

Title: Be Desperate in Prayer

Text: 2 Kings 18-19

"Desperate times call for desperate measures" - The Greek Physician and Philosopher, Hippocrates

We all, at one point or another, in our lives are faced with a seemingly insurmountable situation. What should we do?

Main Idea: When Confronted with Impossible Circumstances Run Desperately to the God of the Impossible !

Why should I? Because the God of the Bible is the only real hope for the Christian. He may not answer in the way you think He should, but He will in the best way. And sometimes, in the bible, we get to see His answer that is definitive and vindicating! That is what we will see today!

There is a record in the Old Testament about a king who desperately needed God to intervene in a no-win situation. Would God help this king and his people? Would God step into this desperate situation?

Maybe you are in a difficult situation right now. Maybe you are feeling hemmed in with no real solution. Maybe you are feeling hopeless and frightened.

What is your first step in this kind of situation? Do you think through all of your options? Do you get out your strategic plan or your financial calculator? Do you call your friends? For counsel and encouragement. What do you do when there is no obvious solution? To your desperate situation.

Hezekiah, the king of Judah, the southern Kingdom of Israel his first knee jerk reaction was to pray not just any prayer but a desperate prayer for deliverance a desperate prayer that he believed God would say yes to.

So, let's first take a look at Hezekiah and his situation so we can better understand why he prayed such a desperate prayer to the only person who could do anything about it - God!

1. Wanted: A Godly King (18:1-12)

Show Map 1

Discuss

Show Map 2

There were no godly kings in the northern Kingdom of Israel. There were 19 kings, and out of all of them, they all did that which was evil in the eyes of God.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah had 20 kings, and **eight** of those kings were good. Hezekiah was one of the 8.

How did he demonstrate himself to be godly? Take a look at the text with me...

2 Kings 18:1–6 NIV84

¹ In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Hezekiah son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. (Evidently **Hezekiah** reigned as coregent with his father **Ahaz** for 14 years (729–715 B.C. BKC) ² He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. ³ **He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done.** ⁴ He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles (An Asherah is a wooden pole representing the Canaanite fertility goddess, Asherah (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:15; 2 Kgs 17:16; Jer 17:2)). He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made (Num 21:9), for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.) ⁵ **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.** ⁶ **He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses.**

Hezekiah Stood His Ground

2 Kings 18:7 NIV84

⁷ And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.

Further in the text, we will see how Hezekiah did **not** serve the King of Assyria.

By the way, here is a map of Assyria compared with Judah...

Show map

And, Hezekiah was all about purging the land that was started in Joshua's time...

2 Kings 18:8 NIV84

⁸ From watchtower to fortified city, he defeated the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory.

He was acting like his great-grandfather David! Purging the land of impure items and people...

Trouble is Brewing in the North

2 Kings 18:9–12 NIV84

⁹ In King Hezekiah's fourth year, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria marched against Samaria and laid siege to it. ¹⁰ At the end of three years the Assyrians took it. So Samaria was captured in Hezekiah's sixth year, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel. ¹¹ The king of Assyria deported Israel to Assyria and settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in towns of the Medes. ¹² This happened because they had not obeyed the LORD their God, but had violated his covenant—all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. They neither listened to the commands nor carried them out.

The Northern kingdom (Israel), which included Samaria (**Show map**) was taken by the Assyrians. Why did this happen to the northern kingdom of Israel?

Verse 12 makes it quite clear...

“because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. They neither listened nor obeyed.”

Remember the value of the Old Testament for the believer today?

Romans 15:4 (ESV)

⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Side note of application for you and me. God is a merciful God, but there comes a time when He lifts His hand of protection and allows tremendous difficulty against His children to get their attention, and grow them in sanctification.

Philippians 1:6 ESV

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Christian, don't ever forget - God is more committed to you being holy than you are!

So, in Hezekiah's 4th to 6th year, Israel (the Northern Kingdom) was under the judgment hand of God.

I'm not certain what Hezekiah was thinking or feeling at this time, but I'm sure it caused him to consider the idea that they might be next! That the Assyrians would someday attack them!

This leads to the next point in the record of 2 Kings...

