Acts 12

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.

Acts 12:5
5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

Acts 4:29
29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,
Acts 12:5
5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

Fervently
The Greek word means: earnestly, strenuously
During our first two years of church planting, our church office was in the spare bedroom in our home. It was an awfully convenient commute, but it eventually became a huge inconvenience when our daughter, Summer, was born. Our spare bedroom turned into her bedroom by night and my office by day. I would set up her porta-crib at night and tear it down in the morning. That got real old real fast, so we started looking for office space.
After a few months of searching, I finally found a row house in the 400 block of F Street NE that we could convert into offices. It was perfectly situated halfway between our home and Union Station, and it had the ideal floor plan.

We prayed that God would give us that contract, but when we presented the offer the next morning, we discovered that someone beat us to the punch the night before.

It felt like a sucker punch that knocks the wind out of you. I was sure that this row house was the answer we were looking for, so it was both confusing and frustrating.

It took a few days to recuperate from that disappointment, but we resumed our search.

A few weeks later, we found a row home in the 600 block of 3rd Street NE, just two blocks from Union Station.

It was even more perfect than the previous place, so we prayed even harder.

Once again, when we presented the offer the next morning, we discovered that someone got in ahead of us the night before. It felt like a second sucker punch that knocked the faith out of us.

After two bitter disappointments, I threw my arms up in the air. It was one of those “What’s going on, God?” moments.

Not only was God not answering our prayers; it felt like He was opposing our efforts. It felt like God was actually getting in the way.

And He was.

And I’m glad He was.

Two weeks later, after those two unanswered prayers, I was walking home from Union Station.
As I passed by 205 F Street, the Holy Spirit jogged my memory, and a name surfaced out of the deep recesses of my long-term memory.

I had met the owner a year before, but I’m not very good at remembering names. I honestly wondered if it really was Robert Thomas. But one way or another, I felt prompted to call him.

There was no For Sale sign on the property, but I knew I needed to obey that prayer prompting, so I looked up his name in the Yellow Pages and found several listings for Robert Thomas.

I made an educated guess and dialed the number.

When he answered, I said, “Hi, this is Mark Batterson. I don’t know if you remember me, but — ” He didn’t even let me finish my sentence. He interrupted me.

“I was just thinking about you. I’m thinking about selling 205 F Street, and I wanted to know if you want to buy it before I put it on the market.”

Only God.

That row home became our first office, but even more significant than its function was its location. 205 F Street abuts 201 F Street.

We started laying hands on those abutting walls and asking God to give us the old crack house next door. I refused to believe that it was coincidental.

I chose to believe it was providential. And it was.

If God had answered our prayers for the row homes in the 400 Block of F or 600 Block of 3rd, He would have given us second or third best.

I was frustrated and confused because
And God doesn’t settle for what is good.

In His providence, God knew that we needed 205 F Street if we were going to eventually get 201 F Street. Because of construction and zoning complications, it would have been impossible for us to build our coffeehouse at 201 F if we hadn’t owned 205 F.

Thank God for unanswered prayers!

Joshua 3
13 And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap.”
14 So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people,
15 and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest),
16 that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho.
God was working upstream.

If we don't get what we pray for, rather than become discouraged, we find contentment in the assurance that God has something better in mind.

If we have to wait for what we have prayed for, we enter into a period of leaning on and trusting God in the situation, believing that it will be resolved in God's timing.

Did faith and prayer provide the believer with more stuff than his non-religious counterpart?

Who ends up with more stuff isn't really the point of prayer, but who ends up with more of God.
1 Samuel 1:8–11
8 Then Elkanah her husband said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?”
9 So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD.
10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish.
11 Then she made a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.”

1 Kings 18:
41 Then Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain.”
42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees,
43 and said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” So he went up and looked, and said, “There is nothing.” And seven times he said, “Go again.”
44 Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, “There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!” So he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.’”
45 Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain.
Mark 14:32–36
32 Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”
33 And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed.
34 Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.”
35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him.
36 And He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.”

2 Corinthians 12:7–10
7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.
8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.
9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
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.

Psalm 91:1–2
1 He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.”