

Always Hearing
2 Kings 18-20:1

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The Bible's very clear when it tells us that God is able to hear our prayers. But what does the Bible say about the times when we don't believe that God's listening.

Well, it's not because He isn't listening or unable to respond. Rather, there's probably something about the condition of our heart that's not allowing God to hear our prayers.

It could be a sin we're cherishing, or a grudge we're nursing against someone. If so, these will keep God from hearing our prayers, but there are other reasons, too.

Like, when we doubt that God has the ability to respond to our prayers. If we pray with selfish motives, or when we ask for something that's not in God's will.

If any of these are in our prayers, then God will either not respond to our prayers, or He will respond with a no.

But it's not just having God ignore us, there're consequences with these patterns of behavior. First, we miss the joy that comes from closeness with our Heavenly Father.

Matthew explained this in Matthew 7:11, *"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

Secondly, we'll miss the counsel and direction of the Holy Spirit, but the third reason is the most crucially.

If we persist in destructive sin, or refuse to extend forgiveness, or insist on praying “My will be done” instead of “Thy will be done” in every situation, then that may be evidence that you don’t have a saving relationship with Jesus in the first place.

I read a testimony from a recovering alcoholic who pointed out the difference between church and an AA meeting.

He said, “If you come in late to church, or miss a couple of weeks, people get annoyed, or look down their noses at you. But if you come late to an AA meeting, everybody jumps up and hugs you and pats you on the back, because they rejoice that you made it at all. They know all about the demons and pressure and shame that are working to keep you away.”

That’s the church I want us to be. I praise God that you’re here this morning to learn more about the Always God.

God hasn’t changed over time. He spoke in the past and he still speaks today. He worked in the past, and He is still working today. He’s always speaking, always working. He hasn’t changed!

This morning, we’re going to look at the story of a man in Scripture whose prayers God did respond.

We’re going to look at who he was, how he lived his life, and what it was, about his prayer, that caused God to incline His ear to him. His name is Hezekiah, and his story is told in 2 Kings, chapters 18-20.

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Hezekiah was the King of Judah from about 715 BC to around 686 BC, about 29 years. He was 25 years old when he was crowned king and was one of the few kings that had a heart bent toward the Lord.

2 Kings 18:3, *“He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done.”*

After the death of Solomon in 931 BC, the kingdom of Israel split into the northern kingdom, which kept the name Israel, and the southern kingdom called Judah.

Every one of Israel’s kings, and most of Judah’s were evil, too, outdoing one another in their sin against God, but Hezekiah was different.

2 Kings 18:5-6, *“Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses.”*

The first thing we learn from Hezekiah is that proximity matters. In other words, the closer someone is to a power source, the stronger that person will be. So, proximity matters.

In verse 6, the NIV says that Hezekiah *“held fast to the Lord.”* The KJV says he *“clave to the Lord”* which means *“to cling, to stick, to stay close, join to, and follow closely.”*

The last part of this verse tells us that he didn’t depart from following God but *“kept the commands the LORD had given Moses.”*

So, he held fast to God. Therefore, proximity matters if we desire God to hear our prayers.

Psalms 91:14-16, *“Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”*

John 15:7, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”*

How would you evaluate your proximity to God? Maybe you’ve heard the story about the elderly married couple who were still driving their 1970’s Buick.

If you’ve never driven in a 1970’s car, you don’t know what you’re missing. In the 70’s cars were huge.

The front seat was called a bench seat since there were no consoles dividing the interior. These seats were so big, the driver’s side was in a different ZIP code from the passenger side.

Well, while this couple were driving down the road, the wife looked at her husband behind the wheel and said, *“Honey, do you remember when we first got this car, how close I would sit to you? You would put your arm around me, and we would just snuggle up so close. How come we don’t do that anymore?”* And the old man says, *“I don’t know. I never moved.”*

Picture yourself on that bench seat. God’s driving. Are you scrunched up next to Him, or are you up against the window?

So, let’s examine your daily routine. How much are you in God’s Word? Or, do you only pick up your Bible when you’re on the way to church—if even then?

If your Sunday School quarterly didn’t have the Scripture printed, would you have any idea how to find the passage it’s talking about?

That may sound legalistic, but how else are you going to measure the degree to which you’re abiding in Christ if it isn’t by abiding in His Word?

Hezekiah's proximity to God, his holding fast to God and refusing to let go, is what helped Hezekiah face a huge national crisis.

When he became king around 715 BC, he was only 25 years old. Just seven years before that, Assyria had wiped the northern kingdom of Israel off the map.

So, fourteen years into Hezekiah's reign, according to 2 Kings 18:19, King Sennacherib of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah; cities where military bases were located.

