

210131 Prayer Defeats a Mighty King 38/04 January 31, 2021

Dear Friends,

We create habits in our lives by repeating the same reactions over and over. Think about the last year and your habits. Have you reinforced bad spiritual habits in your reactions to COVID and to the social and political chaos of the year? Or have you broken some bad habits and started forming good ones? Have you strengthened your faith or compromised it? We can't change what we did through this year, but we can start today to refine our faith by turning to our Lord more and to our own doubting-Thomas selves less.

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. ([Pr 3:5](#) KJV)

When we face the pressures of life, unique pressures such as we've experienced in the last year, or common every-day pressures of "Life under the sun," how do we react? Do we lean to our own understanding and react in fear and roller coaster anxiety? Or do we "Trust in the LORD with all our heart"?

Every life experience, both the good and the bad, even the stressful, gives us an opportunity to grow our faith or allow it to become anemic. Life brings pressure, stress, and difficulties with it. They are an inevitable part of living this "Life under the sun." In a logical sense, life becomes a training ground for our spiritual senses. We may use whatever life dishes up to us to grow our spiritual self stronger in faith, or we may use it to diminish our faith. We choose, and we also live with the results of our choices. We can't blame God when we make the wrong choices, and we also can't blame "Them," whoever "Them" may be in our imagination. We can only look in the mirror of God's "Perfect law of liberty" ([Jas 1:25](#)) and see the spiritual reality of our choices.

Our broken humanity tends to follow failed patterns of unbelief when we face stress and choose not to follow the Lord and His faith-way.

1. It is always convenient to follow the "Blame game" and point our accusing finger at "Them." In this response, we imitate Adam, not Jesus. Our unbelief in this choice eagerly embraces and invests large amounts of energy in the endless conspiracy theories that always abound in this broken world, energy that we "Burn" in this pursuit of unbelief instead of using it to serve the Lord and His people.
2. The ultimate "Blame game" response is to simply blame God for all the sin and junk in our world. This seems to be a rather common reaction of unbelief to pressure situations. Consider Jeremiah, who served his term of faith during the Babylonian captivity, and he served his term in devastated and ravaged Judah. It is Jeremiah, not Isaiah or another prophet, who, some five or six times in his prophecy, surfaces and rejects the fatalistic "God caused us to commit pagan worship, even burn our children in sacrifice to pagan gods" abomination. When things go wrong, and we can't do anything to control them, our brokenness loves to blame God. Anything other than look in that spiritual mirror and take personal responsibility for our own conduct, an action that forces us to consider Biblical, pride-killing repentance from our sins. Should our faith imitate Adam or Jesus?
3. Give up and "Throw in the towel." Conclude with discouraged Israel ([Isa 49:14-16](#)) that God has forsaken or forgotten us. Our unbelief relishes this idea, but it isn't so receptive to God's answer in Verses 15-16.

Every lesson in the Bible that documents and affirms true answered prayers from our loving God

shouts to us that these responses are wrong, and that they will drag us deeper into our problems, not deliver us either *through them* or *from them*. Folks, we need these Biblical reminders of our God's promise to be faithfully with us through our trials, and that He always hears our prayers, and answers them based on what He knows we need, whether it is what we want or not.

Love in Jesus,
Joe Holder

Prayer Defeats a Mighty King

And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword. ([2Ch 32:20-21](#) KJV 1900)

The Assyrians invaded and ended the existence of Israel, the northern kingdom, around 722 BC. They thought to do the same for the southern kingdom. Earlier in [2Ch 32](#), we read of their taunting and trying to dishearten the citizens of Jerusalem. Ironic, isn't it, that the king of Assyria would mock Judah, the southern kingdom, and Jerusalem regarding their God, but he would then be killed by members of his own family in the temple of his pagan god in Assyria. Secular history agrees with this Bible record. Sennacherib was killed by members of his own family.

The Assyrians were fierce and quite effective in their conquests of other nations. They used what had likely been an effective propaganda tool against other nations to dishearten the people of Jerusalem, attack their religion. Intimidate their God. But Sennacherib didn't realize he was dealing with the God of Judah, the one true God of the universe.

Then they cried with a loud voice in the Jews' speech unto the people of Jerusalem that were on the wall, to frighten them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city. And they spoke against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man. ([2Ch 32:18-19](#))

Rather than react in the fear of man, even of a powerful military force, Isaiah and Hezekiah took their case to the Lord. They knew what Sennacherib did not know. God was stronger than he could imagine.

And the Lord sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. How did the Lord respond to the prayers of these two godly men? Send a host of angels? No, He sent only one angel. That was all that was necessary to destroy the Assyrian army. In the New Testament, John reminds us of this truth.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. ([1Jo 4:4](#))

How many times in the last year have you thought about all that was going on in our world and reacted in fear? Or at the least, anxiety? What is to happen? How will we survive this craziness? Will we survive it? In such seasons, we need to consciously go to Bible lessons such as these and remind ourselves of both the power and the goodness of our God.

The Lord forbids our ignoring the common sense He gave us and acting foolishly.

Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah. (De 6:16)

What happened in Massah? Read the first seven verses of [Ex 17](#). The people had no water. Instead of trusting the Lord, they complained against the Lord and against Moses. They even questioned God, “*Is the Lord among us, or not?*” Instead of trusting their God, they complained and quarreled. Does this response to trouble sound at all familiar to you? Moses gave that location two names; “Massah” which means “Testing.” They so doubted God that they put Him to the test. “Prove to us that you are really God.” The other name was “Meribah” which means “Quarreling.” When I occasionally read over the responses of people who post on Facebook, I am painfully reminded of this sad lesson from Exodus. I am reminded of a line from a 1960s folk song, “When will they ever learn?” And my translation of the line is “Will they ever learn?”

