

Week 4 Sermon Series: In His Footsteps/ Praying Strategically

July 19, 2025

Opening Monologue

We are in a Summer Sermon Series titled In His Footsteps. This series explores the biblical truth of how the early Church and Christians followed the teachings of Jesus Christ. They didn't just talk about what Jesus taught—they lived it out.

This Sunday, we dive into a topic that can transform your life: Strategic Prayer. Did you know that Jesus himself was always praying strategically? Consider this moment in Scripture:

"Simon (Peter) and his companions (disciples) went to look for him (Jesus), and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'" (Mark 1:36-37)

The disciples were searching for Jesus—again! I can imagine this becoming an inside joke among them: "Someone go find Jesus; he's off praying somewhere!" (LOL!) What was Jesus doing when he slipped away? He was getting alone with the Father, praying to prepare for a day of ministry. Jesus prayed strategically, and the Holy Spirit empowered him!

Scripture tells us: "the people tried to touch Jesus, because there was power coming out of him, healing them all." (Luke 6:19)

This week, we'll explore how strategic prayer can transform your life and family. Come and be encouraged by the Lord's Word, which has the power to change us forever.

In Christ,
Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "Week 4 Sermon Series: In

His Footsteps/Praying Strategically.” Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

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Key Sermon Texts

Mark 1:35-36

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%201%3A35-36&version=NIV>

Philippians 2:6-8

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%202%3A6-8&version=NIV>

Luke 6:12-13

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%206%3A12-13&version=NIV>

Acts 12:5-18

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2012%3A5-18&version=NIV>

Commentary on Main Texts:

1.Jesus’ Strategic Prayer Life: A Model of Intentionality

“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” — Luke 5:16 (NIV)

Jesus’ prayer life was deliberate, disciplined, and strategic. He didn’t just pray reactively (in response to crisis); He prayed proactively—seeking communion, clarity, strength, and alignment with the Father’s will.

- All-night prayer before choosing the disciples (Luke 6:12-13): Jesus spent the entire night in prayer before a major decision, modeling that significant choices in ministry and life must be bathed in prayer.
- Solitary places (Mark 1:35): Jesus withdrew regularly from the crowd and even His disciples to seek intimacy with the Father.
- Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46): In His greatest moment

of anguish, Jesus leaned into prayer to submit to the Father's will, showing that prayer fortifies us to face suffering and obey God even when it's costly.

Impact on Christian Life:

- We are called to imitate Jesus' prayer rhythm—not just in times of trouble, but as a regular spiritual discipline. Strategic prayer strengthens discernment, keeps us connected to God's will, and builds spiritual endurance.
- Solitude in prayer helps us silence the noise and hear God's voice more clearly.
- Prayer is not an escape; it's a strategy of engagement—with God's power, wisdom, and purposes.

2. Strategic Prayer in the Early Church - Acts 12

"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him."— Acts 12:5 (NIV)

In Acts 12, Peter is imprisoned by Herod during a wave of persecution. The Church responds not by organizing a protest, but by gathering for earnest, focused, and united prayer.

- Their prayer was specific (for Peter's release).
- It was persistent (held throughout the night, verse 12).
- It was corporate (done together, strengthening their faith and unity).

God responded with a miraculous deliverance—an angel freed Peter from prison.

Impact on Christian Life:

- Strategic, united prayer activates divine intervention in impossible circumstances.
- The Church must return to a posture of dependent prayer, especially in times of persecution, crisis, or spiritual warfare.
- Sometimes, like the believers in Acts 12, we may be surprised by the way God answers—but He does act when we pray.

3. The Role of Salt: Preservation, Purity, and Purpose

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?” — Matthew 5:13 (NIV)

Salt, in biblical times, was valued for:

- Preserving food from decay
- Enhancing flavor
- Cleansing and purifying (used in sacrifices - Leviticus 2:13)

Jesus calls us “the salt of the earth”—implying that believers are to have a preserving, purifying, and flavor-enhancing effect on the world around them.

How This Ties Together:

- Strategic prayer preserves our spiritual saltiness. Without it, we grow dull, reactive, and ineffective in spiritual matters.
- Just as salt must be applied to be effective, prayer must be practiced intentionally—not just assumed.
- The Church’s “saltiness” (its effectiveness and impact) is directly related to its connection to God through prayer, obedience, and dependence.
- When the Church prays strategically like Jesus and the early believers, it:

Resists the decay of moral and spiritual darkness

Brings the “flavor” of God’s kingdom—righteousness, peace, and joy

Becomes an agent of healing and restoration in the world

Living Strategically Salty Lives Through Prayer

To live as the salt of the earth, we must live with strategic spiritual intentionality. That means:

- Scheduling time for solitude and prayer, as Jesus did
- Praying with purpose and unity as the early church did in Acts 12
- Seeing prayer not as a ritual, but as a weapon and a lifeline
- Remaining close to God so our spiritual “saltiness” doesn’t fade

Salt changes everything it touches. So does prayer.

Let our lives be seasoned with both—so that we preserve the truth, bring flavor to a weary world, and stay aligned with God’s purposes. (1)

Commentary on Main Scriptures

JESUS PREACHES THROUGHOUT GALILEE

Mark 1:35-37

Jesus had just spent a Sabbath in feverish activity. He had done practically everything except rest. Early in the morning of the next day, he set aside a time of prayer by himself. He spent time in prayer and in silence. Even though he was interrupted, Jesus maintained his intimate fellowship with his Father. By the time the disciples found him, he was ready to face the next challenge.

