

TOPICAL MESSAGE
Am I Surprised When God Answers My Prayers
Pastor JD

DAVID: Lord, we just go before You tonight, Lord, as we lay down our prayer requests, Lord. We just lift them up to You, Lord, that You may answer our prayers, Lord, as we lay them out to You, Lord. We thank You for hearing us, Lord. We thank You for Your blessings, Lord. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

PASTOR JD: Amen. Amen. How are you guys doing tonight? Blessed? Good answer. Right answer. So glad you came tonight and hopefully you got a prayer list. If you didn't, they're right up here. You can come up and grab one. And those of you that are joining us online, I know the start time is earlier than the start time on Thursday nights for our mid-week Bible study. But we're just going to get to it and then we're going to have Pastor Mac come up when we open up the prayer meeting, all-church prayer meeting.

But before we do open it up for prayer, I want to share what the Lord had ministered to me during the five months that I was out of the pulpit caring for my wife before she went home to be with the Lord. And it was kind of an interesting passage the Lord led me to. And at first, I didn't know why *Acts, Chapter 12, verses 1 through 17*, really the whole chapter.

But now I know why because it is a most fascinating and even surprising account with detailed specificity about how we now like them then are surprised when God answers our prayers. And sometimes the surprise is not just when God answers my prayer, but how God answers my prayer, or even the way He answers my prayer.

So if you don't mind, I'd like to open up with prayer and ask God to bless our time together in His Word. If you would join with me, please.

Loving Father in heaven, we're posturing ourselves before You humbly, and really in desperation needing You like never before to speak to us in and through Your word, but also to hear from us when we pray. And as You hearken unto the voice of our cry and hear from on a high, Lord, there are some pretty intense prayer requests on our prayer list tonight and our heart just breaks for these precious people that have asked us to pray. And so, Lord, would You bless this teaching on prayer and our prayer meeting as well tonight? We ask You for this in Jesus' name, Amen.

I want to jump right into *verse 1, Acts, Chapter 12*, and we'll just kind of work our way through this.

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“Now about that time, Herod the king...”

Now, for those of you who have attempted to do a study on all the Herods, stop. It's just going to make your hair hurt, assuming you still have hair left on your head to hurt. I'll give you the abbreviated version of which Herod this is, of which there were many.

This is the grandson of Herod the Great, who was in rule at the time of the birth of the Savior of the world. And it's the same Herod that had all of the Jewish boys butchered, literally not hyperbole. Which Herod is this? His grandson. In other words, Herod the Great was Grandpa.

And so this Herod **“...stretched out his hand to harass [Persecute, harm, injure, kill] some from the church. Then [Verse 2] he killed James [Which James?] [James] the brother of John [How?] with the sword. [Why?] [Verse 3] And because he saw that it pleased the Jews...”**

In other words, he was wanting to curry favor with the Jews. And that'll do it. In fact, why don't you take it a step further Herod and why did you kill Peter too? So out he will go. Why?

“Because [Again] he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. [The feast of unleavened bread.] So [Verse 4] when he had arrested him, he put him in prison and delivered him [Now I want you to notice this detail] to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.”

Why? Because that wouldn't be kosher, pun intended, with his Jewish constituency, from whom he's trying to curry favor. Because this is a holy day. This is when all the Jews would travel to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Feast of Passover. So let's just incarcerate him, assign a guard to secure him.

Four? Oh, yeah. Didn't you know *Acts, Chapter 5*? He's already tried. He already — not tried — he did escape once. It's not going to happen again. He's an escape risk. He's a flight risk, if you prefer.

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So did you know that the worst of criminals would at best maybe have two being chained to one. Peter has four. He's not getting out of here. Oh, really? Ha! No, I'm going to kill him. But I'm gonna wait till after Passover because it's making the Jews very, very happy. Very happy.

So [Verse 5] **“Peter was therefore kept in prison, but [Watch this] constant [Consistent, continual, effectual, fervent] prayer was offered to God for him by the church.”**

How many guards did you put on Peter, Herod? Four. Well, I think you might have a problem here because there's a prayer meeting going on, and the prayer meeting is for Peter, that Peter will be freed. They already know James has been killed.

And by the way, this is not James, the James that is the writer of the Book of James in our New Testament Bibles, the half biological brother, younger brother of Jesus, the savior of the world born to Joseph and Mary after. This is the James of the Big Three, the inner circle: Peter, James, and John.

