SMITH FOR CHRIST PUBLISHING · BEREAN DASHBOARD STUDY

Acts 12

Prayer, a Prison and a Proud King — O·I·A, integrated with the Deep Dive

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION · 2026-11-10 · NASB 1995

"Seeking God diligently — examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

A proud king lays hands on the church, kills one apostle and chains another, and the church answers with prayer. God sets Peter free, strikes Herod down for taking His glory, and shows that kings come and go while the word of the Lord keeps growing.

00 The Text

ACTS 12 (NASB95), MARKED

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions · Command / instruction · Key repeated word · Sin / warning · Promise / blessing · Time / place / contrast

1 Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.

2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

6 On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.

7 And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.

8 And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

9 And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

10 When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

11 When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

12 And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

13 When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.

14 When she recognized Peter's voice, ◷ because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the ⟳ gate.

15 They said to her, "⚠ You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his ⟳ angel."

16 But ◷ Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.

17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them ⚠ how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said,
"🖹 Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

18 Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter.

19 When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ⚠ ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country.

21 On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them.

22 The people kept crying out, "⚠ The voice of a god and not of a man!"

23 And immediately ⚠ an angel of the Lord struck him because ⚠ he did not give God the glory, and he was ⚠ eaten by worms and died.

24 But
☆ the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

Marked in the text

- **v1** "Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church" — Sin / warning
- **v2** "James the brother of John put to death with a sword" — Sin / warning
- **v3** "it pleased the Jews" — Sin / warning
- **v3** "the days of Unleavened Bread" — Time / place / contrast
- **v5** "prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God" — Command / instruction
- **v6** "Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains" — Time / place / contrast
- **v7** "an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared" — God — His character & actions
- **v7** "Get up quickly" — Command / instruction
- **v7** "his chains fell off his hands" — God — His character & actions
- **v10** "which opened for them by itself" — God — His character & actions
- **v11** "the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me" — God — His character & actions
- **v12** "many were gathered together and were praying" — Command / instruction
- **v14** "because of her joy she did not open the gate" — Time / place / contrast
- **v15** "You are out of your mind" — Sin / warning
- **v16** "Peter continued knocking" — Time / place / contrast
- **v17** "how the Lord had led him out of the prison" — God — His character & actions
- **v17** "Report these things to James and the brethren" — Command / instruction
- **v19** "ordered that they be led away to execution" — Sin / warning
- **v22** "The voice of a god and not of a man" — Sin / warning
- **v23** "an angel of the Lord struck him" — God — His character & actions
- **v23** "he did not give God the glory" — Sin / warning
- **v23** "eaten by worms and died" — Sin / warning
- **v24** "the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied" — Promise / blessing
- **v7** "angel" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v4** "prison" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v10** "gate" — Key repeated word (every occurrence)

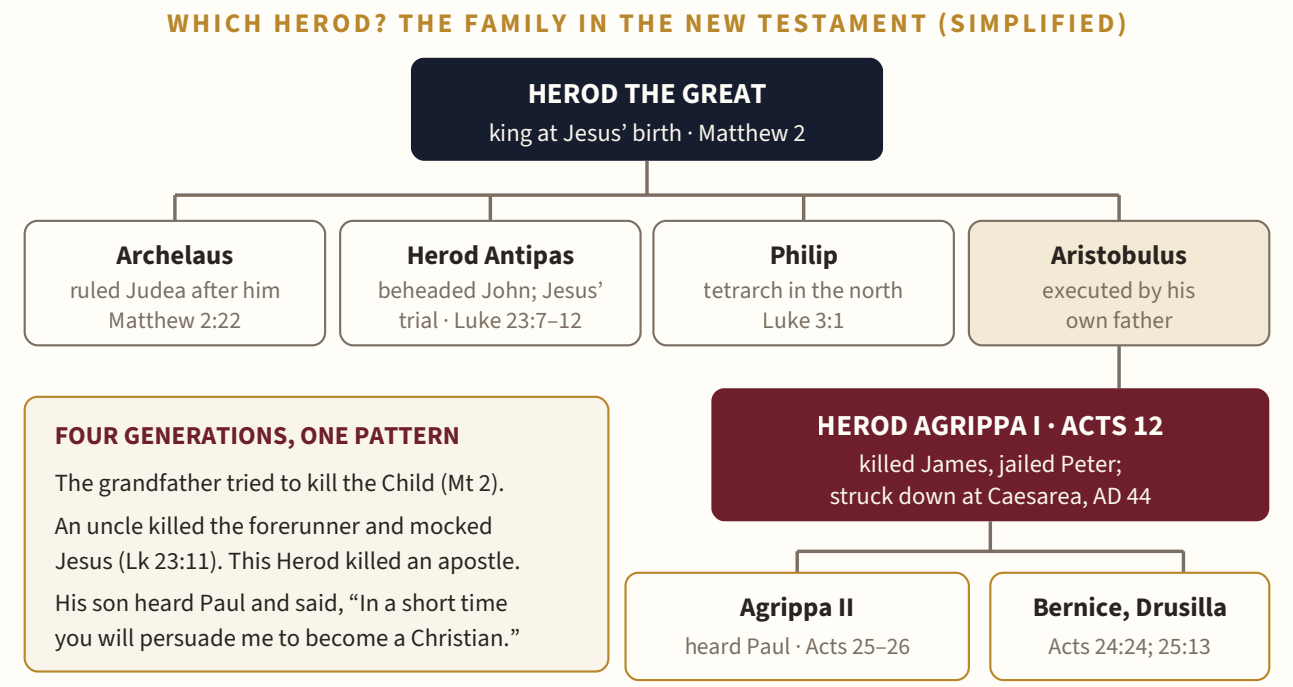
01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 12:24