We must follow Christ's example by carving out time for worship and prayer. Those who help and serve on Sunday especially need to set aside time with God to restore their strength. Our ability to serve will be hindered if we neglect times of spiritual replenishment.

1:35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

Before the sun came up (the morning, while it was still very dark refers to the last watch of the night, between 3:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M.), Jesus went out to a deserted place, the same kind of place where he had met Satan's temptations (1:12-13). In that deserted place, alone and prior to any other activities, Jesus prayed. During his ministry on earth, Jesus was in constant prayer with the Father. Mark recorded three of these times of prayer: (1) after the successful ministry in Capernaum with the healing of many sick and demon-possessed people; (2) after the miracle of feeding more than five thousand people (6:46); (3) in Gethsemane, just prior to his arrest, trial, and crucifixion (14:32-42).

THE VITAL LINK

Jesus took time to pray. Jesus prayed when he was baptized (Luke 3:21), when he dealt with the crowds (Luke 5:16), and when he was transfigured (Luke 9:29). Before choosing the twelve disciples, Jesus spent the night praying to God (Luke 6:12). When people wanted to make him king, he prayed (Matthew 14:23 and John 6:15). He also prayed for individuals (Luke 22:32; see also Luke 9:18; 11:1).

Finding time to pray is not easy, but prayer is the vital link between us and God. If we attempt to live with little or no prayer in our lives, we may find our grace, strength, and peace diminished. We need the

mind of Christ to serve him. We cannot rely merely on spontaneous prayer, but must set aside time for prolonged and deeper communication with God. Like Jesus, we must break away from others to talk with God, even if we have to get up very early in the morning to do it!

What did Jesus pray about? In Mark 14:35–36, Jesus prayed for strength from God to fulfill his mission as planned. After his great successes with the crowds in Capernaum and on the mountainside, his prayers may have focused on fulfilling his mission as Suffering Servant, when it seemed (at least humanly) more strategic to be a conquering king. Popularity was a temptation in itself, for it threatened to turn Jesus away from his mission (“why I have come,” 1:38 NIV). Jesus had a mission to fulfill—and death on the cross was the key, for only Jesus’ death could accomplish salvation. Jesus, in his humanity, may have continued to face the temptation to turn away from the difficult path and take the easier one. He constantly needed strength from God. Going into the wilderness, alone with the Father, helped Jesus focus on his task and gain strength for what that task entailed.

1:36–37 Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” Apparently the people in Capernaum continued to arrive at Simon Peter’s house the next morning hoping to hear more of Jesus’ teaching and see him perform more miracles. When Jesus didn’t appear, perhaps people began to knock at Simon Peter’s door. When the disciples went to arouse Jesus, they discovered that he was gone. They were surprised that Jesus would not follow up on his great success from the previous day’s ministry in Capernaum, but instead disappeared before anyone awoke. So they went to look for him and bring him back. But Jesus had a mission to fulfill and a very limited time to accomplish it. Their words, Everyone is looking for you, anticipate the even greater popularity that awaited Jesus when he extended his ministry beyond Capernaum (see 1:45).

Jesus became a Human Philippians 2:6–8

2:6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Most scholars believe that verses 6–11 are

from a hymn sung by the early Christian church. Paul was using this hymn to show Jesus as a model of servanthood. Like Jesus, we are to seek and fulfill our place of service, even if it is lowly (2:6–8), and leave the glory to God (2:9–11) rather than seeking glory for ourselves (2:3). The passage holds many parallels to the prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. As a hymn, it was not meant to be a complete statement about the nature and work of Christ. It is not known if Paul wrote it or merely quoted it. The celebrated passage 1 Corinthians 13 demonstrates Paul's ability to write poetic pieces. Several key characteristics of Jesus Christ are praised in this passage:

- Christ has always existed with God.
- Christ is equal to God because he is God (John 1:1–14; Colossians 1:15–20).
- Though Christ is God, he became a man in order to fulfill God's plan of salvation for all people.
- Christ did not just have the appearance of being a man—he actually became human to identify with us.
- Christ voluntarily laid aside his divine rights and privileges out of love for his Father.
- Christ died on the cross for our sins so we wouldn't have to face eternal death.
- God glorified Christ because of his obedience.
- God raised Christ to his original position at the Father's right hand, where he will reign forever as our Lord and Judge.

This verse describes the status of Christ as he existed before the creation of the world—that is, his preincarnate state. The words *who being* in Greek are a present participle indicating continuing existence from the beginning (Genesis 1:1). Jesus Christ was not merely a human who lived for thirty-three years on this earth; instead, he existed with God before time began. In Jesus' prayer before his death, he said, "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5 NIV).

Jesus Christ is in very nature God. The Greek word translated "nature" (or "form"; Greek *morphe*) appears in the New Testament only here, in 2:7, and in Mark 6:12. It was generally used to describe the way

objects appear to the human senses. Yet scholars attest that Paul must have used it with a deeper meaning to describe the outward manifestation corresponding to and expressing the inward essence. Having the form of God means Christ expressed the very nature and character of God. In Jesus, we see what God is like.