Think Mount of Transfiguration. That's going to come up in a moment. I think the we talked about it in *Mark* 5. Took me a while. Better late than never. The daughter of Jairus, the synagogue ruler, he only took three: Peter, James, and John. James, the brother of John. John, the Gospel writer inspired by the Holy Spirit, three epistles: 1, 2, and 3 John and the writer of the book we call the *Book of Revelation*. And that's going to come into play in a moment, too. So just hang on to that.

So this — this is not good. And it does bring up the question of, for those of you that read ahead to stay ahead, why would God allow James to be killed and Peter to be saved? I might as well get that out of the way and address the elephant in the room, because that is a biggie.

And we don't know the ways or the whys of God. And when you don't know, you go to what you do know. And what you do know is this, on the authority of God's word: We will not die one second sooner or one second later than the appointed time, because the day of our birth and the day of our death are in the hands of the Lord.

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John — excuse me. James finished the race. He was done, man. I'm out of here then. Okay, go. I'm not done with Peter, though. No, I still need Peter. Believe it or not, I still need Peter.

So I know a thing or two about this. And I don't ask God “why.” I only ask God “what.” What is it that You want me to know? What is it that You want me to see? What is it that You want me to do? Because you see, God will only do the same exact thing that we ourselves would do if we knew what He knew and loved as He loves.

Now take that, what I just said, and superimpose that on whatever you brought to church with you tonight, whatever you're dealing with in your life, that trial you're in, that difficulty you're facing, that hardship that is there at bedtime and there in the morning when it's time to wake up, assuming you got any sleep to begin with.

If you knew what God knew and loved as God loves, you would do the same exact thing and allow the same exact thing to happen. That should settle your heart. I know it has mine. So James; dead. Peter: Not yet, because the church is praying for Peter specifically, fervently because you know, specific prayers yield specific answers, just as conversely, generic prayers yield generic answers and sometimes leave question marks. So they were praying specifically for Peter.

[Verse 6] **“And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping...”**

What? Wait, wait. You're going to be executed in the morning like your brother James, and you're sleeping? I'm not sleeping. I'm not getting any sleep that night. How is it that Peter was able to even sleep? And get this.

[He's] **“...bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.”**

There's the four. It was usually one soldier chained to the prisoner. No, not Peter. He's an escape risk; Acts 5. So we're going to put two soldiers on each side of him and chain both of them to Peter How does Peter sleep? I got somebody — just let me have this one.

Think this through with me. I've got somebody chained to me and I like to sleep on my left side. But the problem is I got somebody chained to me on that side, too. So whether I sleep

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on my left side or my right side — so I can't sleep on my back because then I'll have apnea, airway obstruction. So I guess I'm not sleeping tonight. And plus, who would want to sleep? I mean, I wouldn't be sleeping — now hang on — I would probably be praying.

Question. Why do you think it is that Peter's sleeping? Okay, I know I've done it. I will confess, I'm just as guilty as anyone. Peter, it seems, had a sleeping disorder. Mount of Transfiguration, sleeping; Garden of Gethsemane, sleeping; here in prison the night before his assassination's scheduled for the morning, sleeping. Sleeping disorder.

Okay. I'll tell you; the more biblical answer for why it is that Peter was sleeping. It's *John's Gospel, Chapter 21*. I hope I'm right. Towards the end of that chapter it's the account of when, post resurrection, Jesus has Peter's restoration three times. I put four fingers up. I don't know why. What are you doing? Stay down. Three. Oh, four soldiers, that's why.

So he denied Him three times, just as Jesus said he would. And now He's restoring him three times. Because where was Peter? Oh, he went back. He said, "I'm so fired. I'm going to go back to my fishing business." And so Jesus appears. And you know the account, it's —it's powerful, really. So after He gets done restoring Peter — do you love Me? Feed My sheep. Do you love Me? Feed My sheep. Do you love Me? Feed My sheep.

Now this is after that. Jesus, this is post-resurrection, in an appearance to the disciples. And we know John's there and we absolutely know that Peter's there. Because in *John 21*, we're told that Jesus told John that he would live to an old age, but He said to Peter that he would, when he was older, die by crucifixion, not by Herod's sword. And that's exactly what would happen here.

If I'm Peter, maybe I am sleeping. I mean, it's uncomfortable. Can you guys move over a little bit? But maybe I am sleeping because I already know, hey, Jesus said that I wasn't going to die this way. So I'm gonna — nighty-night. And he was right because he's not older and this is not crucifixion. And to Peter's credit, he believe the word of the Lord.