"But ☆ the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied."

FIGURE · WHICH HEROD?



Trace the line down the right side: the Herod of Acts 12 is Agrippa I, grandson of the Herod who hunted the infant Jesus and father of the Agrippa who heard Paul.

Setting. "About that time" (v1) — while Barnabas and Saul are on their relief trip (11:30; 12:25) — Herod Agrippa I turns on the church in Jerusalem. He kills James the brother of John and, seeing it pleases the Jews, arrests Peter during the days of Unleavened Bread (vv1–4). The church prays (v5). The night before Peter's trial an angel leads him out (vv6–11). He goes to Mary's house, where Rhoda answers his knock (vv12–17). Herod executes the guards and goes down to Caesarea (vv18–19), where, after a speech, he is struck by an angel and dies (vv20–23). The word grows, and Barnabas and Saul return with John Mark (vv24–25).

Structure:

- vv1–5 — **the sword and the prayer:** Herod lays hands on the church (v1); James put to death with a sword (v2); Peter arrested at Unleavened Bread (v3); four squads of soldiers, a trial planned after Passover (v4); Peter kept in prison, "but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God" (v5).
- vv6–11 — **the angel in the cell:** asleep between two soldiers, two chains, guards at the door (v6); the angel, the light, "Get up quickly," the chains fall off (v7); "Gird yourself … follow me" (v8); Peter thinks it is a vision (v9);

first guard, second guard, the iron gate opens by itself, one street, the angel leaves (v10); "Now I know for sure" (v11).

- vv12–19 — **the knock at the gate:** Mary's house, many praying (v12); Rhoda (v13); too glad to open (v14); "You are out of your mind … It is his angel" (v15); Peter keeps knocking; they are amazed (v16); "Report these things to James" — he leaves (v17); the soldiers' disturbance; the guards executed; Herod to Caesarea (vv18–19).
- vv20–25 — **the king and the word:** Tyre and Sidon seek peace through Blastus, for food (v20); royal apparel, the rostrum, an address (v21); "The voice of a god and not of a man!" (v22); struck by an angel, eaten by worms, dead (v23); "But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied" (v24); Barnabas, Saul and John Mark (v25).

Repeated words, with counts:

- "Peter / Peter's" ×9 — vv3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 14 (×2), 16, 18.
- "angel" ×7 — vv7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 23.
- "Herod" ×5 — vv1, 6, 11, 19, 21.
- "Lord" ×5 — vv7, 11, 17, 23, 24.
- "prison" ×4 — vv4, 5, 6, 17.
- "guard(s)" ×4 — vv4, 6, 10, 19; "soldiers" ×3 — vv4, 6, 18.
- "gate" ×4 — vv10, 13, 14 (×2); "door" ×3 — vv6, 13, 16.
- "hand / hands" ×4 — vv1, 7, 11, 17.
- "people" ×4 — vv4, 11, 20, 22.
- "know / knew / realized / recognized" ×4 — vv9, 11, 12, 14.
- "king / king's" ×3 — vv1, 20 (×2); "royal" ×1 — v21.
- "prayer / praying" ×2 — vv5, 12; "chains" ×2 — vv6, 7; "struck" ×2 — vv7, 23; "James" ×2 — vv2, 17; "God" ×2 — vv5, 23.

