

I Still Want More

A Bible Study Series of The Mt. Zion Church

Lesson 6 - Lord Hear My Prayer

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Introduction: The Bible is clear regarding the power of prayer. Simply put, it works. The connection we make between ourselves and The Lord cannot be underestimated for it identifies that we need our Heavenly Father. Often, Christians talk about the power of praying to God during the initial moments when we deal with challenges. Less frequently are the times where the outcome of the prayers are shared. We know prayers matter to God! We also know that God answers prayers.

The practice of prayer is represented throughout scripture, so there must be something important in the communication we are to have with The Lord for ourselves and for the sake of others. We can read how God answered multiple prayers in the Old Testament and how Jesus answered prayers during His earthly ministry. A close reading of the Bible reveals to us that the disciples even asked Jesus about prayer and how to pray. So, there must be something we can learn if we study prayer.

The following lesson is designed to help students understand how Hezekiah used prayer to deal with a life-threatening sickness. We will see that God answered his prayer and gave him even MORE than he asked. Students should leave this lesson with a confidence that God will always hear us and answer us according to His will.

Lesson Scriptures: 2 Kings 20: 1-11, Isaiah 38: 9-20, 2 Chronicles 32: 24

Background on Scripture: Students were able to understand the connection between a commitment to The Lord and how God delivers His people from lesson one about Hezekiah. The defining characteristics of Hezekiah's reign as king can be found in 2 Kings 18: 1-7. Hezekiah's commitment to God secured success in the name of God. That success can be read about in 2 Chronicles 32: 27-30. Readers should be aware that times of enormous success and favor from God can also be combined with times of great struggle. We find that duality in 2 Kings 20; Isaiah 38; and 2 Chronicles 32 which all note that Hezekiah became ill to the point of death.

I. Hezekiah's Prognosis—2 King 20:1

20 In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."

Much speculation regarding the reasoning for Hezekiah's illness has been presented by theologians. Some suggest that Hezekiah's pride as mentioned in 2 Chronicles 32: 24-25 as the cause, but no textual evidence fully supports this position. We know that Isaiah informed him that he should get his affairs in order. Hezekiah's sickness was serious and per Isaiah's pronouncement, would end in death. The illness, while deadly, can be seen as a common issue of life. Students should recognize that a connection with God does not exclude us from complications. Jesus' words remind us in Matthew 5: 45 that sun and rain are the lot of the just and the unjust. Therefore, we as followers of Christ cannot define our lives based on whether we have good or bad. Our lives are to be defined by our relationship with God. Goodness, then, is a result of a connection with God through Jesus Christ. Good is not based on circumstances for circumstances will change. However, those in Christ can assume that even on "bad" days, God still blesses and is present because we are His children.

The prognosis was not good but God was still good. How do we know? Because Hezekiah felt comfortable turning to God in the midst of the negative news.



- How do you respond when you hear unwelcome news?
- How would you explain to someone that God is still good even during troubled times?

One of the repetitive churchisms is that God is good all the time. We say this and when bad happens in our lives, many of us forget the mantra and fall apart. We must remember that the assessment of God's goodness is not solely tied to whether He allowed challenges in our lives. God's goodness describes

His character. It is who He is and not what He does. Yet, what He does is always good.

From Psalm 145:17-18 we are able to understand that all of the work of the Lord fulfills God's purpose.

The LORD is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works.

Though our circumstances may not feel good, they are good and will work towards God's desired outcome. Hezekiah's illness may not have had a direct reason based on his behavior, positively or negatively, but we are able to see God's response to prayer, His healing power, His sustaining power, His mercy, and other aspects of God's character. Thus, we are able to realize who God is at a greater level. The good we observe due to Hezekiah's testimony helps us now. God has come out of this situation!