In 2:7 there is a parallel to the meaning of *morphe*; it is expressed in the words “taking the form of a slave.” Jesus took on more than just the appearance of a slave, he took on servanthood. He became the ultimate expression of humility and service to others. God, in Jesus, dwelt among his people. It was this true claim made by Jesus that infuriated the religious leaders and ultimately caused Jesus to be sentenced to death (John 5:18; 10:33; Mark 14:63–64). But Jesus’ death was all part of God’s plan.

Jesus has equality with God. Everything God is, Christ is; the equality is in essential characteristics and divine attributes. But Jesus did not consider this equality something to be grasped. There are two schools of thought regarding these words about Jesus’ equality with God: (1) Christ did not have to seize or grasp his equality, it was already his, or (2) Christ did not consider his equality with God as something which he had to hold on to and not let slip from his grasp. Actually both ideas are true.

(1) Christ did not have to wrest equality from God. Scholars compare this attitude to Adam and Eve’s, who were tempted by Satan to become like God (Genesis 3:5). Using the analogy from Romans 5, the “first Adam” disobeyed God and yielded to a temptation to be like God. In disobedience, he grasped at something that was not rightfully his, and his pride caused him to lose the glory God had given. The “last Adam,” Jesus Christ, obeyed God. He willingly shed his glory in order to take on the form of fragile humanity. He endured hatred and horror; and when he had completed his task, he returned to his place of honor at God’s right hand.

(2) Christ did not cling to his equality, but set it aside for a time in order to become human. When Christ was born, God became a man. Jesus was not part man and part God; he was completely human and completely divine. Before Jesus came, people

could know God partially. Afterward, people could know God fully, because he became visible and tangible. Christ is the perfect expression of God in human form. As a man, Jesus was subject to place, time, and other human limitations. He did not give up his eternal power when he became human, but he did set aside his glory and his rights. In response to the Father's will, he limited his power and knowledge. What made Jesus' humanity unique was his freedom from sin. In his full humanity, we can see everything about God's character that can be conveyed in human terms.

As Christians, we must take Christ's example to heart. No one must flaunt his or her rights or authority, but instead should seek a life of service. The church also must serve, not promoting its own power, survival, or security. The church must not hoard its resources of people and treasure but should make them available to God's worldwide mission.

2:7 But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. The NRSV translates *eauton ekenosen* as "emptied himself." The word *ekenosen* was used by scholars to elaborate the "kenosis" theory of Christ's incarnation. The theory attempted to explain what Christ emptied himself of. What did Christ relinquish, divest, or renounce on becoming human? Much debate led to various proposals: (1) he emptied himself of his divine preincarnate glory; (2) he gave up the rights and authority of his deity; (3) he relinquished the independent use of his power and authority; (4) he limited the use of some of his attributes of deity—omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence. Other views differentiate and combine elements of this argument.

Recently, scholars say that this passage teaches nothing about what Christ gave up. Instead, a better interpretation would be that Christ voluntarily gave of himself, poured himself out, put himself on the line. So he made himself lowly. Taking the very nature (or form) of a servant was not an exchange, but an addition to his essential nature. The Incarnation was the act of the preexistent Son of God voluntarily assuming a human body and human nature. He did not give up his deity to become human.

Jesus was in very nature (*morphe*) God (2:6) and, upon his birth as a

human being, he took the form (morphe) of a slave. What appeared on earth was not a prince in a palace, or a royal king, or a wealthy and scholarly teacher; instead, Jesus' form or nature on this earth was best wrapped up in the social position of one whose entire life is devoted to serving others—a slave: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45 NIV). He was born in human likeness. He didn't look any different from anyone else, certainly not like a god. Isaiah had predicted, “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2 NRSV). He was born subject to the Jewish law (Luke 2:21; Galatians 4:4) and to his parents (Luke 2:51). He did not have great wealth, breeding, privilege, or position. He was, instead, a poor carpenter living in a dusty town in the Roman-occupied territory of Galilee. He got tired, hungry, and thirsty. While Jesus was fully human, his humanity was a “likeness.” The similarity stopped at the human nature's inborn tendency to sin. Jesus, though fully human, was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus didn't take on the form of just a human, but of a slave. He went far beyond any of us in any act of service. He made servanthood his essential mission: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45 NIV). This is the strongest theology of the Incarnation found anywhere in the New Testament (even beyond John 1:1–18). Jesus' glory and divinity were veiled by his humanity and mortality. While he walked as a human on this earth, Jesus Christ never ceased to be God.

2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! The Greek word for appearance here is not morphe as in 2:6–7; it is schema, meaning an outer appearance, rather than “nature” or “essence.” When Jesus took on a human body (that is, after he grew to manhood), he then humbled himself to accomplish that task for which he had come—to die for sinful humanity in order that they might have eternal life. All humans must die, but Jesus, as the divine Son, accepted death in obedience to the Father's will. This does not mean

that he was obedient “to death” as if death had any power over him; instead, Jesus obeyed the will of God to the point of death.

Jesus died the worst possible torture—death by crucifixion. Death on a cross was the form of capital punishment that Romans used for notorious criminals. It was excruciatingly painful and humiliating. Prisoners were nailed or tied to a cross and left to die. Death might not come for several days, and it usually came by suffocation when the weight of the weakened body made breathing more and more difficult. Jesus died as one who was cursed (Galatians 3:13). The writer to the Hebrews explained, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:7–8 NIV). Jesus’ human life was not a script that he passively followed. It was a life that he chose freely (John 10:17–18); it was a continuous process of making the will of God the Father his own. Jesus chose to obey, even though his obedience led to suffering and death.

