

Christian student ministry workers in Sweden developed a series of questions to ask when reading a Bible passage. Called the “Swedish Method” because of its origins, these questions can be used when reading the Bible by yourself or with others.

The daily readings in this family worship guide have a few questions. However, we encourage you, as appropriate for your family, to ask the following general questions of the text each day.



Is there something that ‘shines’ from the passage—whatever impacts most, or draws attention?



Is there something you don’t understand, or a question the passage raises in your mind?



Is there a personal application to your life?



Is there something you plan to share with someone else – and who will you share it with?



How do ideas in the passage interrelate? Or with other passages in this book – or in the whole Bible?

Worshipping Together is part of the vision and is a ministry of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Frankston, Victoria, Australia. frankstonrp.org.au bit.ly/WTrpcaf

The concept and layout draws heavily from *Let’s Worship God*, a ministry of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Airdrie, Scotland. airdrierpcs.org

The readings are from Tim Chester’s 3-year weekly reading plan. bit.ly/WkBbl or bit.ly/3yrBbl

The quote on the cover is from the article *What Shampoo and Family Worship Have in Common*, Written by Randy Greenwald, (Quoted from *Tabletalk* magazine, Nov 1997.)

Notes this week are drawn in part from commentaries on Acts by John Calvin, Bob Utley, Simon Kistemaker, Gordon Fee/James Stuart, and Kent Hughes, and notes from the HCSB Study Bible, and the Reformation Study Bible

Worshipping Together



We love God because He first loved us.

And we love to tell God that we love Him.

Joyful and faithful worship together twice each Lord’s Day is the highlight of our week. We are glad that they said, “Let us go to the House of the Lord.” Corporate worship prepares us for the week and prepares us for Heaven.

In addition, we regularly worship God as families and as individuals.

One father put it this way:

The back of my shampoo bottle says, “Lather, rinse, repeat.” Simple enough that even I can do it. Though family worship may be a bit more complicated than shampooing hair, it ought not to be rated with “home dentistry” in the scale of difficulty.



If you could buy family worship in the store, it would come in the form of a Bible, and the directions would simply say, “Read, pray, repeat.” Men should gather their families at least once daily. They should read a portion of the Scriptures to them. And they should pray with them. There need be no fireworks or pizzazz to keep the kids interested. There needs to be only a father* with a heart-love for God – who desires to see that love appropriated by his children.*

Read, pray, repeat.

* Fathers leading their family in worship is always the goal. When, in the Lord’s providence, the father is absent or uninterested, a godly mother will lead her children

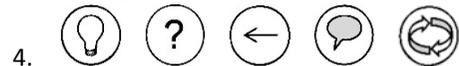
Reading Acts 12:1-3 James the martyr

Notes (See back page for authors)
Remember that Acts is, as Fee/Stuart note, *part 2 of Luke's account of the good news about Jesus; how by the power of the Spirit the good news spread from Jerusalem to Rome*. But good news doesn't spread in a vacuum. And often throughout history, as the good news has spread, so has the opposition to the good news. Now we face that again in Acts 12.

I fear that we may read these 2 verses somewhat numbed by familiarity. Yep, James died at Herod's sword. But, we might think, the bit about Peter's rescue and escape as the church prayed – that is the bit we get moved by. I suggest we should be numbed by these 2 verses – but with grief rather than familiarity.

King Jesus had given Herod the authority to use the sword (Rom 13:4) and now Herod, in a defiant rebellion against the King of Kings, swung it against Him. Although ultimately the One who sits in Heaven laughs at men and ruler's rebellion against Him, "Jesus wept" would not be shocking words to read here as James (one of the inner-3 disciples, John's brother – not James who was Jesus' brother and who wrote the book named after himself) gives his life for the sake of the gospel.

- Questions** (see back page for explanation of symbols)
1. Who was this James?
 2. Why was he killed by Herod?
 3. Who gave Herod the power of the sword?



