



The God Who Hears & Answers Prayer Behold Our God – Bible Reading Plan #33

Isaiah 36-39

Pastor David Sunday

June 17, 2012

Good morning and Happy Father's Day to all of you. We're going to turn in the Bible now to Isaiah 36 through 39. Our text is the story of Hezekiah. Since we're going to be covering a broad narrative, it will be very helpful to have your Bibles open.

We have a God Who hears and answers prayer. That's what the story of Hezekiah teaches us. We have a God Who hears and answers prayer. So let's ask Him for the help of His Spirit as we open His Word together.

Father, we pray that You would richly and graciously pour forth the ministry of Your Holy Spirit, illuminating our hearts and minds to the truth of Your Living Word that abides forever. May this Word be used by You to sanctify us, transform us more and more into the image of Christ and especially today, Father, we pray, "Teach us to pray." We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our God hears and answers prayer. That truth was driven home to me in a fresh way a couple of weeks ago while reading a story from the late Francis Schaeffer. In the year 1947, on his first trip home from Europe, he was flying over the North Atlantic in an old DC4 plane with two engines on each wing. As they got to the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, suddenly two of the engines on one wing stopped.

He said, "I had already flown a lot so I could feel the engines going wrong. And I remember thinking, 'If I'm going to go down I need to get my jacket on.'" So he went and got his coat. He said to the hostess, "I think one of the engines has something wrong with it." He said she was a bit snappy and said, "You people always think there's something wrong with the engines." He shrugged his shoulders, took his coat and no sooner had he sat down then the lights came on and a very agitated co-pilot came and said, "We're in trouble! Hurry and put on your life jackets!"

So down we went. We fell and fell until in the middle of the night with no moon, we could actually see the water breaking under us in

the darkness. And as we were going down, I prayed. Interestingly enough, a radio message had gone out—an S.O.S that was picked up and broadcast immediately all over the United States in a flash news announcement: “There is a plane falling in the middle of the Atlantic.”

My wife heard about this and at once, Edith gathered our three little girls together and they knelt down and began to pray. They were praying in St. Louis, Missouri, and I was praying on the plane. We were going down and down. Then, while we could see the waves breaking beneath us and everybody was ready for the crash, suddenly the two motors started and we flew on into Gander, Newfoundland.

When we got down, I found the pilot and asked what happened. “Well,” he said, “it’s a strange thing. Something we can’t explain. Only rarely do two motors stop on one wing but you can make an absolute rule that when they do they don’t start again. We don’t understand it.” So I turned to him and I said, “I can explain it.” He looked at me. “How?” And Francis said, “My Father in Heaven started it because I was praying.” That man had the strangest look on his face and he turned away.

We have a God Who hears and answers prayer—Who acts supernaturally in the midst of our lives. You’ve heard it said that “no Christian is greater than his prayer life.” That’s the message of the story of Hezekiah, the King of Judah. Hezekiah’s life illustrates that reality. His story is in Isaiah 36-39. He was one of the best kings of Judah—the little Southern Kingdom of Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital. He reigned in Judah at a time when the King of Assyria—Sennacherib—was breathing down the necks of the people of Judah. The king of Assyria had already taken control of all the areas surrounding Jerusalem and now he was poised to attack Jerusalem and take control of Hezekiah’s kingdom. Hezekiah was one of the best kings but the best of men are men at best.

Someone has said, “Hezekiah was one of the most truly human of the kings—a man whose heart was genuinely moved toward the Lord but whose will was fickle under the pressures and temptations of his life.” We see his pressures and temptations in these chapters.

- In chapter 37 he is faced with the intimidation and the taunts of the king of Assyria.
- In chapter 38 he’s faced with the physical pressure of illness in his own body.

- Then in chapter 39 he's faced with the pressure of the seduction of this world.

In each case, it is his prayer (or lack thereof) that causes him to triumph or fall. “No Christian is greater than his prayer life.” We're going to see through Hezekiah's story this morning how crucial it is in our church, our families and in our individual lives that we learn to depend on and rely on the God Who hears and answers prayer.

There's a key little nugget in the middle of chapter 37 that I want to anchor our thoughts on before we look at this story as a whole. Look at chapter 37, beginning at verse 21. See what God says here and if this draws you in and makes you think more carefully about the importance—the priority—of being a man or woman of prayer.

“Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him.”

I underlined those words in my Bible. *“Because you have prayed to me...this is the word...this is what I'm going to do.”* These words connect our prayers and God's actions in history. We have a God Who hears and answers prayer.