GLORIOUS INCARNATION

When Christ was born, God became a man. He was not part man and part God; he was completely human and completely divine. After Christ came, people could know God fully because he became visible and tangible in Christ. (John 1:1–14)

The Good News is that Jesus Christ came as a human, was part of the Jewish royal line through David, died and was raised from the dead, and opened the door for God’s grace and kindness to be poured out on us. (Romans 1:2–5)

As a man, Jesus was subject to human limitations. He did not give up his eternal power when he became human, but he did set aside his glory and rights of his pre-incarnate state as equal with God. He became “poor” so that we could become “rich” in salvation and eternal life. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

As a man, Jesus lived a perfect life, and so he is a perfect example of how to live. As God, Jesus gives us the power to do what is right. It is possible to live a godly life—through following Christ. (1 Timothy 3:16) Jesus had to become human so that he could die and rise again, in

order to destroy the devil's power over death. Only then could Christ deliver those who had lived in fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14)

Christ is eternal, God came into the world as a human, and the apostles were eyewitnesses to Jesus' life. We have not seen Christ, but we can trust the writings of those who did see him. (1 John 1:1-3)

But why did Jesus have to become human in the first place? Why did he have to die? A holy God cannot overlook sin. The sinfulness of humanity had to be punished. In the Old Testament, God required his people to sacrifice animals ("perfect" animals, healthy and whole) to atone for their sins. The costly sacrifice of an animal's life impressed upon the sinner the seriousness of his or her sin before God. When animals' blood was shed, God regarded the people's faith and obedience, cleansed them, and made them ceremonially clean. Why blood? There is no greater symbol of life than blood; blood keeps us alive. "For the life of a creature is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11 NIV).

At the right time, God dealt once and for all with sin and its ultimate consequence, death and eternal separation from God. Instead of sending all humanity to eternal punishment, God took the punishment himself. "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin ..." (Romans 8:3 NRSV). Sin had to be punished, but the punishment was taken by God himself. Jesus shed his blood—gave his life—for our sins so that we wouldn't have to experience spiritual death and eternal separation from God. His sacrifice doesn't just make us ceremonially clean; it transforms our lives and hearts and makes us clean on the inside. Now all people are offered the opportunity to accept Christ's sacrifice on their behalf. How amazing that our God would lay aside his glory and power to face humiliation and torture in order to take the punishment we deserve. "Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15 NRSV).

Power of the Holy Spirit coming out of Jesus Luke 6:19

6:17-19 He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.

Jesus had been up on a mountainside praying through the night (6:12) before he had chosen his twelve disciples to whom he would give special training to carry on his work. Then he came down with them and stood on a level place from which he could continue to teach. Jesus' popularity had continued to grow, for there is not only a great crowd of his disciples (referring to all who were following him) but also a great multitude. People had come from Judea (the southernmost region of Israel), Jerusalem (the key city of Israel, in Judea), and the coast of Tyre and Sidon (Gentile cities to the far north on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea). Word of Jesus' authoritative teaching and healing power had spread, so they had come to hear him. Many others also had come to be healed of their diseases. This Gospel has already shown Jesus healing all manner of sickness and demon possession. Jesus did not disappoint those who came—those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. Luke the doctor gives us the detail that all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. Luke distinguished between those with physical illness and those possessed by demons. This Gospel also emphasizes Jesus' power, and explains here that when he healed, power came out from him. (For more on power, see 4:14, 36; 5:17; 8:46; 9:1; 10:19; 21:27; 24:49.) No one went away disappointed; he healed all of them.

Big decision prayer by Jesus Luke 6:12 - 13

After a night dedicated to prayer, Jesus chose twelve men to be his apostles—his representatives. Whatever Jesus' specific reasons for choosing each disciple, as a group they were often hot-tempered, unbelieving, and "clueless" about the spiritual realities behind Jesus' ministry. One became a traitor, and all of them abandoned Jesus when following him meant sacrifice and hardship. The apostles proved the truth of Jesus' words: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16 NIV).

The better that Christians come to know the weaknesses of the disciples, the more they can see that God has freely chosen them, also. God's grace can overcome any human trait that can mar believers' effectiveness—even the sin that so horribly corrupts them. Believers who are aware of their unworthiness to merit God's mercy and love are in the best position to experience what he can do for them and through them.

6:12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. Luke continued his narrative without giving exact reference to time frames—one of those days. Jesus' enemies had revealed their stubborn hearts and refusal to see him for who he was; his ministry was increasing as people crowded in to hear him. Jesus knew that he would not be long on the earth, so the continuing task of spreading the good news of the kingdom would be entrusted to a group of human beings whom he must choose. This was a daunting task and Jesus needed the Father's help. So Jesus went to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. This was not a quick call for help while Jesus followed his instincts; this was an intense conversation as Jesus sought his Father's guidance in this supremely important task. (For more on Luke's theology of prayer, see the commentary on 5:16.)

