

Life Group Discussion Guide

Against All Odds: How the Name of Jesus Spreads
Week 3: Happy Interruptions • Acts 12:6–19

As our study of Acts unfolds, it's easy to see why the series has been titled, "Against All Odds." At every turn, the mission of the church—to spread the Name of Jesus—faces fierce opposition. Yet, in the face of intense persecution, God is on the move. This is what our message this week is all about – when God intervenes with what Pastor Jon called "happy interruptions."

- During the message, Pastor Jon told of a happy interruption that ultimately led to his salvation. What happy interruptions has God worked in your life?

In this week's text, we explored God's happy interruption of miraculously freeing Peter from prison, where he had been bound in chains and guarded by four squads of Roman sentinels. Pastor Jon pointed out two important implications of God's handiwork:

1. We can't put God in a box

Our journey through Acts 12 confronts us with a difficult question: Why is Peter miraculously rescued, while James is brutally executed? If God has the power to free Peter, why not liberate James as well?

- How would you answer this difficult question?

Pastor Jon's answer is simple: "God does as He wills." And His happy interruptions serve as a reminder that we don't know—or control—the future.

"We often forget what James reminds us of in his letter. Instead of being pretentious, we should say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As Proverbs 16:9 puts it, 'In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.'"

In other words, we can't put God in a box. He will do what He will do.

Although we can't control what God will do, we can choose to welcome His happy interruptions – even when those interruptions don't feel happy to us. This means holding everything, including our very lives, with an open hand.

- Have you ever struggled with understanding *why* God allowed something to happen to you or someone you love?
- How would it change your perspective to believe that all of God's ways are good even when they don't *feel* like it?
- Is there something in your life today that God's leading you to surrender to His will, instead of seeking to control it yourself? What would that surrender look like?

- If that's you, take time now to pray together in repentance for distrusting God and seeking your own understanding or control. Ask for the grace to trust Him even when His will doesn't match up with yours.

2. God wants to fill us with joy and amazement

This was a hard time for the church in Jerusalem. They had just lost James, then Peter is taken into custody. And yet, by the end of the episode, Rhoda is overflowing with joy, and the church is amazed. What does this tell us about our God?

"God wants to surprise us. People love being surprised, happily surprised, and I've noticed that when we love someone, we want to surprise them. God is like that. He had a big present for the weepy Jerusalem church that night, and He made their day."

- Do you believe God has happy surprises in store for you? What does your response tell you about God's character?

When we see a display of God's power like the one in our text—and witness how happy it makes God's people—we might find ourselves wondering, "Why doesn't God do this kind of thing all the time, or at least more often?"

Pastor Jon gave us three reasons to consider:

1. **We would live always looking for signs and wonders:** *"It's tempting when you serve a God as powerful as our God to want Him on call, right? Yes, we are His people, but He's not about to feed our lust for the spectacular."*
2. **There are other things He wants to teach us:** *"Suffering and hardship do things in us that quick deliverance does not."*
3. **We live by faith, not by sight:** *"If God were constantly sending angels to bail us out, it would be disruptive to the maturing of our faith. Different faith muscles get stretched when we trust God even if deliverance does not come."*

- How have you experienced these three truths in your own life?
- What role has waiting on God—trusting Him even when His plans differ from yours—played in the maturing of your faith?
- If you're in one of those seasons right now, which of these truths resonates with you and why?

In closing, Pastor Jon left us with this week's **Big Idea: Believe that God will happily surprise you!** He invited us to get honest with ourselves by asking, *"Do I really believe that today?"*

"Maybe you have prayers that feel hopeless. Maybe you have plans you won't surrender. Maybe you have addictions you've lost the will to fight. Believe that God will happily surprise you."

- Do you believe that God will happily surprise you, even in your most difficult circumstances?
- How does it change your perspective to place your trust in His power to control the outcome, instead of your own?

Our passage in Acts was not the only time God sent an angel to someone's aid. Jesus himself had angels to comfort Him, yet—like James—they would not deliver Him from death. He had to die. It was God's will that He would because it was by His death that God turned our weeping into joy.

"Jesus' death was the happiest interruption the world has ever known. Sin has been conquered. Death has met its death. Evil will cease. God will have His people. The earth will be remade. If God is for us, who can be against us?"

- Take time now to praise God for the happiest interruption the world has ever known, believing the same God who raised Jesus from the grave is at work in your life today!