Contrasts: Herod laid hands on the church (v1) ⟷ the word of the Lord grew (v24). James killed (v2) ⟷ Peter rescued (v11). Kept in prison (v5a) ⟷ prayer made to God (v5b). Chains and guards (v6) ⟷ chains fall off, gate opens by itself (vv7, 10). A vision ⟷ real (v9). "You are out of your mind" ⟷ "she kept insisting" (v15). Peter struck awake (v7) ⟷ Herod struck dead (v23). "The voice of a god" (v22) ⟷ "he did not give God the glory" (v23).

Shape of the chapter: it starts with Herod in power and the church in danger, and ends with Herod dead and the church growing. The middle is one long night: a prisoner asleep, a church awake, an angel at work.

Chapter theme (my words): No king can stop God's word. God may let one servant die and set another free, but He hears His praying people, opens the gates He chooses, and humbles every man who takes the glory that belongs to Him.

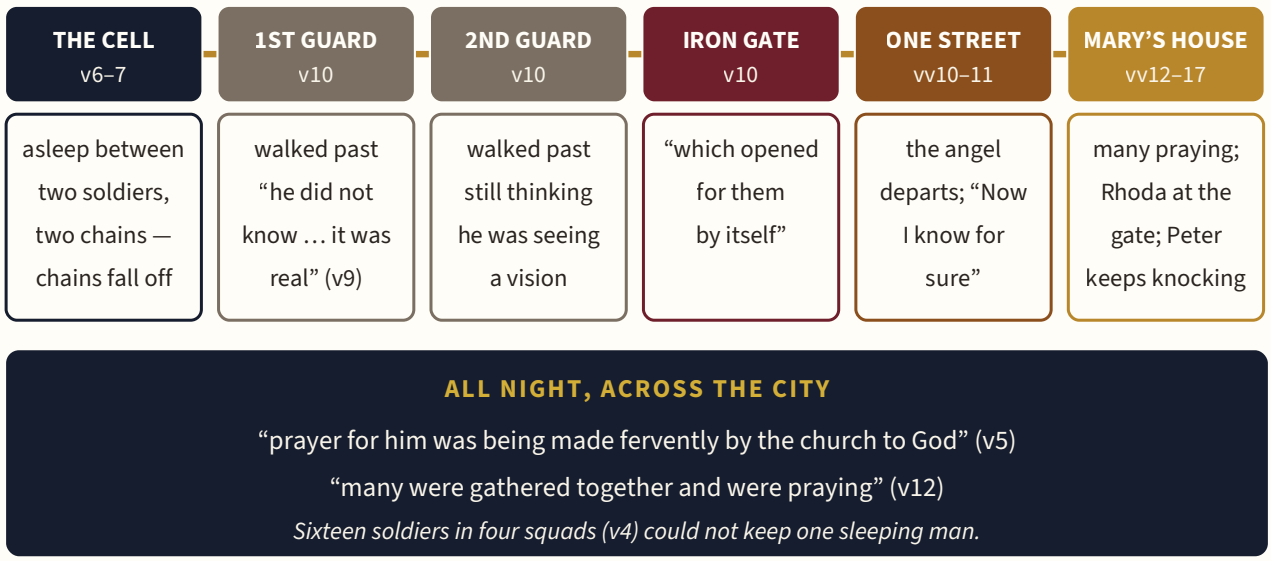
02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 12:11

"When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that △the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.""

FIGURE · THE NIGHT BEFORE THE TRIAL



Read the boxes left to right — cell, two guards, the iron gate, one street, Mary's house — and remember the dark bar underneath: the church was praying the whole time.

Which Herod? Herod Agrippa I. Guzik: "the grandson of Herod the Great." Sproul agrees. He ruled from AD 41 and died in AD 44; Josephus tells of his death at Caesarea and, Sproul says, "At every point, he agrees with Luke's account."

Why James and not Peter? Luke gives no reason, only two lines (v2). Sproul: God always answers prayer, sometimes with no — "in God's providence, He was pleased to allow James to be martyred." Guzik: "Simply, it wasn't time for Peter to go to his heavenly home yet." Henry: "The apostle died a martyr, to show the rest of them what they must expect." Jesus had told James he would drink His cup (Mark 10:39). Faith does not get to demand an outcome.