When Confronted with Impossible Circumstances Run Desperately to the God of the Impossible !

2. Even Godly Kings Face Trouble (18:13-16)

The time eventually came! Assyria invaded Judah!

Hezekiah is now 14 years into his reign as king and the trouble hits. It becomes very difficult for king Hezekiah. He admits he should have paid tribute to the king of Assyria and now pays up! His hope was this would appease king Sennacherib.

What is a tribute? It's like paying money to a bully so they won't bother you. Hezekiah wasn't paying tribute to the bully king of Assyria. Although Sennacherib was a new king, he had the same bully attitude...

2 Kings 18:13–16 NIV84

¹³ In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. ¹⁴ So Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong. Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you demand of me." The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred

talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. ¹⁵ So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace. ¹⁶ At this time Hezekiah king of Judah stripped off the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of the LORD, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

This is a significant problem. Perhaps King Hezekiah is thinking about what took place 10 years ago to the people of the northern kingdom.

It certainly seems like Hezekiah is backpedaling on his decision to not pay tribute. Maybe he thought the king wouldn't notice his lack of payment.

But Sennacherib did notice, and it was a very big deal to him.

Hezekiah did everything within his power to appease King Sennacherib.

- He admitted he was wrong.
- He promised to make it up to the king of Assyria.
 - He promised to pay more than eleven tons of silver and one ton of gold.
 - He even stripped the Temple of God to pay his debt to the king.

Hezekiah knew that he and Judah were in the crosshairs of Sennacherib. His hope was by taking these extraordinary steps, the king of Assyria would relent from his threats and leave Judah alone.

Unfortunately, this was not the case for Hezekiah. The king of Assyria was just getting started.

This leads to the next phase of this intriguing story...

3. There is Trouble, and There is Desperation (18: 17-37)

Hezekiah's situation is about to get desperate.

Hezekiah's gesture of paying tribute did not appease king Sennacherib. In fact, the King sent some powerful leaders and his army to bring a public threat to the King.

2 Kings 18:17–18 NIV84

¹⁷ The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer and his field commander with a large army, from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They came up to Jerusalem and stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. ¹⁸ They called for the king; and Eliakim son of Hilkiyah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to them.

This impressive leadership entourage (supreme commander, chief officer, and his field commander) along with a large army were sent by the king of Assyria to intimidate Hezekiah so he would just give up without any resistance.

They called for Hezekiah to come out, but instead, he sent his leadership entourage out to receive the message from Sennacherib.

A Real Threat!

Take a look at the threat that comes from Sennacherib.

"It's not a threat, its a promise!"

2 Kings 18:19–25 NIV84

¹⁹ The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah: " 'This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours? ²⁰ You say you have strategy and military strength—but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me? ²¹ Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him. ²² And if you say to me, "We are depending on the LORD our God"—isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship before this altar in Jerusalem"? ²³ " 'Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses—if you can put riders on them! ²⁴ How can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen? ²⁵ Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this place without word from the LORD? The LORD himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.' "

This is a prime example of "Talking Smack"!

The message from the field commander - "Hezekiah, you have no basis for confidence..."

- Your military strength is nothing compared to ours.
- Your dependence on Egypt is misplaced because it was not strong at that time and could not be depended on.
- Your God is impotent and incapable of saving you from our massive military might.
- You are better off borrowing 2000 horses from my master the king. Assuming you even have the riders to ride them!
- What's worse is that your God told me to march against you!!

The threat gets worse verses 26 through 35 and there is no place for Hezekiah to turn there is nothing he can do he has exhausted all of his resources.

Hezekiah's servants beg Sennacherib's leadership envoy to not speak in Hebrew but Aramaic so the people would not understand their message and lose hope.

That request did not go so well...

2 Kings 18:26–35 NIV84

²⁶ Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, “Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it. Don’t speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall.” ²⁷ But the commander replied, “Was it only to your master and you that my master sent me to say these things, and not to the men sitting on the wall—who, like you, will have to eat their own filth and drink their own urine?” ²⁸ Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew: “Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! ²⁹ This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you from my hand. ³⁰ Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, ‘The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’ ³¹ “Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then every one of you will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own cistern, ³² until I come and take you to a land like your own, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey. Choose life and not death! “Do not listen to Hezekiah, for he is misleading you when he says, ‘The LORD will deliver us.’ ³³ Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? ³⁴ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? ³⁵ Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”

Do you see what is happening here? The Assyrians are in it to win it. They are determined to take over the Southern Kingdom, Judah, like they did the Northern Kingdom, Israel.