And now this king is threatening the capital city of Jerusalem. In 2 Kings 19, Sennacherib sent a trash-talking letter to Hezekiah. Look at the text of the letter beginning in verse 11:

2 Kings 19:11-13, "Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my predecessors deliver them—the gods of Gozan, Harran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar? Where is the king of Hamath or the king of Arpad? Where are the kings of Lair, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah?"

So, when Hezekiah got this letter, what did he do? 2 Kings 19:14, *"Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD."*

Again, proximity matters. He went up to the house of the Lord. Where do you go when your enemy is beating down your door?

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But there's something here that I want you to see. It's what Hezekiah did with this news.

Hezekiah took this foul letter from Sennacherib, went to the temple, and physically laid it before the Lord. Let's just pause here.

I want you to get the picture in your mind of this young, strong king, laying the pages of this letter on the floor of the temple, and kneeling before the Lord, or maybe even flat on his face in front of God.

That's a picture of literally laying your problems before the Lord! In fact, you need to literally do that this week.

What problem or crisis is troubling you the most right now? Is it a doctor's report? A credit card bill? A subpoena?

Whatever is most on your mind, find something tangible—physical—that represents that and literally lay it before the Lord. Because not only does proximity matter, but posture matters, too.

There are at least five different postures for prayer modeled in the Bible: sitting, kneeling, standing, lying prostrate with our face toward the ground, or praying with hands lifted.

Now, don't think that this is some magic formula where if you just get the mechanics correct, God will answer your prayer, i.e. kneel for a certain amount of time, face a certain direction, etc. That's not true.

But your posture should match the importance of the subject about which you're praying. Are you repenting? Then kneel.

Are you praising God? Then stand. Are you releasing a burden to Him? Then lift your hands.

Mark Batterson says, *"Posture is to prayer as tone is to communication. If words are what you say, then posture is how you say it."*

When King Hezekiah saw his nation threatened by an existential crisis, what was his posture? Kneeling, face to the ground, with the problems that were consuming him literally spread out before God.

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So, proximity matters, posture matters, and lastly, perspective matters.

Let's look at Hezekiah's prayer when Assyria was on the verge of attacking Jerusalem.

2 Kings 19:15-19, "And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: "LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God. "It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God."

Notice in verse 19 that Hezekiah didn't say, "Save us, because we deserve it." He didn't say, "Save us, so that all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you like us best."

NO! He says, save us so that all the kingdoms of the earth may "know that you alone, LORD, are God."

He also didn't say, "Give our fighters strength and endurance. Help our arrows fly straight." Hezekiah left the details up to God.

And here's the result, verse 20, "Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria."

Skip down to verse 35a, *“That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp.”*

The armies of Judah never fired a shot. What a picture of grace! We just saw how Hezekiah’s proximity to God helped alleviate a national crisis, but in 2 Kings 20 we also see how it helped in a personal crisis.

2 Kings 20:1-2, *“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.” Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD.”*

Now, he was only 39 years old when he became deathly ill. And when he turned his face to wall, I believe he did this to shut off every other distraction. A posture of humility and brokenness.

God’s attracted to those who’re humble and broken. It’s a spiritual law: *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*

That’s why, in verse 3, we’re told that he wept bitterly. 2 Kings 20:3, *“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.”*

In this prayer, he acknowledged the sovereign rule and reign of God. He trusted the Lord to answer his prayer, and this is key, **HOWEVER** the Lord saw fit.

Again, Hezekiah didn’t try to instruct God in how He wants God to answer his prayer. He just said, *“remember me.”* So God gives him 15 more years.

That's great, but if I were Hezekiah, I'd be thinking, *"That's just 54-55 years of age. Lord you can do better than that!"*

Yet, with Hezekiah, we don't get any inclination of him doubting, debating, or being discouraged by God's answer.

Because of a deep-seated trust in God the Father, he could pray with an honest heart, *"Not my will, but yours be done."*

Do you have this deep-seated trust in God? What if His response is "No?" Do you have a healthy perspective that God's sovereign, in control, and knows better?

God's all-together different from us. He's working His plan. Healthy prayer includes a healthy posture and a healthy perspective, which comes from our proximity to a Holy God.

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Conclusion

1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

This is good for us to do because, when we reflect on our life, decisions we've made, the motives in our heart, the sinful paths we've taken, we see we've not arrived and at the same time meet the incredible grace, love and mercy of God.

In Hezekiah's prayer for his health, we don't have the specifics for what he prayed. I believe he was so broken; he didn't even know for what to pray.

The Bible says he turned and wept bitterly, and I believe, because God knew what was in his heart, He answered the prayer of his heart. That's how good our God is.

Sometimes, when we're so broken by our circumstances, and we don't know what to pray, do you know what the Bible says?

Romans 8:26-27, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."

Ask God for what's on your heart. Ask Him to move in whatever situation you're facing. Ask Him to meet the needs of your loved ones. Just ASK!