- Praise Pray** Psalm 145a²
1. As you pray, weep with those who weep because of persecution for Christ's sake
 2. Pray for a member of your church
 3. Pray for your family
 4. Pray for a non-Christian friend/family member

¹ You will notice we only have a printed guide for 6 days. We recommend each Lord's Day you review the previous week's readings and/or the previous or current week's sermons and pray together

² Psalm selections are taken from the *Book of Psalms for Worship*. We encourage our congregation to sing the same selection each day for a week to gain familiarity with the selection

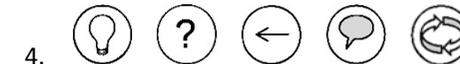
Reading Acts 12:24 Then God's message flourished

Notes (See back page for authors)
Kistemaker comments that *after Herod's death, the Roman emperor appointed a governor to rule the land of the Jews. The Christians once again enjoyed freedom from persecution. As a result, the church continued to increase numerically. Luke implies that the messengers of the gospel went everywhere with the Good News. Wherever these ministers proclaimed the message of salvation, there the church was strengthened in the faith and supported by numerous additional believers*.

After the pain of James's death, the fear for Peter's life, we might expect the church to hunker down and hide. Yet God is showing Himself more powerful than the rulers of this world. He raises them up and He puts them down. And Jesus is building His church!

Calvin comments that *when the tyrant was once taken out of the way the Church was suddenly delivered, as it were, out of the jaws of the wolf. Therefore, though the faithful be accounted as sheep appointed to be slain, (Ps 44:23,) yet the Church always out-lives her enemies; and though the word of God seem often to be oppressed with the wicked tyranny of men, yet it gets up the head again by and by, (Rom. 8:37.) For Luke determined not only what had happened after that Herod was dead, but also by this example to encourage us, that we may be assured that God will do that, in all ages, which he then did, to the end the gospel may at length break through all impediments of the enemies, and that the more the Church is diminished, it may the more increase through the heavenly blessing*.

- Questions** (see back page for explanation of symbols)
1. What did God do to cause His message to flourish?
 2. What missionaries do we meet here?
 3. How does Luke's account encourage us today?



- Praise Pray** Psalm 145a
1. Pray that you will be encouraged with and used in God's message spreading
 2. Pray for your family
 3. Pray for a non-Christian friend/family member
 4. Pray for the reading and preaching of God's word tomorrow

Worshipping Together

Reading Acts 12:18-23 Kiss the Son, lest you be destroyed

Notes (See back page for authors)
Where's Wally³? A fun picture game to find a well hidden, but distinctively hatted man. Now, for Herod and the prison guards, it was, "Where's Peter?". And it was not a game. And it was not fun.

The Greek literally says that "there was no small commotion." Utley notes that *this phrase is characteristic of Luke's writing (cf. 14:28; 15:2; 17:4, 12; 19:23, 24; 27:20). The understatement accentuates the event.* When the "Where's Peter" search turned up fruitless (I suspect the authorities also knew the church met for prayer at Mary's house and did a thorough search there.) the 16 guards were executed. Again, Utley notes that *if a guard lost his prisoner, he had to bear the prisoner's punishment.*

After Herod executed the guards he went to Caesarea. A peace delegation from Tyre and Sidon came to meet with him there. As Herod rose to deliver a sort of "peace prize acceptance speech" the crowds, obviously awed by his appearance and by his speaking skills, praised him as a god. As Herod basked in their adulation, the True God in Heaven sent His Angel of Death to destroy Herod. Calvin notes that *this is certain, that even when he was yet alive he was corrupt with stink and rottenness, so that he was, as it were, a living carcase.* Kiss the Son, lest you be destroyed (Psalm 2:12)

- Questions** (see back page for explanation of symbols)
1. Where was Peter?
 2. How and why were the guards destroyed?
 3. How and why was Herod destroyed?
 4.     

- Praise Pray** Psalm 145a
1. Rejoice in prayer that God rules over all and judges justly
 2. Pray for a member of your church
 3. Pray for your family
 4. Pray for a non-Christian friend/family member

Worshipping Together

Reading Acts 12:1-5 Peter in prison, the church in prayer

Notes (See back page for authors)
Because Herod was a man-pleaser and not one who feared the Lord, when he saw that killing James won him favour with the Jews, he proceeded to put Peter in prison and prepare to kill him too, after Passover. (We are now some 14 years after the Passover after which Jesus was killed – and raised.)