PRAY FIRST

Jesus never wrote any books. He never led any church-growth conferences or revival meetings. He left no organizational charts for us to follow. His one and only method for founding and building up his church was the men whom he called to follow him. These men were his legacy, his "organization." There was no plan B. No wonder he spent an extended period of time in prayer before choosing them. What a contrast to the way that Christians operate so much of the time, making decisions and then asking God to bless them. How much better the decisions would be, how much more effective the work and healthy the churches, if believers would follow Jesus' model: pray first—really pray—and then act. Do you have a major decision (or several) on the horizon? Commit your decisions to the Lord in prayer.

The Christians prayed, and the power of the Holy Spirit was displayed Acts 12:5-18

The rapid growth of the church in Jerusalem (6:1) brought fierce opposition (8:1). Persecution often accompanies progress. Unable to stop the masses from embracing this new faith, the Jews launched a direct attack upon the Christian leaders. Beyond mere threats and warnings (see 4:18–21; 5:40), this time Herod had James executed and Peter arrested.

These were tense and traumatic times, but the church began to pray “very earnestly” (12:5 NLT). It is important to remember that God was not finished with the church at Jerusalem nor the Jewish element of Christianity just because the emphasis would soon shift to Paul and the Gentile outreach. God was still using Jewish believers for his work.

12:1 About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. The church was growing dramatically, but the king was increasing the persecution. This was King Herod Agrippa I, the son of Aristobulus and grandson of Herod the Great. His sister was Herodias, who had been responsible for the death of John the Baptist (see Mark 6:17–28). Herod Agrippa I was partly Jewish. The Romans had appointed him to rule over most of Palestine, including the territories of Galilee, Perea, Judea, and Samaria. He persecuted the Christians in order to please the Jewish leaders who opposed them, hoping to solidify his position. Agrippa is mentioned in the Bible only in this chapter. He died suddenly in A.D. 44 (see 12:20–23), a fact also recorded by the historian Josephus.

Agrippa related fairly well to his Jewish subjects. Because he had a Jewish grandmother of royal blood (Mariamne), he was grudgingly accepted by the people. In his youth he was temporarily imprisoned by the emperor Tiberias; in due course he was trusted by Rome and got along well with the emperors Caligula and Claudius.

The Christian movement created an unexpected opportunity for Herod to gain new favor with the Jews. Gentiles began to be accepted into the church in large numbers. Many Jews had been tolerating this new movement as a sect within Judaism, but its rapid growth alarmed them. Persecution of Christians was revived, and even the apostles were not spared. Agrippa orchestrated the first execution of an apostle, James, followed by the imprisonment of Peter.

FAMILY TIES

Four generations of the Herod family are mentioned in the Bible. Unfortunately, each of the Herods left behind an evil legacy: Herod the Great murdered Bethlehem's children; Herod Antipas was involved in Jesus' trial and John the Baptist's execution; Herod Agrippa I murdered the apostle James; Herod Agrippa II was one of Paul's judges. This is a prime example that for good or evil, parents have a lasting and powerful influence on their offspring. Traits and qualities are passed on to the next generation, and often the mistakes and sins of the parents are repeated by the children. What example are you setting for your children? It is not what we say that counts, but how we live. They will copy our actions more than they will listen to our lectures.

12:2 He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. James and John were two of the original twelve disciples who followed Jesus. They had asked Jesus for special recognition in his kingdom (Mark 10:35–40). Jesus said that to be a part of his kingdom would mean suffering with him (“drinking from the same cup”—Mark 10:38–39). James and John did indeed suffer—Herod executed James, and later John was exiled (see Revelation 1:9). These two brothers were the first and the last apostles to die. Their lives and ministries somewhat parallel two of the “seven” from 6:1–6—Stephen and Philip. In the sovereign plan of God, one was taken early, and the other was left to minister for many years. These are reminders again that believers have a “General” in charge of the troops, who will send, move, protect, and then bring home his soldiers as he sees fit. See also John 21:20–22, where Peter inquires about how he and John might die. Christ's answer was, “What is that to you? You follow me” (NLT). This illustrates the devoted service that Jesus' disciples should render to him.

There is a great deal to be learned here from what did not happen to James and what did happen to Peter later in this chapter. Imagine being a part of both prayer meetings. The church surely had prayed as fervently for James as they did for Peter. The church may have been praying at the same location, involving most of the same people, perhaps even the same servant girl (Rhoda—see 12:1–3). Peter was miraculously set free. James, however, was killed with the sword (referring to beheading).

THE FATE OF THE APOSTLES

Name: Simon Peter

Fate: Crucified

Name: James, son of Zebedee

Fate: Martyred by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1-2)

Name: John, son of Zebedee

Fate: Exiled to Patmos; later died of old age (one legend is that Domitian had John thrown into a pot of boiling oil, but he was unharmed)

Name: Andrew

Fate: According to tradition, was crucified (in the form of an X) at Patrae, a city of Achaia, because he rebuked Aegeas, the proconsul for idolatry

Name: Philip

Fate: According to tradition, died as a martyr at Hierapolis

Name: Bartholomew/Nathanael

Fate: Said to have preached the gospel in India or perhaps Armenia where conflicting reports have him flayed alive or crucified upside down

Name: Matthew/Levi

Fate: According to legend, preached in unspecified foreign nations

Name: Thomas

Fate: According to tradition, preached in Parthia and Persia and died as a martyr by being speared with a lance