The story begins in chapter three where we get the context. We see that the key issue in Hezekiah's life—and in yours—is that your prayer life reveals where you are placing your trust. Your prayer life is like the pulse of your faith. It reveals where your faith is focused and how strong your faith is. It's the pulse showing you in Whom you trust and where you have placed your confidence.

In chapter 36 it's the 14th year of King Hezekiah. Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, that super-power of his day, wants to take control of Judah. He sends one of his chief military officers to Hezekiah. His title is listed in verse two where it says, *“And the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh...”* That's just a military officer. From now on we're going to call him, “General R.”

General R comes and starts taunting King Hezekiah. His taunt is summarized in verses four through ten. *“On what do you rest this trust of yours?”* We see it again in verse five. *“In whom do you now trust...?”* Seven times in the Hebrew language (six times in the ESV) we see this word, “trust.” Trust. Your prayer life reveals in Whom you place your trust and where you are placing your confidence.

In the rest of chapter 36, General R assaults the people of Judah with these threats. He's saying, “You can't turn to Egypt for help. They're not going to help you. You can't

turn to us for help. Even if we could give you enough horses to ride on to go against Egypt, you wouldn't have enough men to put on the horses." This pagan general says, "You can't turn to the Lord your God for help either because you have sinned against Him. In whom do you now trust?"

1. What Kinds of Prayer Does God Delight to Hear & Answer?

Isaiah 37:1-20

Let's ask four questions about the God Who hears and answers prayer as we work our way through the rest of this story beginning in chapter 37. First of all in chapter 37, what kind of prayer does God delight to hear and answer? King Hezekiah shows that he has placed his trust in the Lord immediately. He demonstrates his trust in the Lord. Look at Isaiah 37:1: *"As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD."*

It's his instinctive response to go to God with his burden—with his trial. That means that he was probably in the practice of praying. Oswald Chambers has said, "It is not easy to find your way to God in a sudden crisis unless you have been in the habit of going to God in everything." Prayer needs to be the habit of your life so that way when crisis comes, you know where to turn. Hezekiah turns to the Lord in an attitude of brokenness, humility and repentance. He knows that if their hope and confidence is based on themselves, they're done. Verse one says, *"...He tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD."*

Then he sends his officers to Isaiah to hear from the prophet if there is any word from the Lord. His officer brings to Isaiah this message about their desperate situation in verse three: *"They said to him, 'Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth.'"*

In other words Hezekiah is saying, "We do not have any strength in ourselves. We are like a woman who has gone into labor and but has no strength to deliver the child. Lord, if You leave us to ourselves, we're helpless right now." But God graciously answers through the prophet Isaiah that He's not going to leave them to themselves. And a word comes back from God through Isaiah in verses five through seven basically saying, "The king of Assyria

is just going to hear a little rumor of trouble. That little rumor is going to scare him off and he's going to retreat so you don't have anything to fear." That's the Word from God. "Fear not. The High King of Heaven is on your side."

"Do not fear the great King of Assyria whom you can see with his battalion all around you, with his armor personnel carriers. Don't fear him. Fear the God you cannot see. Who is the Lord of Hosts? The High King of Heaven. That's the test now. Are you going to walk by faith in the God you cannot see or are you going to walk by sight and fear this great king whom you can see?"

Just the word from the Lord comes through Isaiah and then General R is back at it again in verse eight, taunting and blaspheming God, saying, "God is not going to deliver you. My king, Sennacherib, has conquered all of these other little kingdoms. You think you're safe? You think you can survive this? Haven't you heard what he's done to all the other nations?" He sends this taunt to Hezekiah in a letter. When they bring the letter to Hezekiah—I love his response in Isaiah 37:14—he does what comes instinctively for him. He doesn't say a word. He doesn't respond to the taunting of the world with the weapons of the world. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are mighty through God to the pulling down of stronghold (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Hezekiah goes into the house of the Lord in verse 14 and spreads this letter before the Lord. He looks to the High King of Heaven and begins to pray to God. We see his prayer in verses 16 through 20. Let's read it together starting with verse 16:

"O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth."

A. The kind of prayer God delights to hear & answer is bathed in worship & adoration

The first aspect of the kind of prayer that God delights to hear and answer is that it is bathed in worship and adoration. The first requirement of true prayer is to know to Whom you are praying to get your mind and heart focused on Who He is. He's the Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Heaven's armies. He's the God of Israel Who brought His people through the Red Sea on dry ground. He's enthroned above the Cherubim and seated at the throne of the universe. He is the only God of all the kingdoms of the earth. He made heaven and earth! That's Who we're praying to when we pray to our God Who hears and answers prayer.