Kistemaker notes how serious Herod was about Peter's imprisonment. *Herod assigned sixteen soldiers to guard Peter: four squads of four soldiers each. The soldiers were subject to execution if their prisoner escaped (v. 19); Peter's treatment was approximately equivalent to that of a modern maximum-security prisoner...Herod Agrippa wanted to be absolutely certain that this time Peter could not escape.*

The church had to have been reeling at the shock of James' sudden execution. Now, Peter, the primary spokesman for the early church, was facing execution too in just a few days. As Hughes comments, *the beleaguered Jerusalem church seemed overwhelmed and helpless. There was nothing they could do.*

But of course, there was something they could do. They made earnest prayer to God for Peter. And they, and Herod, would be astounded by the power of God in responding to His people praying!

- Questions** (see back page for explanation of symbols)
1. Why did Herod put Peter in prison?
 2. What sort of guard was set up for Peter?
 3. What could the helpless church possibly do?
 4.     

- Praise Pray** Psalm 145a
1. Rejoice in God's power to respond to His people praying
 2. Pray for a member of your church
 3. Pray for your family
 4. Pray for a non-Christian friend/family member

³ "Waldo" in the USA. We love nicknames in Oz!

Reading Acts 12:5-11 Peter is rescued

Notes
(See back page for authors)

As Peter is under heavy guard in prison, the church is under heavy prayer. Kistemaker comments that *as long as Peter was kept in prison the church offered continuous prayer for him. The text speaks of fervent prayer, which signifies that the church prayed ardently and with heart, soul, and mind implored God for Peter's release.*

As the church is at prayer God is at work. Notice first of all that the night before Peter is to be executed, he is sleeping. This could be due to the exhaustion of his circumstances and his grief. It could also be (Luke doesn't tell us) due to his trust in the Lord to care for him even in this desperate situation. We can always lie down and sleep in peace, because the Lord keeps us. (Psalm 4:8)

As Peter sleeps in peace, God's angel wakes him up. Though the bright light shining suddenly in the cell didn't wake Peter, an angelic kick in the side did. He obediently got up, got dressed, and followed the angel out of prison, certain that this was all just a lovely dream. Having passed the 8 on-duty soldiers as if they weren't there, Peter and the angel walk out of the prison. Kistemaker notes that *the angel and Peter passed through the gates as if someone opened them. In the Greek, Luke uses the word automatē, from which we derive the expression automatically. This heavy gate opened by itself.* And Peter realised it was not a dream – but was better! His Lord had rescued him!

Questions
(see back page for explanation of symbols)

1. What is the church doing while Peter is in prison?
2. Why can we sleep in peace, even during times of trouble?
3. How does Peter wake up and get out of jail?

4.     

Praise Pray

- Psalm 145a
1. Rejoice in God's power to respond to His people praying
 2. Pray for a member of your church
 3. Pray for your family
 4. Pray for a non-Christian friend/family member

Reading Acts 12:11-17 Peter rescued? You're crazy!

Notes
(See back page for authors)

As soon as Peter realised his escape was not a happy dream, but rather a happy providence of his Lord's rescue, he wanted the church to know. Luke doesn't tell us how Peter knew, but he knew where to go. Perhaps the only reasonable expectation for Peter was that the church would be gathered, praying. (Remember too, it was the middle of the night!) It appears that Mary's house was a common place for the church to gather to pray. (Mary was mother to John Mark, later missionary assistant to Saul and Barnabas, and even later, writer of the gospel bearing his surname)

So, Peter went there. The church was praying. Peter was knocking. Rhoda answered, but didn't open the door in her excitement. Instead she went to interrupt the prayer meeting. "Peter's at the door!" "You're crazy!" they said. And, I imagine, then said, "Let's get back to praying that God will somehow rescue Peter."

Finally they let Peter in and rejoice in the Lord's delivery. Peter tells them to tell James (Jesus' brother, and one of the leaders in the Jerusalem church), then he goes to ground.

Had Jesus been there in the flesh, I think that He would have said, "Oh, you of little faith." The church was praying, hope against hope, that God would deliver Peter. But obviously they didn't really think God would. God could, they were sure. But would He do it? Don't we often pray that way? Might we, instead, pray believing. God can, and God does, answer prayer!

Questions
(see back page for explanation of symbols)

1. Why did Peter go to Mary's house?
2. What happened when he knocked at the gate?
3. Why is it hard in praying to believe that God will answer?

4.     

Praise Pray

- Psalm 145a
1. Rejoice in prayer that God answers prayer
 2. Pray for a member of your church
 3. Pray for your family