Name: James, son of Alphaeus

Fate: Not known

Name: Thaddaeus/Judas, son of James

Fate: Not known

Name: Simon the Zealot

Fate: Not known

Name: Judas Iscariot

Fate: Committed suicide by hanging himself (Matthew 27:5; Acts 1:18)

Name: Matthias

Fate: According to tradition, went to Ethiopia to minister where he was eventually martyred

Name: Saul/Paul

Fate: According to tradition, was beheaded at Nero's command along the Appian Way

Was there something wrong with the way the believers prayed for James as opposed to Peter? The wrong words? Scriptures? posture? Was there not enough faith? Did God love Peter more than James? The answer to all these questions is, of course, no, but they are the kinds of questions Christians invariably ask when faced with such a clear example of the contrasting will of God for two lives. The sovereign choices of God in the lives of these two apostles—equally loved by God, needed by the church, and missed by their friends and family—should teach believers to trust God more.

12:3-4 When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish leaders, he arrested Peter during the Passover celebration and imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod's intention was to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover.

Herod, in the self-serving spirit of the previous Herods of the New Testament (see the chart "The Herod Family" on page 417 [25:21-22]), took special delight in the positive political benefits he received from executing James. Herod Agrippa's uncle was Herod Antipas, who had participated in the execution of Christ (Luke 3:1; 23:6-12), and his grandfather was Herod the Great—the paranoid murderer of Bethlehem babies as he attempted to kill the newborn Christ (Matthew 2:1-17). Since James's execution pleased the Jewish leaders, Herod

Agrippa then arrested Peter during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the week-long festival directly following Passover. This was a strategic move since more Jews were in the city than usual, and Herod could impress the most Jews by imprisoning the most visible of the church leaders.

Peter was well guarded by four squads of four soldiers each—each squad would have guarded Peter for one-fourth of a day! Evidently, Herod knew of Peter's previous escape (5:19–24) and wanted to be sure that such would not happen this time. Luke stressed this detail to set the scene for the mighty power of God. No one could escape under human power alone. Herod planned to give Peter a public trial after the Passover.

12:5 While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him. Herod undoubtedly was planning to execute Peter, but the believers were praying fervently for Peter's safety. The earnest prayer of the church significantly affected the outcome of these events. The Greek structure of this sentence emphasizes the contrast here between the imprisoned apostle and the prayers of the saints. On the one hand, Peter was kept. On the other, prayers were sent. Something was bound to happen. The believers are here called the church, a clearly identified entity in Jerusalem.

PETER'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE FROM PRISON / 12:6-19

James was already dead. Peter was in prison. From a human perspective, the situation appeared terribly grim, but from a heavenly perspective, this was just another opportunity to display the infinite power of God—"the rulers plot together against the LORD.... but the one who rules in heaven laughs. The LORD scoffs at them" (Psalm 2:2, 4 NLT).

When an angel of the Lord miraculously delivered Peter from prison, Herod left for Caesarea (12:19). The plan and purposes of God cannot be thwarted. Jesus assured his followers, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).

This section of Acts is one of the most exciting and most humorous

scenes in the whole book: exciting, because Peter was in jail and was prayed out by a faithful, fervent, praying church; humorous, because this praying church didn't really believe God had answered their prayer even when they had their answer in the flesh at the front door of their prayer meeting. This chapter teaches a great deal about prayers, answers, and the God who is behind them all.

12:6 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. Peter, a few years later, would write these words in one of his letters: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23 NIV).

Luke carefully recorded the location of the soldiers (12:4) in charge of making sure this reputed jail-breaking apostle (5:19–24) did not slip away again and leave Herod with a serious public-relations problem. Two soldiers were chained to Peter, one on either side, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Luke again stressed the power of God over earthly rulers. Herod was doing his best to prevent another escape. But it would not be enough.

12:7–8 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." This same type of jailbreak had happened to the apostles before, as recorded in 5:19–24, but more detail is given here. From his sleep, Peter was roused by an angel tapping him on the side and was told, "Get up quickly." The command was accompanied by his chains falling off his wrists. The term for "falling off" comes from the Greek word *ekipto*, meaning to "drop away." Evidently, neither the angel nor Peter touched the chains—they came off because God was setting Peter free.

ANGELS

God sent an angel to rescue Peter. Angels are God's messengers. They are divinely created beings with supernatural powers. In the Bible

they are depicted as occasionally taking on human appearance in order to talk to people. Although angels are heavenly beings, they should not be worshiped because they are not divine (Colossians 2:18; Hebrews 1:13–14). Angels are God’s servants, just as we are. Worship Jesus! That’s what the angels do (Luke 2:13–14; Hebrews 1:6). As the writer of Hebrews notes, “God’s Son is far greater than the angels” (Hebrews 1:4 NLT).

One can picture the groggy Peter, thinking that he was dreaming (12:9), needing the instruction of his angelic liberator to help him get his clothes on. Peter complied with the angel’s directions, but he had to be reminded to put on his coat (“Wrap your cloak around you”). Then he followed the angel out of the cell.

Nothing is written about the whereabouts of the guards, who were likely not the only prison guards around. A couple of them would have been posted at every gate, every door, and at any possible escape route from the prison. The soldiers may have been dazed, asleep, or blinded from the whole event. In the end, it would be a deadly miracle for them (12:19).