B. The kind of prayer God delights to hear & answer is ultimately concerned for the glory of God & for His reputation in the world

Hezekiah begins with worship and then in verse 17 he demonstrates his concern is not so much for himself as it is for the glory of God. He's concerned for God's reputation. That's the second aspect of the kind of prayer God delights to hear and answer. It's prayer that is ultimately concerned for the glory of God and for His reputation in the world. Look at verse 17.

"Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God."

"He's blaspheming You. He's degrading Your reputation." Verse 18 says,

"Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire. For they were no gods, [they're just idols] but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand..."

The name "Isaiah" means "The Lord saves." And that's the great burden of his prophecy—to show that God alone is the Savior of His people. When all human hopes have failed, when all comforts have been lost, when there is nowhere else for God's people to turn, they can turn to the Living God Who saves His people from all the threats of the kingdoms of this world. *"O Lord, our God, save us from his hand!"* Why?

"...that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD."

So the kind of prayer God delights to hear and answer begins and ends with worship. It is bathed in humility, concerned for the desire that God's name be honored. It's the kind of prayer Jesus taught us to pray when He said, *"Begin like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'"* (Matthew 6:9-10).

If we could choose an ending to our life, everyone one of us would choose a story-book ending, a happily-ever-after ending. But there comes time in the life of faith where we have to put that aside. We have to say, "Whether or not that's the end of the story of my life, here's what I desire more than anything—Hallowed by Thy name! Let that be the final

chapter of my life. Let my life exist for Your glory.” That was what motivated Hezekiah, and that’s the kind of prayer that God loves to hear and answer.

To apply this, Ray Ortlund asks some questions. He says,

“A passage like this raises searching questions. For example, do our committees and boards at church make decisions by a bold faith? In our homes, do we raise our children to live with boldness? Personally, when was the last time you made a major decision that was so clearly of God and so clearly not of yourself that your conclusion actually surprised you? **Are we shocking anybody by our faith?**... God wants us to experience what it’s like for him to come through when the only thing that will suffice is what is directly and immediately of God. He wants us to be living proof that he is real, as we dare to treat him as our greatest ally in the universe.”

Hezekiah had a bold, audacious faith in God. Hezekiah’s faith in this instance is quite shocking. He bases hope on the God He cannot see and takes a stand against a king who is very present in his threats. That’s the kind of prayer God delights to hear and answer. “Hallowed by Your name, God.”

2. Why Does God Hear & Answer Prayer? Isaiah 37:21-38:8

This brings us to the next section beginning at verse 21. Look at what God says here. *“Because you have prayed to me...this is the word that [I have spoken].”* He goes on to describe God’s word of indictment against Sennacherib. God knows all about Sennacherib.

We read about ourselves in Psalm 139 earlier, how God knows when we sit and when we rise. God knows the same thing about the wicked. Look at verse 28. God says about Sennacherib, *“I know your sitting down and your going out and coming in, and your raging against me.”*

Psalm 139 is a great comfort if we trust in the Lord but it’s also pretty frightening if we’re in rebellion against God because God knows—God sees those who are raging against Him. God says to Sennacherib in verse 29, *“Because you have raged against me and your complacency has come to my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth...”* That’s what the Assyrians loved to do to their captors. It doesn’t sound very comfortable to be dragged around by a hook in your nose and a bit in your mouth like a horse. God says, *“I’m going to do that to you, Sennacherib. ...And I will turn you back on the way by which you came.”*

The verses that follow describe in non-dramatic prose exactly how God's Word came about in bringing the King of Assyria down. They were wiped out in a single night, we read in verse 36, by the angel of the Lord. The whole army was destroyed without the people of Judah having to shoot one arrow or throw one stone. The angel of the Lord came and wiped out the whole army in a single night, probably with a plague or disease. And then one day Sennacherib was worshipping his false god, Nisrak, in his temple and two of his sons came and struck down their father with a sword. Not a very happy thought for Father's Day but that's what happened to the King of Assyria.