What kind of prayer? *Ektenōs* — stretched out, earnest (v5). Henry: "The death of James alarmed them to a greater fervency in their prayer for Peter." They prayed "to God," and they prayed together, at night, in a home (v12). Spurgeon: "Better hold prayer meetings at midnight than not at all."

Why could Peter sleep? Jesus had told him he would live to be old (John 21:18), and Guzik notes, "Peter showed no signs of anxiety." Henry: "God gives him sleep, as he doth to his beloved." Spurgeon: "Sleep on, blessed slumberer!"

Why the Passover echoes? A night deliverance in Passover week, an angel, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals" (v8; Exod 12:11), and Peter's confession, "the Lord … rescued me" (v11) — the verb Stephen used of God rescuing Joseph and Israel (7:10, 34). Luke shows that the God of the exodus is the God of the church.

Did the church expect an answer? Guzik: "Even while they prayed for Peter, they found it hard to believe God actually answered their prayer." Sproul: "They could not believe that God had answered the very prayer they had prayed." Spurgeon pushes back: "It has sometimes been said that they did not really expect Peter to be set free. … Perhaps so, but I doubt it." Henry: "Sometimes that which we most earnestly wish for we are most backward to believe." I take it that weak faith still prays, and God still answers.

"It is his angel" (v15). Guzik: "The Jews believed in the idea of guardian angels." Henry will not build a doctrine on one remark: "this alone is too weak to bear the weight of such a doctrine." Scripture does teach that angels serve God's people (Ps 34:7); this verse tells us what the believers thought, not necessarily what is so.

Which James (v17)? Not the son of Zebedee, now dead, but James the Lord's brother (Guzik), who leads the Jerusalem church in 15:13 and 21:18.

Why was Herod struck? Luke gives the reason: "because he did not give God the glory" (v23). Sproul: the primary cause was God's judgment, not disease. Guzik: "he was corrupted from the inside out." Henry: "Thus great men are made an easy prey to flatterers." Isaiah 42:8 — God will not give His glory to another.

The word grew (v24). Sproul: "The worms did not eat the gospel; they ate the king—and the gospel flourished." Henry: "the more it was afflicted, the more it multiplied, like Israel in Egypt." As a futurist I also hear in the Herods a pattern: proud rulers rage against the Lord and His people, and the Lord laughs (Ps 2) — a pattern that runs on to the end of the age.

Word study (Greek):

- **Herod — *Hērōdēs* (G2264):** here Agrippa I.
- **mistreat — *kakoō* (G2559):** to do harm (v1).
- **squads — *tetradion* (G5069):** a squad of four; only here.
- **fervently — *ektenōs* (G1619):** stretched out (Luke 22:44; 1 Pet 1:22).
- **chains — *halysis* (G254):** vv6, 7.
- **angel — *angelos* (G32):** ×7 in the chapter.
- **by itself — *automatos* (G844):** only here and Mark 4:28.
- **rescued — *exaireō* (G1807):** 7:10, 34; 12:11.
- **Rhoda — *Rhodē* (G4498):** "Rose."
- **out of your mind — *mainomai* (G3105):** 12:15; 26:24–25.
- **kept insisting — *diischyrizomai* (G1340):** Luke 22:59; Acts 12:15.
- **rostrum — *bēma* (G968):** platform, judgment seat (2 Cor 5:10).
- **struck — *patassō* (G3960):** vv7, 23.
- **glory — *doxa* (G1391):** what Herod withheld.

- **eaten by worms — *skōlēkobrōtos* (G4662):** only here.
- **grew / multiplied — *auxanō* (G837) / *plēthynō* (G4129):** 6:7; 7:17; 12:24.

Key insights to carry (from the Deep Dive):

1. **James died; Peter walked out** — God is good in both stories.
2. **Jesus' word to James came true** (Mark 10:39).
3. **Sixteen soldiers, one sleeping man** (vv4, 6).
4. **Prayer at full stretch** — *ektenōs* (v5).
5. **A second Passover rescue** (vv8, 11).
6. **The gate opened by itself** — *automatē* (v10).
7. **Answered prayer can be hard to believe** (vv15–16).
8. **A servant-girl again** — *diischyrizomai* (Luke 22:59; Acts 12:15).
9. **One angel, two strikes** — *patassō* (vv7, 23).
10. **The worms ate the king, not the gospel** (Sproul).