Wow, what a novel idea. And is it interesting that when we believe there's a peace that ensues, so much so that I guess he's able to get some shut eye despite these smelly, ugly soldiers that are chained to him on each side. So and then, not only that, you got two more.

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And I got to believe these guys went to 24s. They were, you know, built and scary, big, tall, muscles, bulging veins.

Did I take that too far? I just want you to — I want you to use your God-given imagination so you can see what God wants us to see and what God wanted me to see. And I saw it. Now, you got two scary, you know, hitmen out front and you got two scarier hitmen chained to you, and you're in deep REM sleep. You know what I mean? REM: rapid eye movement. That's where you have the dreams and that's deep sleep. You know, there's — and it usually doesn't happen till closer to the end of — I don't want to get into a sleep study here, but I kind of know a thing or two about this as well.

Now, *verse 7*, this is where it gets — and you'll forgive me for seeing the humor in this, but you got to admit, this puts the fun in funny.

[Verse 7] **“Now behold [Look, watch], an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, “Arise quickly!” [Hurry up! Wake up! Get up!] And his chains fell off his hands.”**

I love it when God does that. It gets better. And this is where I just see the humor and it's really kind of funny.

[Verse 8] **“Then the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and tie on your sandals”; and so he did. And he said to him, “Put on your garment and follow me.” So he went out and followed him...”**

Hold on to the rest of *verse 9* for just a moment. This is where I see the humor. He is in such a deep sleep that the angel has to say, okay, we're getting dressed now. We're getting dressed now. We're putting on our sandals now. We're putting on our sandals now. We're putting on our robe now. We're putting on our robe now. We're walking now. We're walking now. He's probably dazed and amazed and we're actually told that he was.

“So he went out and followed him, [Verse 9] and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.”

Stop before you go to *verse 10*. You know how that is, right? A dream that is so real that when you wake up your going — you're either doing one of two things depending on if it's a

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nightmare or a dream. You're either thanking God, "Oh, thank You, God, it was only a nightmare." Or you're asking God, "Oh Lord, how was it just a dream?" It wasn't real. And that's where Peter's at. He doesn't know if this thing's real. He thinks he's just imagining it; he's seeing a vision.

This is after — I don't know what the angel struck him with, you know, because this was a highly-trained angel who, you know, this wasn't his first rodeo. I mean, what did — and then we're also told the detail that he picked him up and poof! Smacked him. "Wake up!" Peter's like, where am I? Who are you? What is this? Am I dreaming?

Now *verse 10*. **"When they were past the first and the second guard posts..."**

Okay. Remember now, the chains that these two ugly, smelly, you know, hitmen were chained to Peter with? They just fell off. What happened to these guys? I think they were put in and remained in a deep sleep and didn't wake up when the angel was getting Peter to wake up. Because we're not told precisely about how, in *verse 10*, they were able to get past the first and the second guard posts. But they did.

This is what I mean by we don't know how God's going to do it. In fact, we don't believe that that's how God's going to do it. And I just picture God, I'm going to speak for myself in my own prayer life, just going, really, now, JD? Watch this. The chains melt off. If it's me, I'm going, okay, but that's — we're not out of the woods yet because we got these guards out front. No, no, don't worry about that. I think they were blinded.

And there are many accounts, both biblical accounts and post biblical accounts of people being blinded. One example: Two Bibles being smuggled into countries where you will be put to death for smuggling Bibles into. So they just walk past them. Hey, guys. Nighty night. Sleep tight. We're out of here.

[Now,] "...they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord..."

Stop. You know what that word in the original language of the Greek New Testament for "own accord" is? It's the Greek word "automate" or "automatos," where we get our English word for "automatic." This is so cool. The angel of the Lord installed an automatic gate

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opener, and it just opened up like we have. They let me have a remote. I love remotes. So you know if I get here, and it's not the scheduled time because they're on the timer and I need to get in like I did today for our staff meeting, I can just push the button. I love it. That gate just opens up automatic and I drive in. Automatic. Automatatos.

"...and they went out and went down one street, and immediately [And I kinda don't blame him] the angel departed from him."