The ESV Study Bible says, "The drama is not in what happened—all the drama took place in prayer." That's where the work was being accomplished! Through prayer! Verse 21, "*Because you've prayed to me...this is what I'm going to do.*"

A. Through prayer God draws us into His sovereign purposes & involves us in what He is doing in the world

So why does God hear and answer prayer? Verse 26 of this passage makes it clear that God has been on the throne in all of this. Everything that's been happening with Assyria was all determined by God long ago—God planned these events from days of old. He's brought it all to pass. God is sovereign over everything in the universe. Nothing happens outside God's sovereign control but in the sovereignty of God, He's ordained that through His people's prayers these plans that He's made of old will come to pass.

Richard Baxter, one of the Puritans said, "A man in a boat by his hook lays hold of the bank and thus gets closer to the bank by his labor as if he drew the bank to him." But he's not drawing the bank to him—it's God's using the pulling of the rope and the hook to bring him closer to the bank. Likewise, we're not changing God's sovereign plans through our prayers—God has ordained in His sovereign plans that through our prayers those plans are going to come to pass.

If you can explain that mystery, I'd love to read about it. It is a clear mystery that God has revealed to strengthen our faith and to embolden us in our prayers.

B. God answers our prayers for the sake of His name & for His own glory

- 1. We pray in Jesus' name as an expression of our humble reliance upon our Savior.**

The second reason God hears and answers prayer is simply stated in Isaiah 37:35. *“For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake...”* That’s important. God answers our prayers for His own sake—for the sake of His name; for His own glory. When we pray in Jesus’ name, we’re saying, “God, I’m not worthy to come before You. I can only come through the blood of Your Son Who has cleansed me of my sin. Through His righteousness alone I can approach Your throne of grace. If You left me to myself, I couldn’t do it.” So we pray in Jesus’ name as an expression of our humble reliance upon our Savior.

2. We pray in Jesus’ name because it gives us confidence, authority and boldness.

When you say, “In Jesus’ name” at the end of your prayer, you’re saying, “God, I have confidence that Your Son, Jesus Christ Himself, would put His signature at the bottom of this prayer. This is an acquisition request from me to the King of Heaven and I am confident this is Your will. Therefore, I ask that You do this in the name of Jesus. I’m confident that He would authorize this request.”

When you can pray like that, 1 John says you have confidence that God hears you and that He will do what you have asked in His name. It’s for the sake of His name that God answers our prayers.

C. God hears & answers our prayers to show His faithfulness to His promises

Look again at verse 35: *“For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David...”* David was the king generations earlier to whom God made covenant promises that one of his sons would be seated on his throne and his kingdom would endure forever (2 Samuel 7). God says, “I have not forgotten that promise that I made.”

God answers our prayers to vindicate His reputation and to show His faithfulness to His promises. We should never let our own sense of unworthiness hinder us from going boldly to the throne of grace because we come in the name of Christ to plead promises that He has made. We do so for the glorifying of His name.

Let me contrast this to what happens in chapter 38. Here we see another crisis—a personal crisis. Hezekiah is 39 years old and he gets deathly sick. Isaiah the Prophet comes to him and says in Isaiah 38:1, *“Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.”* Hezekiah, in absolute desperation cries out to God (which is a legitimate thing to do) that God would preserve his life. He’s faced with the prospect of

death here at a young age. It seems like all his kingdom is coming to an end and he doesn't have a son at this point. He cries out to God and weeps bitterly before the Lord.

There is nothing wrong with that and a lot right with that! See if you can tell the difference between what Hezekiah prays here in Isaiah 38:3 and what Hezekiah prays in chapter 37. He said to the Lord, *"Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.*" At this point, Hezekiah is saying, "Lord, I've been faithful to You! I've walked with You! Would You please do this for me?"

That's different from what he prayed in chapter 37, where he is clothed in sackcloth, realizing his sin and the sins of the people. He never pleads on the base of his own merit. But here in chapter 38 he prays, "God, **I've** done this. **I've** walked with You. Please do this for **me**."

Back when Kate was sick, we were blessed with the prayers of many people. And sometimes really well-meaning people would say to Kate, "You know, I know God's going to heal you because you're such a good person. I know that because of who you are God's going to be gracious to you." She is a good person in many ways but to Kate's credit, she never, ever prayed that way herself. She never said, "Because of who I am or how I've walked with You, would You do this for me?" Many times, if it was appropriate, she would graciously tweak what the people were saying and point their focus back to Christ because it's only because we're in Christ that we have any right to come before the Father.

Hezekiah gets more than what he's asking from the Lord. He gets 15 more years of life. He gets a miracle. God makes the sun stand still to show that He's going to do this and Hezekiah's kingdom is delivered. But notice when God answers Hezekiah, He never says, "Hezekiah, I'm doing this for you because you've walked so faithfully with Me."

