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Rescue in the dark



parenting for faith

Acts 12

Rhoda forced open her tired eyes and straightened her slumped body. She couldn't believe she had let herself fall asleep. Was it time for the sun to come up yet? It felt so very late. Inside the little home, the light from one small candle barely lit the faces of the men and women around her who were softly praying together.

The last few days had been so sad and frightening. Jesus' friend Peter had been arrested and was probably going to be killed. Since no one knew what to do to help Peter, his friends had decided to get together to do the most powerful thing they could think of—ask God to help and keep praying until something happened.

Rhoda had often listened to Peter speaking about Jesus, the Son of God. Her life had now become so full of light and joy. She knew that if God could rescue her from sin, he could certainly rescue Peter from a cold, awful prison. She clenched her fist with determination and went back to praying. 'You are a big God. Please help Peter.'

On the other side of the room, a man wiped away tears and prayed, 'Oh, God of the universe, king of all, set our friend Peter free! Rescue him, God!'

Rhoda nodded her head in agreement and joined him and the others in prayer.

'Yes, God. Peter needs a miracle! Rescue him!'

The prayers and soft cries grew louder and louder and filled the dim little room. A fire of emotions leapt up in Rhoda's heart, and tears flooded her eyes. Just last week, King

Herod had killed another one of Jesus' disciples, James. It felt as if, at any moment, any one of them could be taken and thrown into prison, or worse. She took a deep breath. She couldn't imagine how Peter felt, held by chains, not knowing what would happen next. Her heart returned to determined prayer.

Just then, Rhoda thought she heard several knocks on the front door. She looked around the room to see if anyone else had heard it.

The knocks came again, faster and louder. This time, everyone stopped praying and listened.

'I'll go and see who it is,' Rhoda said, cautiously. She slowly rose to her feet and made her way through the crowd. She pressed her ear against the locked door. 'H-hello? Who's out there?'

'Rhoda, is that you?' whispered the voice. 'It's me, Peter! Please open the door.'

Rhoda gasped and then stumbled back a few steps. It *was* Peter's voice. But... how could it be him? A spark of joy began deep inside Rhoda and rushed through her body like lightning. She spun around and ran at full speed to the back room, to her waiting friends. 'It's Peter!' she exclaimed. 'Peter's at the door!'

The men and women stared back at her, seeming confused. 'You're out of your mind,' one young man said.

The knocks began again. This time they didn't stop.

The young man scrambled to his feet, headed straight for the door, and quickly unlocked it. The others ran after him,

crowding around the opening to see who was standing in the darkness.

Looking back at them was the smiling face of their friend Peter. In a swell of excitement, everyone, including Rhoda, broke out in cheers and hugs and deep thanks to God.

After a minute, Peter waved his hands to quieten them.

‘Well, what happened, Peter?’ Rhoda asked. ‘How did you escape from prison? Tell us!’

Peter smiled. ‘I was sleeping between two soldiers, all chained up, and then I felt a poke in my side. I opened my eyes and saw an angel telling me to put on my shoes and clothes and cloak and follow him. My chains just fell off my wrists. They just fell off! I followed the angel and we walked past guards and through gates that opened all by themselves. I thought God was showing me something in a dream. I wasn’t sure it was real at all. Then, when I was on the street, the angel just disappeared.’

Peter paused and a stillness spread through the little community of people as they became aware of the amazing wonder of God’s love and power.

Rhoda looked at all the shining faces around her, wet with happy tears. She was so grateful that she served a God who would listen to their prayers in the middle of the night and rescue their friend who was sleeping in prison.

Extras for parents

Key truth: God is at work, rescuing and doing great things in the night.

Discussion

If you want to discuss this story with your children, here are some suggestions.

First, help your children recognise the key truth from the story. These questions will help you get started:

- Why were the people in the house worried about Peter?
- What were they doing to help Peter?
- What was God doing while they were praying?

You may want to continue the discussion and broaden your children's understanding of the story's key truth. Choose one or two of these questions to launch a conversation and see where it goes:

- Why do you think Rhoda was so surprised to see Peter at the door when she had been praying all night for him to be rescued?
- Why do you think God didn't tell the praying people what he was doing at that exact moment?
- Has God ever rescued you? Or do you know any story of God rescuing other people?
- God is a rescuer. Who do you know who needs rescuing right now?

Pray

If you want to pray with your children, here is a prayer that may serve as a starting point.

Father God, you are the great action-God, doing wonderful rescues in the night. Thank you that you never stop to sleep, but you are working through the night. God, be the rescuer now! [Pray for anyone you know who needs rescuing, including any of your family members.] We look forward to waking up and seeing what you have been doing tonight. Thank you, God, our rescuer.

If you want to help your children connect with God and continue chatting with him on their own, here are a few suggestions.

- Ask your children to think of someone who needs rescuing. It may be one of them or someone else. Invite them to draw a picture of the person and, as they draw, to chat to God about the situation and what the person needs. Put the picture of the person on their wall by their bed, so that whenever they look at it they can remember to chat quickly to God about that person.
- For older children, grab a newspaper that you are comfortable with, and allow them to flip through a few pages and choose something that strikes their heart and makes them feel compassionate. Give them space to read a bit of the article, then encourage them to chat to God about it, asking him to rescue and fix the situation. As the days go by, keep an eye on that story to see what God is doing, and talk about it.

'Parenting for faith' tool

At bedtime, our children may have specific things they want to pray about—a friend who is ill, a test coming up, or a stressful happening at playgroup or school. Often, we pray about these things fervently and forget about them the next day. Nights are a perfect time for building up a child's faith, to know that when we pray, God is active and working on the situation in response to our prayers and his plans.

If this is particularly pertinent to your family at the moment, I suggest that you make a prayer journal—just a piece of paper or small book where you write down anything specific that is burdening your children. As you and they continue to pray for the situation, come back to the journal the next day or the next week and discuss with them what God has done. This way, your children will develop a nightly expectation of God's action while they sleep.