12:9–10 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. 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. Peter seemed dazed as he followed the angel’s instructions because he thought he was seeing a vision. Peter thought this was similar to his experience with the sheet let down from heaven, recorded in chapter 10 (the same word is used here for “vision” that was used for his vision at Joppa in 10:17). Though Peter was following the angel as they made their way out of the prison, he was not really aware of what was really happening.

They passed two sets of guards before arriving at the iron gate which led to the city. With dramatic effect, the gate mysteriously, miraculously opened for them by itself (the Greek is *automate* —“automatically”), and they passed through it into the city. The angel stayed with Peter a little longer, then suddenly left Peter alone.

12:11 Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” Whether Peter just took a while to wake up or there was something about the angel’s work that had him dazed, and the night air brought him to, is unknown. The text just says Peter came to himself and, speaking to himself, verbalized his confidence that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me. The term translated “rescued” means to “deliver or save” and implies a daring rescue, just in the nick of time.

Peter also verbalized his awareness of Herod’s motives and Herod’s plans to use Peter’s incarceration (and possible execution) as another way to ingratiate himself to the Jews (all that the Jewish people were expecting). Peter’s awareness of his life-threatening situation, particularly in light of the recent execution of James (see 12:2), made his peaceful sleep in the prison cell all the more marvelous. Peter had seen enough to trust that the Father was in control of his life.

12:12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Once he realized that he was not dreaming, Peter went directly to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark. John Mark, mentioned here in passing, was the author of the Gospel of Mark and became an important character on the first journey of Paul (see 13:5, 13; 15:37–39).

Mary’s house was large enough to accommodate a meeting of many believers. An upstairs room in her house may have been the location of Jesus’ last supper with his disciples (Luke 22:8) and/or the place where the 120 earliest believers met for prayer (1:15; 2:1). Evidently Mary’s home was a common place of meeting for the Jerusalem church (or part of it), at least for prayer. This particular night, with their beloved Peter in prison and the apostle James recently martyred, a large group had gathered and [was] praying.

12:13–15 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When

she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel." This is a comical scene. Peter knocked at the outer entrance. Rhoda, the servant girl, answered the door. Mary's house must have had a vestibule or hallway to the street with an outer door at the street and an inner door opening into the house. Rhoda was so excited to hear Peter's voice that she forgot to open the door! Meanwhile, the sober, serious saints, hard at the work of praying for Peter's release, failed to realize that the answer to their prayer was standing at the door, trying to get in! They even went so far as to accuse the poor girl of being crazy (out of your mind). At her insistence, they speculated that maybe Peter's angel was at the door, indicating they thought that he must have been executed already! Luke records their reaction but doesn't comment on it. Evidently, Jewish superstition believed that guardian angels could appear and look like the person they guarded. No one went to open the door!

12:16 Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally went out and opened the door, they were amazed.

One wonders what was going through this usually impatient apostle's mind at this point. Certainly, his absence from prison would be noticed soon. The guards would likely know exactly where to look for him. The servant girl had recognized Peter's voice, but the others, so busy praying for Peter's release, wouldn't come to the door to let the freed apostle into the house! If ever people should stop praying and do something, that was the time!

As Peter continued knocking, someone finally went to the outer door and opened it. Everyone was amazed (in Greek, *exestesan*—the word is used in 10:45 to describe the reaction of the Jewish believers who had witnessed the Holy Spirit coming to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius).

12:17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place. The pandemonium was so loud that Peter had to quiet the crowd by motioning with his hand. He recounted

the story of his escape (though an angel had been used, it was the Lord who had brought him out of prison).

Peter instructed that the information about this miracle be passed on to James and the brothers. This James was Jesus' brother, who became a leader in the Jerusalem church (15:13; Galatians 1:19). The James who had been killed earlier (12:2) was John's brother and one of the original twelve disciples. Peter's instruction to inform James indicates that James may have already been recognized as one of the leaders (if not the leader) of the Jerusalem church. Perhaps through this very series of events and this statement before the gathered church, Peter was officially moving out of direct leadership of the Jerusalem believers. Possibly he sensed that this latest brush with Herod was God's sovereign shifting of him to plow another field.

In short order, likely because of his certainty that Herod's soldiers would be after him, Peter left for another place. It is unknown exactly where he went.

12:18-19 At dawn, there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter. Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn't be found, Herod interrogated the guards and sentenced them to death. Afterward Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while. Meanwhile, back at the prison, there was a great commotion. Under Roman law, guards who allowed a prisoner to escape were subject to the same punishment the prisoner was to receive. Their lives were on the line, so a commotion was in order! After a thorough search for Peter, these sixteen guards were sentenced ... to death.

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Program, Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, Guzik, David, Life Application Bible Commentary, Factbook Logos bible, Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1995, Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. Barton, Bruce B. 1996, Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. Acts. Life Application Bible Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, Barton, Bruce B., David Veerman, Linda Chaffee Taylor, and Grant R. Osborne. 1997. Luke. Life Application Bible Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1995. Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Mark. Life Application Bible

Sermon Notes:

Wk 4 In His Footsteps: “Praying Strategically”

Well, as announced this last Sunday, Meg & I spent this past week at the Vineyard National Conference. The only downside of the Conference was that it was in Ohio... The home of the Buckeyes. Unfortunately, the National Vineyard Director (Jay Pathik) is a Buckeye, and at Opening night we had to listen to how Ohio State won the National Championship last year... Blah Blah Blah.

