

Foundations Week 3: Laying a Foundation of Prayer Acts 12:11-17 **David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (January 17, 2021)**

Good morning Pathway. I hope you're doing well and have enjoyed your week. At the end of the service, I'm going to lead us in communion, so please get some bread and juice ready. Today we are up to week 3 in our Foundations series. We started by taking stock and looking at what is in our hearts, and doing the examen to evaluate 2020 and how we experienced God's presence during last year. Last week we looked at shaken foundations, and I shared my response to the events of January 6 in DC, focusing on the importance of using our words carefully, the consequences that our words have, and our responsibility to stand up for truth and peace. I continue to pray for peace in our national capital and in our state capitals as we approach the inauguration on Wed. There is so much that we have to pray for.

Today we are shifting gears, and for the next few weeks we're going to look at how we can build up our foundations as a church and personally, as we build upon the foundation that Christ has laid for us. The strength of these foundations is what will shape and direct the year ahead for us in our spiritual and community life. The first area I'm focusing on is laying a foundation of prayer, especially as we begin a time of corporate prayer and fasting as a church tomorrow. Please turn with me to Acts chapter 12. I'll start reading at verse 5.

⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

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. ⁷ 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.

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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."

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. ¹³ Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

¹⁵ “You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

¹⁶ But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 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 other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

What do you expect to happen when you pray? That’s a question that I’m going to come back to as we explore this story. Acts is a fast paced book exploring the actions of the apostles following the ascension of Jesus to heaven. We see the Holy Spirit coming in power on the first disciples. We see the exponential growth of the early church as they scatter all over the Mediterranean world and bring the gospel with them. We see churches started, outreach ministry done, people being healed, and other miracles taking place.

We see the beginning of Paul’s transformation from someone persecuting the church to a church leader. And we see Peter taking leadership of the church after being restored by Jesus following his denial on the night Jesus was arrested.

Chapter 12 begins with a crackdown by Herod on the church. He put James to death, and found out that this made the Jewish leaders happy. He went on to arrest Peter. In verse 5, we are told that Peter is in prison and the church is praying earnestly for him. The night before his trial, Peter is asleep, chained up, and between two guards. All of a sudden, an angel wakes him up, and leads him out of the prison. Peter thinks that this is a dream, and follows the angel, but does not believe it actually happening. Verse 11 is when he realizes that it was real, and that he is now free. Here’s my summary for today.

- **Our future victories will come through prayer.**

What do you expect to happen when you pray? Do you expect God to answer, or you hope that things will improve but you’re not holding your breath? Does it feel sometimes more like something that you know you should do, but you don’t think will really accomplish much?

Rhoda told the others at the prayer meeting that Peter was at the door, but they refused to believe her. They said she was out of her mind. Don’t interrupt my prayer meeting with an answer to my prayer, we will have 25 minutes left!

When they saw him, they were astonished! They were blown away. The work of God is impressive. I would probably have responded the same way. There are prayers I know I would be completely shocked if they were immediately answered.

How can we lay a foundation of prayer for this coming year? Our path to a thriving Christian life and ministry here at Pathway is through prayer. This is both as we pray on our own, but also as we pray together. I believe that joint prayer is essential to our personal spiritual growth, and to our growth as a church.

So, how can we can strengthen our prayer foundation as a community? One way is to join us tomorrow as we're beginning a 21 day pray and fast. Fasting is deliberately replacing the normal routines of life with focused time in prayer and the study of God's word. It is an act of surrender that helps us humble ourselves before God and positions us to experience spiritual breakthroughs in our lives.

Fasting is one of the most powerful Christian disciplines through which the Holy Spirit can transform our lives and also invite God's favor towards issues concerning our communities and nation. Fasting is not easy and requires self-discipline. We need to be deliberate to remain faithful through the duration of fasting and plan for increased time in prayer during our 21 day fast.

When we pray and fast, we can expect increased intimacy with God and a deeper clarity of His will and desire for our lives. Prayer and fasting increases our conviction towards sin, righteousness and judgment and breaks the power of sin as God purifies our attitudes, cleanses our bodies and souls. Prayer and fasting results in a profound personal change, breakthrough for difficult personal, church and national issue (Joel 2:12-14).

We invite you to join our 21-day fasting experience starting next week Monday, Jan 18 to Feb 7. During the fast, depending on how you are doing it, you may feel somewhat weaker than normal; you may feel tired, irritable or even get headaches. Lightening your workload and cutting down on exercise is advisable to maintaining your health and morale. Drink plenty of water (at least 6-8 glasses per day). If you have any long-standing illnesses or a physical condition that may be affected by fasting, or if you are currently on any medication, please consult your doctor before starting any fast.

