No, this article isn’t about sleeping in church! Actually, it’s about sleeping in prison – the night before you are to be executed.

Herod Agrippa I (not to be confused with his son, Herod Agrippa II, before whom Paul gave his defense) had already “killed James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts 12:2). It made the Jews so happy that “he proceeded further to seize Peter also” (v. 3). Herod planned not to kill Peter, though, until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. No need to distract from the holiday with a nasty execution!

If you were in Peter’s shoes, what would you do? It is night, and Herod plans to kill you tomorrow. How about making a run for it? That would be challenging, since you are in prison, chained between two soldiers, two with more soldiers guarding the door.

Maybe you would feel like pacing the floor. The soldiers between whom you are chained would probably veto that idea. Praying would be appropriate – you could do that while stationary, and silent prayer wouldn’t even disturb the soldiers.

Could you do what Peter did? I marvel that, within hours of his scheduled execution, “Peter was sleeping” (v. 6). Since you and I know the rest of the story – how Peter was rescued by an angel of God, escaped from prison, and lived to preach the gospel many more years – we can relax. But Peter didn’t know this would happen; since you are in prison, chained between two soldiers, two with more soldiers guarding the door.

Peter was rescued by an angel of God, escaped from prison, and lived to preach the gospel many more years.

First, he obviously was at peace both with himself and with God. Previously, he had suffered imprisonment and beating for Jesus and the gospel’s sake. He knew Stephen had already been stoned by the Jews, and that Herod had already murdered James. Peter appears not to have been worried; severe anxiety usually makes sleep impossible. Execution would only let him be with Jesus again a little earlier than he otherwise expected.

Second, Peter was a far different man from just a decade ago. Herod Agrippa I came to power in AD 44. Back in AD 33, a panicked Peter had denied three times that he even knew Jesus. Now he calmly confronted what was, from a human perspective, certain and imminent death.

May each of us grow, as Peter did, so that we face the trials of life, and even death, with calm assurance.

---Luke Bower (Abilene, TX) via Old Paths

---Ed Wittlif (Denver, CO)