Preschool–Grade 6

Rhoda and Peter in Prison

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: Pray without ceasing, and expect God to answer. He can answer while we are still praying.
Bible passage: Acts 12:1–17. Students read it out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." *Acts 12:5 (KJV)* and "Pray without ceasing." *1 Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Acts 12:1–19. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses. Students read 12:5–17 out loud; you sum up verses 1–4 yourself (see part 2).

1. Opening game: Do I Really Expect It? (5–10 minutes)

Read each statement and let students vote with a thumb up (agree), thumb down (disagree) or sideways (not sure): 1) When I pray for something, I expect God to answer. 2) If God doesn't answer right away, it's OK to stop praying. 3) Praying together with other people matters. 4) I'd be surprised if God answered a prayer of mine this week. After each, ask: *Why do you think that?* Say: "Today we read about a church that kept on praying, and was astonished when the answer knocked at the door."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

First sum up Acts 12:1–4 yourself: "Herod the king began to vex the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword. When he saw it pleased the Jews, he took Peter too, put him in prison, and gave him to sixteen soldiers to keep him." **Then read out loud: Acts 12:5–17.** Students take turns, a verse or two each. Old words in this passage:

- **vex** (12:1): trouble and hurt; **quaternions** (12:4): groups of four soldiers
- **without ceasing** (12:5): without stopping; **keepers** (12:6): guards
- **smote** (12:7): struck; **gird thyself** (12:8): put on your belt; **cast thy garment about thee**: put on your coat
- **wist not** (12:9): did not know; **vision**: something God shows, like a dream
- **ward** (12:10): a guard post; **of his own accord**: by itself; **forthwith**: right away
- **of a surety** (12:11): for sure; **expectation**: what people were waiting to see
- **surname** (12:12): last name; **damsel** (12:13): young girl; **hearken**: listen
- **gladness** (12:14): great joy; **thou art mad** (12:15): you are out of your mind; **constantly affirmed**: kept saying
- **astonished** (12:16): amazed; **beckoning** (12:17): waving; **hold their peace**: be quiet; **shew**: tell

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Look closer. Point out these details with the class:

- **The danger was real.** Herod had already killed James (12:2), and Peter was kept by sixteen soldiers, chained between two of them (12:4, 12:6). The church knew how serious it was, and they prayed "without ceasing" (12:5).
- **Peter was asleep.** On the night before Herod would bring him out, Peter was sleeping (12:6). The angel had to strike his side to wake him (12:7).
- **God did what no one could.** The chains fell off, the guards were passed, and the iron gate opened "of his own accord" (12:7, 12:10). Peter said, "Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel" (12:11).
- **Praying, but surprised.** The church was praying at that very moment (12:12), yet they told Rhoda, "Thou art mad," and were astonished when they saw Peter (12:15–16). God answers even when our faith is small.
- **Rhoda kept saying it.** She "constantly affirmed that it was even so" (12:15). Being young didn't make her wrong.
- **Give God the credit.** Peter "declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison" and told them to tell the others (12:17).

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. The church couldn't fight Herod's soldiers. What could they do (12:5)? Why is that more than "just praying"?
2. Peter slept the night before he was to be brought out (12:6). What does that tell you about him?
3. Why do you think the people praying for Peter had such a hard time believing he was at the gate (12:15)?
4. Rhoda was young, and the adults didn't believe her (12:15). How should we treat the faith of younger believers?
5. What is one thing you have stopped praying about? What would "without ceasing" look like for that?
6. Peter told how the Lord brought him out (12:17). Who could you tell about something God has done for you?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: **therefore** means so, **without ceasing** means without stopping, and **the church** means God's people. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 uses the same words: "Pray without ceasing."
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Acts 12:5 this week, and say 1 Thessalonians 5:17 every time you start to pray.

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5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "God answered the church's prayer, and He hears us too. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter himself preached it: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."
Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

6. Activity: Prayer Without Ceasing List (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Three people or needs I will pray for every day this week, without ceasing.
2. One prayer God has already answered for me or my family.
3. A short prayer asking God to help me keep praying and expect Him to answer.
   If there is time, students pair up and pray for each other's first need.

This week: pray for the three people on your list every day, and write down anything God does. Tell someone about it, the way Peter told the church (12:17).

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that You hear and answer prayer. Help us pray without ceasing, believe You when You answer, and tell others what You have done. In Jesus' name, amen."

Teacher note: you sum up 12:1–4 yourself so James' death (12:2) is told gently, in one sentence. The lesson stops at verse 17; 12:18–19 (Herod commanded that the keepers be put to death) is not read in class. "It is his angel" (12:15) is what the people said; don't build teaching on it. The James in 12:17 is a different James, since James the brother of John had been killed (12:2).

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