

Blue Buses

The children at a Christian orphanage in Romania needed a bus to help them get from place to place, especially when they were invited to churches or civic events to sing. So, during their daily devotion time the orphanage caretakers encouraged the children to pray for a bus. As they were praying, one of the children added, “Lord, please make it a blue bus.” Later one of the caretakers admitted, with a chuckle, that she was worried the child would be disappointed. Just like in America, most buses in Europe are yellow. It was going to take a miracle for a poor orphanage in a poor country to obtain a bus, much less one with a custom color! A few days later a friend of the orphanage called and asked if they needed a used bus. It was cheap, but there was one problem. It was blue. Everyone was delighted. Most were surprised. One child said, “Isn’t blue what we asked for?”

The story of the blue bus is similar to something that happened in the first century church. King Herod, intent on persecuting and killing believers, had already executed James, the brother of John. Now he had thrown Peter into prison. For good measure, Herod had ordered four squads of soldiers to guard Peter (Acts 12:2-4). Acts 12:5a says, “*So Peter was kept in prison.*” Kept in prison—I’ll say! He was restrained by two chains and surrounded by 16 guards! Talk about a hopeless, impossible predicament for one of God’s Kingdom workers.

As soon as people in the church heard, they knew what to do. They sprang to action. One of them got on the Internet and sent out an urgent prayer request. Okay, I will admit they had to use another means of communication back then. Nevertheless, we know they got the word out because Acts 12:5b says, “*...the church was earnestly praying to God for [Peter].*”

What came of their prayers? Well... an angel arrived, chains fell off, then the angel and Peter walked right past four squads of guards. When Peter and the angel reached the outer, iron gate, “*it opened for them by itself and they went through it*” (Acts 12:10). The world’s first automatic door! Peter was out. Rescued. Free from Herod’s evil plans! Peter hurried to the local house church where the believers were “earnestly praying.” Rhoda, the door-answering servant, reported the news to the congregation: “The answer to our prayers is on our doorstep.” Rhoda was overjoyed. Everyone else said, “*You’re out of your mind*” (Acts 12:12-15).

Eventually, Peter was able to share his dramatic story with them. Initially, the people were surprised. However, as they listened, they probably began to realize, “Oh yeah. Isn’t Peter’s freedom what we asked for?”

What about you? Have you prayed for any “blue buses” lately? Wait, is that a knock at the door I hear?

Group Discussion:

(Please note: There are no right or wrong answers to the discussion questions. Let the Holy Spirit work through each member of your group. The best learning will happen when everyone shares his/her own insights, questions, concerns, and ideas.)

1. Share some examples of “blue bus” answers to prayer that you (or your group, or church) have experienced.
2. Read Acts 12:1-19 aloud, then discuss the following:
 - a. How would you describe Peter’s response during and after his release from prison?
 - b. What impact did the prayers of the church have on this situation?
 - c. Compare verses 5 and 12 with verses 15-16. Why was “the church” that was “earnestly praying to God” on Peter’s behalf so shocked to discover that Peter had actually been released?
 - d. God allowed James to be executed, but He miraculously allowed Peter to live. Imagine you are a member of the church that was gathered in Mary’s house that night, listening to Peter tell the story of his dramatic rescue. What is your reaction to these two different outcomes? (For more background on James, see Mark 10:35-40)
 - e. In what ways do you think “the church” was different after this event?
3. How would you respond to someone who says, “I prayed for something specific (a blue bus, a release from prison, etc.) but never got what I asked for.”
4. What lessons does this story reveal for you, your group, and/or your church?
5. What is one change you will make in your Kingdom work as a result of this discussion?
6. Close with a time of prayer about the lessons and changes you identified. One member of the group may pray for the whole group, or each member may pray for the person on his or her left and so on.