

SHINE Devotional

Week 42 – Lesson 1



All in the Family

Scripture reading Acts 12:12

“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.”

Who was your favorite sitcom family? Depending on the decade, one could choose a variety of unique families. The Huxtables enjoyed a caring but compulsive father. The Bradys told the story of a lovely lady and a man named Brady who all became a bunch, complete with a maid named Alice. From the Cleavers to the Simpsons, television sitcoms highlight the idiosyncrasies of parents and kids. We watch and laugh at the real struggles of marital bliss and relate to the everyday burden of paying a mortgage and trying to keep shoes on the kids growing feet. What characteristics typify your family?

Peter needed refuge. The apostle escaped prison through the miraculous provision of God’s angelic deliverance. On the run, he sought refuge and a place of safety, and arrived at Mary’s house. Mary and her family served others; their home was a place of ministry. Apparently, they were a family of means. In Acts 4, Mary’s brother, Barnabas, sold some land and used the profit to further the gospel message. On that night, Barnabas was evidently staying with his sister. He had arrived there on commission from the Antioch church. While the Jerusalem believers were under an onslaught of persecution, Barnabas had arrived with comfort and care from other believers. Mary’s house became the headquarters for this consolation. Mary is also referred to as the mother of John, whose surname is Mark. We believe this is the Mark of whom the second Gospel is named. Many theologians believe he served as a caretaker of Peter’s account of the Gospel. Mark travelled with Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys, but abandoned the team when struggles arose. The actions of this young believer brought division between Paul and the youth’s uncle, Barnabas. Barnabas and Paul parted ways with Paul later admitting that Mark was “Profitable” for the ministry.

This family served. Their stories show them leaning into serving and more serving. As far as I know, nothing else is known about these family members. Their lineage and status faded with the closing of the book of Acts, but their service for the kingdom remains. A hospitable host, a compassionate missionary, and a useful minister stand as their family banner.

How can we promote ministry in our families today? It is a legacy worth leaving.

SHINE Devotional

Week 42 – Lesson 2



Open the Door

Scripture reading Acts 12:13-14

“And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.”

Excitement steals our sense of normalcy. For instance, on Black Friday, hordes of Americans flock to malls and box stores to secure the “door buster” sale. These deals will not last forever. They are too good to be true. On one such Black Friday about twelve years ago, I ran into Walmart to gather up the deals. It was still dark, and the weight of Thanksgiving dinner was still with me, but I courageously braved the elements. In a flurry of activity, moms were grabbing George Forman grills, children were crying in the pathways, and door buster deals lined the aisles. I quickly started grabbing items too. I purchased a boy's Huffy bicycle for \$30. I also scored some DVDs for \$3 apiece, along with some miscellaneous items. I got one of the last bikes and felt delighted about my hunting skills, until I returned to the vehicle. I showed my prizes to my wife, and she asked a very logical question: who was the bike for? It caught me off guard. I won. I beat the others who wanted the bike, and it was only \$30! The problem was, no one on our list could use an 8-year-old's Huffy bicycle. I returned it the next day. Have you ever been there? In a flurry of activity or a season of intense emotional struggle, you forgot something important.

Rhoda was praying with the saints. Time passed for the believers who had no other recourse for Peter's salvation than prayer. Someone knocked on the door, and Rhoda left the prayer meeting to attend to the unexpected guest. When she asked the visitor to identify himself, she recognized Peter's voice. In a moment of absent-minded emotion, she left the preacher at the door to share the news with the praying church. SHE LEFT PETER OUTSIDE! The man just escaped from jail, and Rhoda left him outside. Rhoda gives us a subtle reminder. Do not forget what is most important. In the busyness of life and the hustle of the present, keep the process going. Do what is most important. Refuse to allow emotion and excitement to steal away the blessing of opening the door.

SHINE Devotional

Week 42 – Lesson 3



Dying in an Escape Room

Scripture reading Acts 12:17-18

“But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.”

A few years ago, my brother invited Breanna and I to an escape room. I had heard about these new experience attractions, but this was my first opportunity to check it out in person. We met him and Heather, his wife, at a store front business. The decorations and advertising explained exactly what hid behind the doors: adventure. The host took us to a room and placed us all in handcuffs, explained the plot, and left us to our imaginations. We had one hour to escape, or we would be executed for a crime we did not commit. The clues would lead us to unlock the cuffs, cell, and eventually escape. Time expired. We failed. We died. In searching for the answers or right clues to unlock the outside door, we kept looking in the wrong place. When the host greeted us, she explained where the clues were. It seemed so obvious in the clarity of the one who knew, but we were searching in the wrong place.

The two verses of our devotional illustrate a similar circumstance. In Mary’s house, believers marveled at Peter’s escape. He detailed the breakout and credited the Lord with protecting his life and answering their prayers. Peter directed the believers to share his testimony with Pastor James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, and its members. When Peter left to go to “another place” for everyone’s safety, he left a group of wonderers with answers and confidence in the validity of God’s power. Verse 18 depicts a vastly different landscape. In the compromised cell, those who pledged allegiance to Herod and his tyranny experienced emptiness. Answers evaded them. Self-preservation prompted a squall of analysis. A prisoner on death row had escaped and no one knew how. Their questions were never answered. They were looking in the wrong place. The answers to life’s most compelling questions are found in God’s Word. No other place offers solace, and instead, leaves the seeker as empty as Peter’s cell. Need answers? Search no further than the pages of God’s answer key.