Look at Isaiah 38:5: *"Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city."* "I'm doing this because I have purposes, Hezekiah, that you do not know—beyond what you can see."

Realize this: God always has purposes for answering our prayers that go far beyond what we can see. He always has reasons that transcend our own deserving. God always sees more than our own personal crisis. His vision is broader and reaches farther. God acts in response to our prayers but His answers are never a repayment for our prayers. We don't

earn God's blessings because of how fervently we pray. God is generous and gracious to us because of Christ—because we belong to Him and His promises. He answers because He's faithful to His promises.

3. How Should We Respond When God Hears & Answers Our Prayers? Isaiah 38:9-22

A. We should remember God's mercies

Thirdly, how should we respond when God hears and answers our prayers? Look at Isaiah 38 beginning at verse 9. Hezekiah begins by remembering God's mercies. That should be our first response when God answers our prayers. *"Forget not all His benefits"* (Psalm 103:2).

- In 38:10-11, he goes through and traces when he was on the brink of despair.
- In verse 12, he felt how fragile his life was and how final death is.
- In verse 13, he felt God's hand of discipline heavy on him *"like a lion"*—it felt like God was breaking his bones.
- And then in 14-16, he talks about how he feebly cried out to God for help. *"Like a swallow or a crane I chirp."* Sometimes all we can do in our weakness is just chirp to God. "Help! Help! Help! I need You!" That's what Hezekiah was doing.
- In verse 17, he beautifully traces how God answered his prayer. He says, *"Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness."* When God brings His children through great trials, it's always for our welfare. It doesn't always taste that way. As we sang this morning, "The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower" (God Moves in a Mysterious Way by William Cowper). *"Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back."* "God, You've forgiven me. You've answered me and I remember Your mercies to me."

B. We should determine to praise, worship & glorify Him with all our breath, for all our days

The first thing we should do when God answers our prayers is remember what He has done and then secondly, determine to praise, worship and glorify Him with all our

breath, for all our days. Verse 20 says, *“The LORD will save me, and we will play my music on stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of the LORD.”*

“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits? I’m going to lift up the cup of salvation. I’m going to call on His name. I’m going to live for Him. I’m going to pay my vows to Him. I’m going to be faithful to Him all the days of my life.” That’s what we should do when God answers our prayers.

When someone has gone through a great crisis and God has delivered them, sometimes we think, “They are on this higher plane now and they’re going to live on this new level of faith and never be selfish again. Maybe they’re never going to sin again! They’re just living for God and they’re never going to go back.” But that’s not the truth. We see in chapter 39 that Hezekiah didn’t always remember God’s mercies or live for God’s glory.

Oswald Chambers said, “The crisis in which God was revealed is to be the light of your life when there is no crisis.” If God has been merciful in answering your prayers in powerful ways, that needs to be the light of your life on the ordinary days when there is no crisis. Trusting God is not a one-time episode—it is to be the habit of our lives. That’s why God says, *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

4. When We Fail to Rely on the God Who Hears & Answers Our Prayers, What Difference Does It Make? Isaiah 39:1-8

When we’re prayer-less—when we lean on our own understanding—does it really matter? Look at chapter 39. I’m going to tell the story quickly. Babylon, a different country, now comes. Envoys from Babylon come to Hezekiah because they heard he’d been sick and recovered. Verse two says, “[He] *welcomed them gladly...*” He’s so excited that this other powerful nation is coming to check him out and to see his kingdom.

It never says in this chapter that Hezekiah prayed. His instinctive response in crisis was to pray but now he’s prosperous, the people come and he doesn’t seek the Lord. He welcomes them gladly and then takes them into his armory—his treasure house—and shows off. “Look at how rich I am.” He wants to impress the Babylonians with his wealth.

When Isaiah the prophet hears about this, he is mortified. He is not happy that Hezekiah has succumbed to the flattery and seduction of the world. Isaiah brings Hezekiah

a word from the Lord that basically says, “Hezekiah, those Babylonians that just looked at your storehouses are going to come back and take all of it away from you. They will take your kingdom away and send you into exile. Your sons will become eunuchs and serve the King of Babylon. Exile is coming.”