Like, my work is finished here. I'm out of here. Bye. Oh, wow. Thanks a lot, Angel. I mean, Peter's still not sure what's going on. He's still not processing what's happening until *verse 11*, where we're told, **"When Peter had come to himself..."**

Come to his senses, finally wrapped his mind around what just happened. You know, did that just really happen? Yeah. Tell me that just didn't happen. No, that happened. Whoa. This is the aha moment.

[And then] **"...he said, 'Now I know for [a] certain [Beyond any doubt] that the Lord has sent His angel and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.' So [Verse 12] when he had considered this, [Contemplated this] [Thought about this] he came to the house of Mary, [Who's Mary?] the mother of John [Which John?] [Oh, the John] whose [Roman] surname was Mark..."**

Hey, we know that guy. The Gospel of *Mark*. That's him. That's his mother's house. And they got a prayer meeting in that house. That's a house of prayer. And I love this.

"...where many..." Would you underline? No, you don't have to, but I did. **"...many were gathered together praying."**

This was a full house of prayer. There were many people there for prayer. And this is in Mary's house? There's a lot of Marys, too. But this Mary is *Mark's* mommy. That Mary. That means *Mark* was there and in prayer, as were the many that were also gathered there and also in prayer.

Now, this is where we get to what I really want to share with you.

[Verse 13] **"And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda [Means rose] came to answer. When she [Verse 14] recognized Peter's voice, [Notice what we're not**

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told.] [She didn't see Peter's face.] [She recognized Peter's voice.] because of her gladness [She was so overjoyed and excited and just I mean, ecstatic.] she did not open the gate..."

Where's that electric gate opener, that automatic gate opener guy when you need him? So what does she do instead of opening the gate for Peter, whose voice she heard?

[She] "...ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. [Now please pay particular attention to verse 15.] But they said to her, 'You are beside yourself!'"

You're out of your mind. You've lost your marbles. You know this "you're beside yourself"? Doubtless you've heard that expression before. You know what that means? You're beside yourself talking to yourself. You've lost your mind. Wow. I thought you guys were praying for Peter to be released. And now you've got Rhoda telling you God answered your prayer, and you think she's lost her mind and beside herself.

Now, this is one of two, I would say, rather insulting responses from these people of prayer. **"Yet she kept insisting..."** I mean, the word **"insisting"** here carries with it the idea in the original of emphatically, clearly, persistently insisting that it was Peter.

"So they said, [Rhoda, you're adorable.] 'It is his angel.'"

What? You just got done telling her she's out of her mind, she's beside herself talking to herself. You know, and I'm an auditory learner when I go, you know, out, which isn't much. I don't get out much. But when I do, I have a list. I always have a list because you know I love lists. So I have a list, but I want to make sure that I'm in the section that has the items close in proximity that are on my list that I love so much.

So what I do is I speak them out loud. So I'm basically talking, and sometimes I'm praying. I'm saying, "Lord, would You help me find it? Please let them have it in stock this time." And people are looking at me and I'm talking to myself. They're going, oh, cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs. That guy is beside himself. He's talking to himself.

Well, what's interesting, the reason I emphasize that in concert with this second insult from these people of prayer, after Rhoda is insisting no, God answered our prayer, I'm not out of my mind. Peter is here. He's right there. No, that's not Peter. He's an angel. Why didn't

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they — question: Why didn't they get up then? I mean, I would want to see an angel. Okay. It's not Peter, but it's his angel.

Wouldn't it stand to reason they would get up at least and go see the angel? I'd like to meet him. What's your name? They haven't given me one yet. I'm a trainee. Well, I just — pleased to meet you. Just had to see you. Because angels, you know, can take on human form. You know that, right? That's why we're told that, be careful, because you don't know if you're entertaining an angel unaware.

That messed some of you up right there. I could tell because you're going, Oh, no! Oh, that encounter. No! Please, God, tell me that wasn't an angel that I was unaware of. If so, can You please extend my deepest apology to him? I had no idea. Had I known...

Well, that's the whole point. So the reason why they didn't get up to go see the angel that they're accusing Rhoda of seeing instead of actually being Peter is because it was not uncommon in the early church to see these guardian angels, of which they suspected this was. So meanwhile, Peter is absent. The automatic gate-opener guy-angel, he still can't get in the gate. Man, that gate opened up automatos, automatic. This one, not so much. Man, I'm having a hard time.

So what does he do? And by the way, she recognized Peter's voice. Not his face. His voice. What does that imply? That Peter was talking and asking to be let in to the prayer meeting that doubtless he knew was about him. So why do I point that out? Because he continues asking. He continues seeking. He continues...