Jay failed to mention a couple important facts: #1 Michigan beat OSU the last 2 years during the regular season... And we won the National Championship in 2024. Also, who has a mascot as a Nut? Totally weak. So... Can anything good come out of Ohio? Yes. We had 10 anointed services in 4 days that flushed any hatred we had against OSU.

No, seriously, all joking aside, we had a great time of refreshing and renewal and let me just say our Vineyard USA Family is doing great, and the Lord is saving souls through Vineyard Churches globally all around the world. Here is a fun, joyous fact that you should be aware of: There are over 2,000 Vineyard Churches outside the USA, representing 100 different countries. Part of our tithes and offerings goes to planting these churches and saving souls.

Very quick, before we pray, here are the AVC Connections:

- YouTube
- App
- Facebook/Website

[Let's Pray]

We are in a Summer Sermon Series titled “In His Footsteps.” We are comparing the Gospels of Jesus to the actions of the Early Church and Christians in the New Testament. There is no getting around it: the Christians and Churches followed in Jesus Christ's footsteps. Today, we are going to get into a powerful topic that can change your life. I titled this week's sermon “Praying Strategically” (2 Parts).

The Gospel of Mark records this important fact about Jesus' spiritual rhythm of life:

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and left the house and went to a solitary place to pray. Simon (Peter) and his companions went to look for Jesus, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'" (Mark 1:35-36)

I personally believe this became an inside joke with the Disciples: "LOL, is Jesus gone again? It's time to go get Jesus—someone find him. LOL."

In case you don't know this, Jesus did some profound supernatural miracles in His ministry. You might say, "Well, of course He did, He is Jesus." Yes, you're right, but we must not forget the very important detail and truth:

"[Jesus] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness... and being found in appearance as a man... he humbled himself and was obedient to death on the cross." (Philippians 2:6-8)

A theologian named Eugene Peterson comments on this fact: "Having become human, he stayed human. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived selfless... and then died a selfless, obedient death."

John says: "Jesus became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (John 1:14)

So, where was Jesus all the time? He was strategically praying to God the Father and receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit to do life and ministry. Here's some of the supernatural results from Jesus praying strategically:

"The people tried to touch Jesus, because there was power coming out of him, healing them all." (Luke 6:19)

Jesus said: "Someone touched me; I know because power has gone out from me." (Luke 8:46)

Last week at the Conference, I had this opportunity to pray with people I didn't know at all after ministry time began,

and some words of wisdom were given.

- I went forward as the altar was filled with what appeared to be hundreds of people.
- As I began to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to come, powerful things began to happen.
- Words of wisdom and prophecy over these people moved them in bodily form.

Here's the deal: I and others were strategically praying over people for specific things. Can everyone say this?

We will say it twice: "I need to pray strategically for specific things in my life."

At the Conference, I received prayer from a soon-to-be missionary (who, by the way, was leaving a six-figure income to go rescue children in Honduras).

- He strategically prayed for me about a request I made.
- He laid his hands on me, and there was electricity that came from his hands into my head, and power was moving through my whole body.

Friends, praying strategically is a Biblical truth. It will change your life and family.

Listen: when Jesus made big decisions, He prayed.

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles." (Luke 6:12-13)

I want to close with this powerful story and the Early Church praying strategically:

Read Acts 12:5-18

"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.' When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, 'Peter is at the door!' 'You're out of your mind,' they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, 'It must be his angel.' But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. 'Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,' he said, and then he left for another place. In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter."

Friends, we must pray strategically. It will change your life and family.

Devotional Questions

Read the following questions and reflect on these devotional questions:

Mark 1:35-36

1. Jesus often withdrew to solitary places to pray. How can you incorporate intentional solitude and focused prayer times into your own life to prepare strategically for daily challenges and decisions?
2. Considering how Jesus prioritized prayer early in the morning, what does this teach you about setting a specific time for strategic prayer, and how might this intentional practice align your heart with God's will for your day?

Philippians 2:6-8

1. Reflecting on Jesus' humility and His choice to take on the nature of a servant, how can you strategically pray for a heart that mirrors Christ's humility in your interactions and decisions?
2. How does understanding Jesus' obedience unto death, even death on a cross, shape your strategic prayer life when faced with difficult situations calling for sacrifice and faithfulness?

Luke 6:19

1. Given that people sought Jesus for healing by touching Him, how can you strategically pray for opportunities to reach out in faith to Christ for healing in your life and in the lives of those around you?
2. How can you pray with a strategic mindset to be used as a vessel of God's healing power, just as people came to Jesus for healing power to be released from Him?

Luke 6:12-13

1. Before making a significant decision in choosing the apostles, Jesus spent the entire night in prayer. How can you adopt a practice of extended strategic prayer when faced with critical decisions in your own life?
2. How does Jesus' example of praying before choosing His disciples encourage you to seek divine guidance through strategic prayer in forming and nurturing important relationships?

Acts 12:5-18

1. The early church fervently prayed for Peter while he was in prison. How does this demonstrate the power of communal and strategic prayer in times of crisis, and how can you incorporate this practice within your faith community?
2. Reflect on the miraculous outcome of the church's prayers for Peter's release. How can you strategically pray with expectation and faith for God to work powerfully in seemingly impossible situations?