Cross-references: Exod 1:7; 12:11; Ps 2; 34:7; 107:14; 146:3–4; Isa 42:8; Dan 5; Mark 4:28; 10:39; Luke 22:31–33, 44, 54–62; John 21:18; Acts 5:19; 6:7; 7:10, 17, 34; 15:13; 26:24; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 13:3; 1 Pet 5:5.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 12:5

"So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God."

FIGURE · TWO STRIKES OF THE SAME ANGEL

TWO STRIKES OF THE SAME ANGEL · πατάσσω (G3960) · vv7, 23

"he struck Peter's side" (v7)	"an angel of the Lord struck him" (v23)
in a prison cell, in chains	on the rostrum, in royal apparel
asleep the night before his trial	delivering an address to a crowd
a church praying for him	"The voice of a god" (v22)
"Get up quickly" — chains fall off	"he did not give God the glory"
"the Lord has … rescued me" (v11)	"eaten by worms and died"
struck — and set free	**struck — and brought down**

THE SHAPE OF THE CHAPTER

v1 "Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church"

v24 "But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied"

Luke uses one verb for both strikes: the humble prisoner is struck awake and set free; the proud king is struck down. Then read the bottom box from v1 to v24.

Truth to face — God is good when He says no. James died and Peter lived, and the same church prayed. Some of the men I walk with have buried sons, lost marriages, done years inside while praying for a different outcome. Sproul says God was "pleased to allow James to be martyred." I don't have to explain God's no; I have to keep trusting the God who gave it.

Command to obey — pray at full stretch, and pray together. The church did not organize a protest or a jailbreak; it prayed "fervently … to God" (v5), late at night, packed into a house (v12). I want our group to pray like that, not just mention things. This week I will name one man in chains — literal or otherwise — and pray for him with others, out loud, and keep at it.

Promise to trust — no gate is too strong for God. Chains, sixteen soldiers and an iron gate meant nothing to the Lord (Guzik). The gate opened "by itself." Whatever has locked me in — an addiction, a sentence, a fear — God opens gates in His time. "God never is before His time; nor is He ever too late" (Spurgeon).

Example to follow — Peter asleep and Peter obeying. He slept between two soldiers because his life was in God's hands, and when the angel spoke he got up, dressed and followed, one step at a time, without understanding it. I can sleep tonight on the same hands, and I can take the next step God shows me even if I don't see the whole road.

Sin to confess — taking the glory, and doubting the answer. Herod took praise that belonged to God and died for it. I confess the ways I enjoy credit and flattery for what God did. And I confess that I sometimes pray like the people at Mary's house — and then call the answer a coincidence. Lord, let me recognize Your knock.

Questions for the table (from the Deep Dive):

1. God let James die and set Peter free, and the same church prayed for both. How do I keep trusting God when He answers one prayer with yes and another with no? (12:1–11; Mark 10:39) *He was pleased to allow James to be martyred (Sproul).*
2. Peter slept in chains the night before his trial. What is keeping me awake right now, and what would it look like to sleep like Peter? (12:6; Ps 4:8) *God gives him sleep, as he doth to his beloved (Henry).*
3. The church prayed "fervently" — stretched out — for Peter. What person or situation am I praying for that way, and what am I only mentioning to God? (12:5, 12; Luke 22:44) *Times of public distress and danger should be praying times (Henry).*
4. Peter obeyed one step at a time without knowing it was real. What is the next small step of obedience God has put in front of me? (12:7–10) *Peter obeyed without really knowing what was happening (Guzik).*
5. The praying church told Rhoda she was out of her mind. When God answers my prayers, do I recognize it — or explain it away? (12:13–16) *They could not believe that God had answered the very prayer they had prayed (Sproul).*
6. Herod took praise that belonged to God. Where am I tempted to take credit, or to enjoy flattery, that belongs to Him? (12:21–23; Isa 42:8; 1 Pet 5:5) *Great men are made an easy prey to flatterers (Henry).*

Worship. The Lord sends His angel into a locked cell, strikes a sleeping man awake, drops his chains, walks him past the guards and opens the iron gate by itself. He hears the prayers of a frightened church in a crowded house. He will not give His glory to another, and no king can stop His word.

Prayer. Lord, You are the God who brings Your people out. Teach me to pray at full stretch, with my brothers, for the men still in chains. Give me Peter's sleep when I am afraid and Peter's obedience when I don't understand. Forgive me for taking credit that is Yours and for doubting answers You have already sent. Open the gates only You can open, and let Your word keep growing in me and through me. Amen.

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