In Isaiah 39:8 Hezekiah responds. *“Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, ‘The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.’ For he thought, ‘There will be peace and security in my days.’”* In other words, Hezekiah is saying, “At least the story is going to end happily ever after for me! I don’t need to worry about that exile! I don’t need to worry about what’s going to happen to my sons and grandsons. I have affluence, peace and security in my days. That’s all I care about.”

When we fail to pray and keep our vision centered on God and His purposes for us, we become very short-sighted, selfish and prideful. We need to pray without ceasing because we are vulnerable to the intimidations and threats of this world; to the grief, sorrow, unbelief in the midst of suffering and to seduction from the things and values of this world. Hezekiah sadly fell prey to that vulnerability.

Look at the story and ask yourself, “What would you rather have? A long life or a faithful life?” Hezekiah got 15 more years but he didn’t always rely on God in those 15 years. Say to the Lord, “I need You every hour!” In doing so you are depending on His Son Jesus Who lived His whole life in reliance on His Father. Jesus prayed without ceasing. He ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). He showed us what it means to always do what pleases His Father to depend on Him. One of the reasons Isaiah gave us this story is to show us that our hope lies not on any human king but only in our Lord Jesus Christ. But this story is also here to instruct us on the privilege of prayer.

I was talking to one of our elders this week who shared with me that when he got saved as a college student, one of the things his pastor taught him was the importance of beginning every morning in fellowship with His Father. [I’m protecting his name right now because I know he doesn’t want to be lifted up.] I asked him, “Elder, do you still do that now that you have a long commute?” (He drives a couple of hours to work, there and back.) He said, “Oh yes, every day.” He said lately he had wanted to become more faithful in interceding for our church and started printing out the church directory with all of our pictures in it. He gets up in the morning, reads his passage of Scripture, asks God to show him something specific that he can pray for us. Then he gets in his car with that church directory. He knows his way well enough that he doesn’t have to keep his eyes on the road

constantly so he keeps looking down at our pictures. He takes the verse that he read in the morning and prays that God would apply the truth of that verse in our lives. He has about 17 people that he manages at work. All 17 of those people are bathed in prayer before their manager gets to work. “No Christian is greater than his prayer life.”

I think that shows us an example of spiritual greatness and strength. I think it should encourage us that we’re being prayed for that way. It motivated me to want to be more earnest, systematic and faithful in my prayers for you.

I think about fathers and the story of John Patton, a missionary to the New Hebrides, who grew up in the home of a Scottish Christian man. His father would go for prayer as a rule after every meal. The 11 children knew it and revered the spot where their father prayed. They would hear him crying out to God. John Patton said in his autobiography,

“Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, blotted from my understanding, if I forgot everything I knew about God and His Word, my soul would still wander back to those early scenes from my childhood and set itself up once again in that sanctuary closet. And as I would hear the echoes of my father’s cries to God, that would hurl back all doubt about the faith with this victorious appeal. My dad walked with God. Why may not I?”

One of the best legacies we can leave with our children is a faithful life of prayer. “No Christian is greater than his prayer life.” It was Leonard Ravenhill who said those words. I close with the rest of his statement.

“The church has many organizers but few agonizers; many who pay, but few who pray; many resters, but few wrestlers; many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding. People who are not praying are playing.”

Tithes may build a church but tears will give it life. That’s the difference between the modern church and the early church. Our emphasis is on pain; theirs was on praying. When we have paid, the place is taken—when they had prayed, the place was shaken (Acts 4:31). In the matter of effective praying, never have so many left so much to so few. Brothers and sisters. Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we come before You, not because we deserve to but because You’ve claimed us to be Your children through the blood of Your Son, Jesus. It’s in His merit, dressed in His righteousness that we come. We thank You that You’re so patient with us though we so often fail to trust in You. Thank You that You are gently and graciously and sometimes firmly teaching us that apart from You we can do nothing. Thank You that

You welcome us to Your throne of grace to receive help and mercy in our time of need. Lord, I confess that I'm but a beginner in the life of prayer but I want You to teach me to pray—to depend on You completely, not just for moments of crisis but in all the ordinary needs of my daily life.

I pray for our church, Lord, that we would be a church that shocks people through the boldness and audaciousness of our faith. That You would be glorified and magnified as we pray for Your name to be hallowed and Your Kingdom to be coming through our ministry here and around the world. Lord, teach us to pray. Help us to see what a privilege it is and to enjoy more communion with You this week. Thank You for the instruction of Your Word, for this story, for Your faithfulness to Hezekiah even when he was faithless. And the same is true for us. And so we pray, Lord, be Thou our vision. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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