SHINE Devotional

Week 42 – Lesson 4



A Few Good Men

Scripture reading Acts 12:19

“And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.”

No one mourns the life of Nazi soldiers. The evil perpetrated during the reign of the Third Reich inflicted so much pain upon the world that we still stand in shock at the cruelty inflicted by their leaders and evil henchmen who carried out their bidding. When confronted by the Allied forces and brought to trial for the atrocities executed upon humanity, the defendants at Nuremberg offered this defense, “Befehl ist Befehl”, literally “an order is an order”. Soldiers who gassed innocent civilians, raped Jewish women, and facilitated the torture of millions passed the blame to their superiors. Rob Reiner’s film *A Few Good Men* explored a similar thread in 1992. Orders are orders. The film’s protagonist postulated the need for necessary evils. He declared, “You can’t handle the truth!” when confronted with giving an unlawful order.

This small passage of Scripture illustrates the fallacy of absolving oneself of personal responsibility. One could argue these “keepers” were only following orders in holding the preacher captive. But, there was a difference. These keepers were Hebrews. They grew up knowing the law. Their moral compass was not shaped by Roman liturgy. It was nurtured in the foundation of the Pentateuch. They chose a side. They chose to obey man rather than God. In the case of the Nazis, their defense failed. Conscience and basic humanity shot down their defense. Most of the prosecuted criminals met with violent deaths or executions. American cinema convicted the soldiers obeying an unlawful command in Reiner’s film and the critics applauded. The soldiers in our passage today carried responsibility for the death of James, the imprisonment of Peter, and his escape. They chose the wrong leader.

God allows people to experience the consequences of their choices, good and bad. Choose today to be on God’s side. If an opportunity presents itself to make temporary gains while violating the principles of God’s Word, resist. Live in light of what is right and do not compromise.

SHINE Devotional

Week 42 – Lesson 5



The Slap Game

Scripture reading Acts 12:23

“And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.”

Teenage boys do dumb things. Think about your last fifteen minutes spent with a teenage boy. What dumb thing did they do? Teenage boys say dumb things, wear dumb things, and make up dumb things to entertain themselves. It is amazing they live long enough to become husbands and fathers. One of the dumbest games ever invented has to be “hot hands”. If you are unfamiliar with the game, the rules are simple. two opponents face off. One teenage boy holds their hands face down in front of their opponent while the other holds their hands face up directly underneath. At any given moment, the face up player can move their hands to slap the hands of the other player. This action continues until he misses, or the other player gives up due to his hands feeling as if they are on fire (thus the name hot hands...clever huh?). It is always better to be on the giving hand than the receiving hand.

Inviting God to pour out His wrath is more foolish than any teenage game. Twice in this chapter, the Angel of the Lord smites someone. The Angel of the Lord smote Peter on the side to share the blessing of deliverance from jail. Peter lost his chains, escaped the guards, and walked undaunted past the iron gates. Peter experienced the hand of God’s blessing. The same hand of blessing for Peter, executed the judgment of God to Herod. In our verse above, the Angel of the Lord is back to smiting. The Scripture records that the Angel of the Lord smote Herod. Herod was eaten by worms. Yes, he was eaten by worms. Gross! Herod lived a defiant life. He persecuted God’s people. He profited from corrupt government. Herod believed the lie of self-importance and died a miserable death. Peter enjoyed years of blessed ministry and led the most important movement in world history. One felt God’s blessing, one felt God’s wrath - from the same hand. Our choices invite the same consequences. Determine to choose God’s blessing over God’s judgment.

SHINE Devotional

Week 42 – Lesson 6



Going Viral

Scripture reading Acts 12:24-25

“But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.”

No cure in sight. Since Jesus ascended and left the believers with the great commission, persecution had mounted. The Roman consulate cared only for peace. Pilate cared little for the religion of the vassal Hebrew people, and had reluctantly obliged the request for Christ’s death. The Pharisees had attempted to slow the spread of the gospel message at every juncture. Now, Herod violated every cultural norm to secure political favor and maintain a sense of importance. The politically expedient thing to do was extinguish the virus of Christianity plaguing his nation. If James had to die, so be it. The virus must be curbed. The funny things about a virus is that it tends to go viral. Christianity behaves in the same manner. The only way to prevent the spread of the Gospel is to develop herd immunity or inoculate citizens against its potent effects. Herod failed to eradicate Christianity. In fact, he created a super spreader event with Peter’s imprisonment. Herod had attempted to mask the message and keep it from spreading, but the Gospel passed right through his feeble attempts in the dead of night. The Gospel went viral. Paul and Barnabas, who no doubt celebrated Peter’s escape while at Mary’s house, would carry the Gospel into Europe and Southeast Asia.

The Gospel spread despite Herod, and the Gospel continues to spread in our generation. We are more than 19 centuries and thousands of years removed from its inception, yet we still feel its effects. The Gospel’s potency is quite active. The only vaccine to its spread is the complacency of its carriers. When Christians stop sharing Jesus, we inoculate ourselves and others from its life-giving effects. When the Gospel is not demonstrated in our lives, it mutates into a strange concoction that substitutes religion and tradition for power. No foe of God could eliminate the Gospel of the 1st century. It was potent. It remains potent today if we share it and refuse to live in a sterile environment of locked down comfort. Share Jesus with someone today. It will change their lives and eternity.