[Verse 16] “Now Peter continued knocking.”

Don't read the rest of the verse yet. Don't get ahead of me. Don't rush me. We're doing okay on time. You don't need to look at your watch or your device. Does that sound a little bit like what Jesus said in *Matthew's* Gospel about, **“Ask and keep on asking”**?

In the original it's not just ask one time, and it's a lack of faith if you have to ask a second time, because that means you doubt. You only need to — I actually somebody tell me that when I was a new believer. And you talk about messing me up. I'm like, whoa, I thought, you know, until I finally — man, this is why it's so important, especially as a new or young

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believer, to get grounded early on in the word of God. It would be later, thankfully, that I would finally learn that what Jesus was saying in the original language was ask; keep on asking.

Think parable of the persistent widow who would not give up. I already asked. Keep asking. I already knocked. Keep on knocking. I've already sought. Keep on seeking. And that's exactly what Peter is doing. It's called persistence, tenacity, if you will. And guess what happens?

The rest of *verse 16*. **“...they opened the door and saw him...”**

And no, “Thank You, Jesus, for answering our prayer. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah.” No. They're shocked. Surprise! It can't be you. We're praying for you in here to be released from prison. You're supposed to be in prison. What are you doing here? Oh, I'm here because God answered your prayer. Surprise!

They weren't just surprised. They were astonished. They were shocked. Now they're beside themselves. Did — is that — is that okay? Do you see that? Here's the last verse, and then I'll try to wrap it up with a personal application.

Now this is Peter, **“...motioning to them with his hand [*Shh*] to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, ‘Go, tell these things to James [*That's the brother of the Savior. Half-brother.*] and to the brethren.’ And he departed and went to another place.”**

Smart move, prudent, wisdom, because he's a man on the run. Sorry, that was a flashback. I don't even know. I know the song. I'm so sorry. It just — now you're — I'm so sorry. Will You forgive me, Lord, for that? Now it's stuck in my head. No, but this is the same Peter, by the way, when he escaped, miraculously, the Lord freed him, with the other apostles, from prison because they were imprisoned for preaching in the name of Jesus and forbidden, explicitly forbidden by law to no longer speak the name of Jesus.

So they were captured and incarcerated because they disobeyed that law. And here comes the angel. I don't know if it's the same guy. It's like, oh man, I got to go back in *Chapter 12* again? No. But we're told that the angel of the Lord just came and freed them miraculously.

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And what do they do? They go out and they start preaching, doing the exact thing that they were imprisoned for doing in the first place, preaching in the name of Jesus.

And we're told, watch this detail, *Acts 5*, Peter stood up. I like this guy. I think he gets a lot of bad press. Don't you agree? He says, excuse me — very loosely paraphrased. Excuse me, but if you ever put in place a law that requires us to disobey God in order to obey man, guess what? Ha! Emphasis added. We're going to obey God. Jesus! Have you heard the name above all names? Jesus.

And you know what's interesting? They didn't know what to do. I mean, if we put him back in prison, the angel's just going to free him again. Because they knew what happened. They're not stupid. So there was this guy by the name of Gamaliel. He was a highly respected man, and he said to them, hey, just let it go. Watch. Keep an eye on it. If this is — and he cites some case examples, you know, case number, you know, verses so-and-so, you know, it came to nothing. But if this is of God, there's nothing you can do about. So they let him go.

I tell you; you might be here tonight or watching online, and you're still knocking on that gate. You're still asking and seeking. And there's not been the finding, there's not been the opening, there's not been the receiving. Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Remember now, God's going to do the same exact thing you would do if you knew what He knew and loved as He loves. I think this is more for them than it was for Peter, by the way.

And incidentally, spoiler alert. For those of you who are interested, the rest of the chapter, this Herod, I mean, it's pretty graphic. So viewer discretion advised or reader discretion advised. But spoiler alert, he goes to Caesarea by the sea beautiful coastal resort where the Herods would go. Some of you have been there with us that have been to Israel with us.

And he's there in this Colosseum. And the sun is just hitting and glistening perfectly at the right time at the right spot on his silver- and gold-plated kingly armor. And he starts speaking. And the people start responding with this is the voice of God. And he's like, yeah. I'm sorry if you had dinner. (Gagging sounds)

In that moment, he was eaten alive to death by worms. God's going to always have the final word. You might have a Herod in your life that's making your life very hard, mocking you,

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attacking you, persecuting you, not promoting you, talking stink about you. I mean, you can fill in the blanks. Don't think for a second that God — God keeps meticulously perfect records of every word and every deed, and He'll have the final word in the end. I'm learning to not defend myself. More better that the Lord defend you. He's your defense.

