Acts 13:47; Rom. 15:9, 16).”<sup>7</sup>

#### ENDNOTES:

1. Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 18.

2. *Ibid.*, 18.

3. Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2107.

4. Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Luke–Acts* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 900.

5. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*, special anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018),

6. *Ibid.*, 35.

7. Douglas J. Moo, “The Letters and Revelation,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 2542.