II. The Prayer of the Righteous—2 Kings 20:2-3

²Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord,
³“Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Hezekiah's response is one that lends itself to misunderstanding if read incorrectly. He heard Isaiah's pronouncement on his life and decided to ask God to change His mind. Notice, the prayer is one of deep anguish and despair. He does not argue with Isaiah or God. He pleads with God to remember his acts which are in line with God's word. To identify one's following of the rules is not an example of arrogance when expressed with the right attitude. Here we do not find pride displayed or a self-centered expectation that God owes Hezekiah something. We should read this in line with the thoughts of Jesus from in John 15:7,

7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

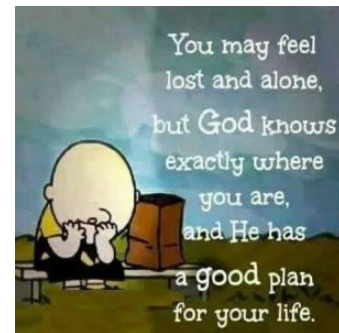
Our right to ask God relies on abiding in Christ and in His word. Hezekiah had done this as mentioned in 2 Kings 18:1-3. He aligned his obedience and practice with God's word. (REMINDER: The incarnate God, Jesus, had not been born yet.) Because he was in relationship with God, it was appropriate that Hezekiah reached out to ask for what he desired.

- Were you ever taught that we should not question God? Is this Biblically accurate? Explain.

The difficulty we find in this issue relates to when God says no. How does John 15:7 line up with those times when God denies our request? Let's analyze the writer James' thoughts to gain clarity on this situation.

In James 5:14-16, we find a familiar passage related to healing and prayer which frames our thinking about what prayer can do. The key phrase for discussion **¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, ^[k]fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.**

Unfortunately, many have assumed that because we follow the process outlined in the passage that God must do what we have asked. This is an erroneous understanding of James' explanation of how God responds to us. In the last phrase of verse 16 we find that effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much and we assume it means "makes God do what we want". The phrase actually means that the prayers of the righteous *produce an advantage, serves in a useful way, or has power.* What advantage is gained when we turn our cares over to the Lord? What is the usefulness gained? What is the power gained? The answer lies in who we turn to when in need. When we turn to the Lord, we gain the advantage of His grace and mercy, so if He denies our request we are able to stand with Him as we go through our challenge. We invite His power in and allow Him to carry us during the *valley* experience. We experience Him in new ways so that we can be more useful to Him and have greater faith in Him. Even if He says no to changing our situation, our prayers can change our perspective and understanding of God. In the words of Paul from Romans 5:3-5



³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

The understanding we gain and advantage we gain in many situations is maturity in Christ. While we go through the situation, we feel the pain, but if we were to look for The Lord, we would find that He is present even in our suffering.

Hezekiah’s relationship with God did not mandate God answering with a yes. In this instance, however, God did respond favorably, healed Hezekiah and gave him 15 more years of life! It was in God’s will to say yes. One must always remember that we do not make God perform for us. Even Hezekiah’s plea based on what he counted as commitment towards God could still have been met with a no. The exciting news of this incident was that God answered with a yes. When was the last time you thought about God’s yes to your prayers?

Activity: For the next few moments, consider a few prayers requests you have made to the Lord. Write down how he answered you with a yes or how he exceeded your requests.

Request	God’s yes answer or exceeding of your request

- When you got the yes, what did you do?
- What does our response reveal about our relationship to God?
- How can you sensitize your mind to respond better to what God has done for you?

THE MORE: Read the poem written by Hezekiah as recorded in Isaiah 38: 9-20 and explain how the sickness benefited Hezekiah.

⁹ A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery:

¹⁰ I said, "In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?"

¹¹ I said, "I will not again see the LORD himself in the land of the living; no longer will I look on my fellow man, or be with those who now dwell in this world.

¹² Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me.

Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me.

¹³ I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me.

¹⁴ I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens.

I am being threatened; Lord, come to my aid!"

¹⁵ But what can I say?

He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this.

I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul.

¹⁶ Lord, by such things people live; and my spirit finds life in them too.

You restored me to health and let me live.

¹⁷ Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish.

In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction;

you have put all my sins behind your back.

¹⁸ For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.

¹⁹ The living, the living—they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness.

²⁰ The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments

all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD.

Conclusion: Our lives are not guaranteed to have only good times. When we face challenges, we can seek God for answers and for change. His will always determines the outcome and because He is God, we can declare that He is always good.