- **Decide how you will fast:**

- Daniel fast: Going without certain food – often meat, alcohol, sugar, and other enjoyable or 'fancy' foods. Check out this website for a detailed description of a Daniel fast (<https://www.daniel-fast.com>), which gives a strict version but you can determine which foods you will give up during your fast.
- Partial Fast: Not eating one or two meals on a specific day or abstaining from certain kinds of food.
- All-day Food Fast: Abstaining from food one day or multiple days per week.
- Activity/Media Fast: Forgoing a time-consuming activity such as entertainment, hobbies, television, internet, sports, etc.

- **Set fasting goals & write them down**

Begin with clear personal goals as well as breakthrough goals for your church. Be specific. Why are you fasting? Do you need direction, healing, restoration of your marriage or resolution of family issues? Are you facing difficulties? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Write these requests in a journal or a notebook. Keeping a journal throughout your fast is a great way to track and remember all God does during your fast.

What breakthrough are you seeking this year? What is something big on your mind? A loved one far from Christ? A critical decision in the life of your family? A relationship that is falling apart? What great matters are in front of your church or ministry? An evangelistic outreach? A financial crisis? A desire to grow deeper in Christ?

Peter was locked up in a prison, between two guards, and God was able to set him free. God can you free from any chains that are holding you down, from any obstacle you are facing. God can bring renewal and healing to your life.

A few days ago, we sent out a prayer sheet by email that you help you write down prayers in different categories. Think about what personal prayers you'd like to make, what prayers you're making for your family, and who you are praying for to come to salvation. What are your prayers for Pathway, and your desires for the US? What about mission and other countries? And remember to pray for the persecuted church and for the poor and the vulnerable.

I'm praying for God to do great things this year, and I'm praying for the vaccine distribution to be effective and to allow us to reopen safely. I'm praying for new members of our staff team this year, for our ministry teams to grow, and for us to recruit new trainees. I'm praying that we can keep training up new leaders. I'm praying that we can launch Rooted and Alpha, and prepare to plant another church. I'm praying for our finances and resources to grow and to increase, as we reach new people and gain new territory. I'm praying for fresh energy and vision, for God to reveal even more opportunities and ideas this year that I haven't even thought of yet, that I don't even anticipate, and I believe that God will hear these prayers and will answer.

Please join me in praying boldly. Let me know what your prayers are for Pathway and as we join our efforts and partner in prayer we can multiply and grow as we see God move in incredible ways.

- **Immerse yourself in God's Word**

Fasting is ultimately an expression of humility and dependence on God. It is about replacing the daily intake of food, entertainment and human contact with focused times of prayer, spending large amounts of time feeding on the Word of God and spiritual listening. The YouVersion Bible App and bible.com have a variety of 21- day Bible reading programs. Last year I read the NIV Chronological One year Bible, and this year I'm reading the NRSV Daily Bible, and I have that to be very helpful. Make sure that you have a plan, and know what you will be reading over the next few weeks, and for the rest of the year.

- **Prepare your heart**

Sin separates us from God and keeps us from experiencing His presence. Prepare your heart for the fast by asking God to reveal any unconfessed sin in your life, or any sinful habits. Then ask for forgiveness and dedicate time during the fast to pray for breakthrough in uprooting any entrenched sin patterns. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit and surrender your life fully to His Lordship.

- **Expect God to move**

Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, for anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Enter your fast in faith,

believing that God has the power to answer your prayers and give you a breakthrough. You will only experience God's power to the extent that you believe. Whenever you feel doubt, be open about them and ask God to help you to overcome them and to increase your faith. Remember to pray! Fasting is about depending on God and taking extra time to connect with God through prayer, it is not simply about going without food or Facebook. I pray that we will each have life-changing encounters with God as we embark on this fast!

We also have a daily prayer guide we sent out by email and posted online. Please check out our page on our website under resources for prayer.

Another way we can keep prayer as part of our culture besides this fast is to join regularly in our corporate prayer time. We've been having a prayer meeting once a month, but coming up we're expanding that:

- Sundays before our service from 10 – 10:25 on Zoom – Sun Jan 24th
- Once a month on the first Sat @ 9 am – Feb 6
- 3rd Thur @ 7 pm – Feb 18

Please look over these times and figure out what works best for you, and I hope that all of us can participate. I'm sure that we all carry dreams for our church in our hearts, things we would be blown away if God was to do in our midst. To review what we've seen today:

- **Our future victories will come through prayer.**
- **Decide how you will fast:**
- **Set fasting goals & write them down**
- **Immerse yourself in God's Word**
- **Prepare your heart**
- **Expect God to move**

I'm going to end with communion. As we enter into this season of prayer, God I invite you to fill us. Lead us forward in your will. When I think about what Jesus did on the cross, I think about how much he gave up. He came to earth, lived like us, and then allowed himself to be betrayed by his own disciple, one of the original 12. He allowed himself to be beaten and tortured, and to give up his life. If Jesus went through all of that, then I can give up some food I enjoy for a few weeks in order to focus on dedicating this year to him.

I'm going to read from 1 Cor 11.

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Let's eat the bread together.

25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Reflection Questions

- How can we build up a stronger foundation of prayer in our lives?