What does it mean for us to tempt the Lord? Whenever we ignore the common sense God gave us and dare bad things to happen by knowingly exposing ourselves to them, we tempt the Lord. Can God heal from disease? Of course He can, and He did so many times in Scripture. However, in the ordinary course of life, God also wove into the fabric of His law to Moses a long list of “Unclean” pronouncements on His people when they were exposed to various contagious diseases. The requirement of this “Unclean” status was a defined period of isolation. How amazingly well those diseases and the quarantine times agree with contemporary medical knowledge. If you are exposed to many contagious diseases, the wise and medically advised course is to quarantine yourself for a measured time. If you haven’t shown signs of the disease by the end of that time, you almost certainly are free from the infection and will not contract the disease—or give it to someone else. When medical authorities advise people exposed to COVID to quarantine themselves for two to three weeks, they are actually practicing the same kind of wise preventive medicine that God implemented in His law to Moses. If we choose to ignore those precautions, are we not then tempting the Lord?

Isaiah and Hezekiah show us the right, the godly way to respond to trouble in our lives. And our study passage reminds us of the Lord’s gracious response when we trust Him and manifest our trust by taking our problems to Him. We sing the right words when we sing, “Oh what peace we often forfeit; oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.” But do we believe the words when we sing them? Do we practice what the words of the hymn teach us? How refreshing, if one day we each looked on our Facebook feed and read only posts that looked to the Lord and praised Him for answered prayers. Wow!

Do we believe what Scripture teaches us regarding prayer, specifically answered prayers? Do we believe what Jesus taught us regarding His promise of answered prayers in [Lu 11:1-13](#)? Or have we become too occupied trying to rationalize and explain unanswered prayer to even pray with the expectation of a real answer?

For too many years, I joined the noise of discussions that focus on the faithless question, “Does God really answer prayer? Does prayer really change anything at all?” Instead of chasing this unbelief, why don’t we study our Bibles and learn *what God tells us about answered prayers*? I struggled with this question far too long before I decided to write this present series of studies that examine the answered prayers of the Bible. Once I started looking at my Bible for examples of answered prayers, I was shocked at the number of such examples. Thank the Lord; He sends us the message we need to hear—we need to believe—in His Word. He does hear, and He does answer our prayers. If you have any doubt, take up your argument with Isaiah and Hezekiah, along with the many other Bible people who speak from their personal experience of God’s gracious answer to their prayers. I recently received a simple, brief note from a godly person who reads my weekly Gleanings. He thanked me for writing on this topic, closing with this comment, “My family has experienced many answered prayers!” Amen!

Does prayer change anything? So far, we are only to 2 Chronicles, and I’ve found twelve examples of godly people praying, and the Lord very specifically answering those prayers. Could we find a better answer than the multitude of examples in Scripture?

In the passage before us, both Isaiah and Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for relief. A pagan king and his forces, mighty forces, surrounded Jerusalem and constantly hurled slurs at the people and at God. How easily these people could have responded with slurs and insults against the Assyrians, but they didn't. Two godly men in the city led the example. They went to the Lord in prayer. And our passage leaves no doubt. The Lord responded to their prayer by sending one lone angel--He didn't need more--to break the spirit and power of the mighty Assyrian army. One angel from the Lord sent the mighty Sennacherib home in shame.

In our Christian walk, we discover quite frequently that God's voice in the midst of trials is not the majority of voices. Nor is it the loudest voice. But it is the right voice, and it speaks for God of His victory. Conspiracies come and go, but God does what He did with the greatest conspiracy of all human history. He announced it a thousand years in advance, and He laughed at it! ([Ps 2](#)) So why do we become so moved in our faith by the first hint of a conspiracy, often with little or no factual evidence to support it? Sadly, my observation indicates that belief in conspiracies of any kind become more important to the person than his faith and lead him into a declining view of God and of His goodness. Do we believe our God is so weak or so unconcerned that He will allow sinful man to secretly defeat His people and His name? Where is our faith? Let's join Isaiah and Hezekiah. Instead of becoming unnerved and obsessed by these ideas, real or (As is so often over time proved to be the case) imagined, why don't we simply go to the Lord in prayer as these two godly men did? We need not pray for a legion of angels to confuse and defeat our God's enemies, public or conspiratorial. We need pray for Him to send only one angel to remove the problem.

We need not reply to the angry shouting voices we hear against our God. In replying to them in anger, we follow their bad example! A good friend reminds us from [Pr 26:4-5](#); the longer you engage a fool in word exchanges the more difficult it becomes for observers to know which of you is the fool. We do not at all follow our Lord's example. Answer their angry voices with our own quiet prayer, and then quietly, and faithfully trust the Lord to take care of the problem, and of the problem people if He deems that action necessary. The same God who sat on heaven's throne in Isaiah's and Hezekiah's day comfortably sits on that same throne today. If we choose to chase imaginations of secret evil plots against us, or if we respond in kind to angry shouting voices against us and against our God, He is likely to simply sit back and leave us alone. However, if we go to His word and to Him in prayer, believing prayer, and ask Him to deal with our problems in His way, we might discover the greatest and best surprise of our lives. Our prayers might be answered! Are we willing to trust our God with that possibility?

Elder Joe Holder