Because I've tried, and it only makes it worse. I answer a fool according to his folly, and I become just like the fool that I'm answering in his folly, and I stoop down to his level. Oh, yeah? Me? What about you? And then game on and game over. I might win the argument, but I've lost the opportunity to win that person to Christ.

So one last thing by way of a takeaway, and this is what the Lord just really settled my heart with and ministered to my heart with. These guys at that prayer meeting? Apparently, it was packed. It was a full house, standing room only in Mary's house. And they're praying specifically, fervently, effectually for Peter to be released. And then God answers their prayer.

And what's their response? They can't believe it. No, that's — no, you guys, come on, let's just get back. We're going to keep praying for Peter. What are you talking about? Man, the guy's right there. God answered the prayer. What's the matter with you?

I wonder. We don't know what Peter said, but we know that his voice was heard, so he had to have said something like, what is the matter with you guys? I know you're in there praying for me to be freed. Surprise! God answered your prayer. I'm freed. Now, would you let me in?

This should be very encouraging to every single one of us, myself included. Here's why. Their prayer may have been fervent and effectual and sincere and powerful, but their faith, their belief was not commensurate with their prayer. Let me explain. We can pray, ask God for something, but deep down in our hearts, and Lord knows our hearts, that's a big ask. I mean, look at James. So but we'll pray. I mean, there's a lot of people there anyway, so I might as well pray. But they actually didn't believe and have the faith. They were faithless.

And yet God remained faithful. That's what the Lord gave me, and I hung on to it with my fingernails. See, I had been praying, "God, please, would You heal my wife?" Surprise! She's healed. Well, that's not exactly — I should have maybe been more specific. No, she's

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perfect now, awaiting her glorified, eternal body. But she's in My presence in glory. No more pain. No more sadness. No more suffering. No more cancer.

I answered your prayer, but you just didn't expect Me to answer it in that way. Surprise! Because you see, JD, I'm going to answer your prayer the same exact way you would answer your own prayer if you knew what I knew and loved as I love. That's hard to grasp. I realize. I get it. But God is faithful even when we're faithless. In fact, I'll add especially when we're faithless. Even when our faith is so microscopically small to be that of the size of a mustard seed it can still move that mountain and free that brother that — free you from that prison as you walk through that automatic gate.

So here's the takeaway, and then I'll have Mac come up, and we'll have all-church prayer. We'll open it up. But please don't leave here without this. Even when we pray not believing, surprise, God is still going to answer the prayer. And here's why I believe that is. One reason. There are several, but one reason in particular. See, we can take pride in prayer.

How do I know that? Because I do that. Man, God did this because I prayed. Oh, I'm not worthy. Wow. So wait, you're taking the credit for what I did because you prayed? Be careful with that one. Be very careful when it comes to you being prayerful. So I think that one of the main reasons — and this is what God has been ministering to me first and foremost, is that, you know, like an earthly father desires, contrary to what their young children believe, wants to surprise them.

“I have a surprise for you.”

“What is it?”

“Well, I can't tell you, otherwise it won't be a surprise.”

I think God our heavenly Father, infinitely more so, I think He just wants to surprise us sometimes.

“What's the surprise?”

“Well, we're going to take you someplace.”

“Where?”

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“You’re going to ruin the surprise. I can't tell you, otherwise It won't be a surprise.”

And then all of a sudden, they realize we're going to the water park. Surprise! Oh, I love you, Mommy, Baba. You're the best Mommy and Baba. You're my favorite Baba; my daughter told me one time. I was like, wait, there's more? She still has fun with me on that one.

See, the answer, as surprising as it might be, in the way that God answers and at the time that God answers and how God chooses to answer is not predicated upon my faithfulness, but His faithfulness. I mean, I'm sorry, but you're beside yourself. Get back in here, Rhoda. We love you, but you're losing it. Get a grip. That’s just his angel. Let's get back to praying for Peter to be freed. That's called the opposite of faith.

That man who encountered Jesus and Jesus asked him, **“Do you believe?”** And he said, **“I believe, but help my unbelief.”** Oh, how many times have I prayed and pleaded with God? Lord, I do believe but help my unbelief because I don't know how You’re going to do it. I don’t know the way You’re going to do it. I surely don't know when You're going to do it. Yesterday would have been good. But it's not in my way or in my time. But it's in Your way and in Your time and always for Your glory, not mine.

I'm still learning. And one of the things I'm learning is that I have a lot that I need to learn, especially when it comes to the surprising simplicity of answered prayer. Sometimes God answers prayer and we don't even know it. Sometimes God answers prayer and we haven't even prayed it. I'll give you a moment on that one. How do I know? I've had it done where like, God, I didn't even pray. And sometimes — one more. Did I say, “one more” yet? I haven’t said, “one more.”

So one more. Sometimes God doesn't just only answer prayer, He over answers prayer exceedingly, abundantly, above and beyond anything we could have ever thought or imagined, let alone ask. So big ask. I mean, the statistical probability, logically, would say that with James now being dead, Peter’s a dead man walking or chained up, at least. Oh, you don't believe then, huh? No, not really. But I'll pray. Okay.

You know what? Sometimes, God, if for no other reason other than to surprise us and shock us and astonish us and amaze us in His awesomeness, will do things that way just for us.

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He's done that for me. I didn't know how. I didn't know what. I didn't know when. I didn't know the way. I just knew that God is good. And no matter how bad yours or my situation is, it can never change how good God always is.

This comes from a man still grieving and mourning, deep sadness piled on by the sadness of my three adult children, whom I would covet your prayers for. But God. I don't know what He's doing, but God knows what He's doing. And not only that, but God knows that I would be doing the same thing that God is doing the same exact way at the same exact time. I would do the same exact thing.

And even when I pray, and my prayer's a wimpy prayer. You know what I mean by "a wimpy prayer"? If you have a better word than "wimpy," please let me know. But I'll use "wimpy" for lack of a better one. Wimpy prayers like, you know, I'll speak for myself. I won't look at anybody. Lord, please free Peter from prison, you know, and...

Wow, you're just like going through the motions. You don't really believe that God's going to do that, do you? Ha! Boy, are you in for a surprise. "God, heal my wife." Fervent prayer and fasting, pleading, begging, seeking, knocking, asking persistently with tenacity. Surprise. I answered your prayer. She's perfect. She's in My presence.

And here's the thing, JD. Even if she could, she would never come back. Wow. Thanks a lot. You know what? If that's true, and it absolutely is, then I would do the same exact thing He did and spared my wife from what may have laid ahead, especially being my wife. She'd taken a lot of hits over the years. It's cumulative for women. That's the way God wired them, made them fearfully, wonderfully, beautifully.

And you know what? I can see it now. I couldn't see it, but now — I once was blind, but now I see. Wow, Lord, thank You. You spared her. Yeah, this is the deepest pain I've ever known possible or imaginable. But You spared her. And You answered my prayer for her. You just didn't answer the way I thought You would. Surprise. But it's the right answer. And it's the perfect answer because, God, You're a perfect God.

So I'm done. Please, as we pray, it's not the power of your prayers. It's the power of the God that you're praying to. It's not even the faith in your prayer, believing. No, it's the

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prayer to the One who you believe in. Don't pray small prayers with little faith when you have such a big God. Trust God for the big asks and prepare yourself.

You know, my kids like to surprise me. They do pranks. And they stopped. You know why? Because I returned the favor. I reciprocated the pranks. And then once they got a taste of Baba's pranks, they said, okay, okay, no more pranks. No more pranks. Because I got 'em good.

“Woo! Ah!” “Surprise!”

“Don't do that.”

“Well, you did that to me. I'm doing that unto you as you have done unto me.”

I wonder if we a different account had they had faith and believed. They wouldn't have been surprised. Peter's at the gate, Rhoda? Hallelujah. I knew it, God. I knew it! I knew You would do it. I believed You could do. And You did it. Thank You, Lord. Wow. I want to be that guy. I want to be that guy. Okay, Mac, come and save these people. I'm not talking about eternal salvation. Just save them from me. I love you man.

PASTOR MAC: So with the time we have left, why don't we open it up for church prayer? Join with me please. Father in heaven, thank You for the lesson that we received tonight. So timely, and it's priceless. And, Lord, would You meet us here as we come to You with prayers, seeking You to answer them and bestow upon us the faith, knowing that You will. So we give this time to You.