What was the result of this verbal smackdown?

The People Stand in Obedience, and Hezekiah’s Staff is Dispirited!

Interestingly the people, who understood every word, stood silent and strong.

But Hezekiah’s staff are significantly frightened!

2 Kings 18:36–37 NIV84

³⁶ But the people remained silent and said nothing in reply, because the king had commanded, “Do not answer him.” ³⁷ Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went to Hezekiah, with their clothes torn, and told him what the field commander had said.

Friends, if there was a time when things didn’t look good for Hezekiah and the southern land of Judah, well, this was it!

Although the people stood strong, Hezekiah’s right-hand men had thrown in the towel. This was way bigger than them and any potential resources they had.

By the way, have you ever been in this place? Have you ever been hemmed in with no place to turn? Facing a seemingly impossible situation?

What did you do?

I know of a situation where there was a young woman raised in a Christian home who was determined to marry someone who was not a believer. Not a great plan....

The young woman was my wife, Angie and the woman praying was Trudy Veltman, my mother-in-law. She said I didn't stand a chance because of all the people praying for me...

When difficult times come, prayer should be our immediate response...

This leads us to...

4. Desperate Times Call for Desperate Prayer (19:1-19)

Chapter 19:1 sets off this chapter as a chapter of desperate prayer and a definitive answer from God

Hezekiah Positions Himself for Prayer and Repentance

2 Kings 19:1 NIV84

¹ When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD.

The posture Hezekiah assumes is one of humility (I can't fix this) and desperation toward the only one who can.

He also enlists support from others he knows have a connection with God.

Hezekiah Sends His Staff for Prayer Support

2 Kings 19:2–7 NIV84

*² He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. ³ They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. ⁴ It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, **has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard.** Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives." ⁵ When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, ⁶ Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master, '**This is what the LORD says:** Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. ⁷ Listen! I am going to put such a spirit in him that when he hears a certain report, he will return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword.'"*

A word of encouragement and hope from God through Isaiah the prophet!

More Threats from Assyria

2 Kings 19:8–13 NIV84

⁸ When the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah. ⁹ Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was marching out to fight against him. So he again sent messengers to

Hezekiah with this word: ¹⁰ “Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, ‘Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria.’ ¹¹ Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? ¹² Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my forefathers deliver them: the gods of Gozan, Haran, Rezepth and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, or of Hena or Ivvah?”

(Show Map)

Evidently Sennacherib’s **field commander** pitched his tents near Jerusalem and waited for Hezekiah to send him a message of surrender. While the commander was there, word reached him that Sennacherib **had left Lachish** (cf. 18:14). **He withdrew** from Jerusalem and located his master near **Libnah** where he was engaged in battle. Libnah was just a few miles north of Lachish. This is why the field commander removed his large army (18:17) from the walls of Jerusalem.¹

However, just because Sennacherib left Lachish did not mean he had forgotten about Hezekiah. Sennacherib would destroy Judah no matter what!

A Powerful Prayer of Desperation!

2 Kings 19:14–19 NIV84

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. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: “O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶ Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. ¹⁷ “It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. ¹⁸ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men’s hands. ¹⁹ Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God.”

Notice the components of this prayer after he spread the letter out in the temple.

Hezekiah’s prayer is a Praise sandwich...

Praise

- Hezekiah recognizes the God of Israel is sovereign over all including all kingdoms.
- Hezekiah’s prayer recognizes as the creator of all things which gives Him authority over all things.

Request

¹ Thomas L. Constable, “2 Kings,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 576.

- Lord, don't ignore the direct insults you are receiving from Sennacherib.
- Lord, these enemies of yours are quite impressive. They have accomplished much.
- They have destroyed the gods of their enemies (not really gods). Don't let them destroy your reputation! Step up, Lord, and show them who you really are. You are no God of wood, you are the supreme, all-powerful God of the universe.
- As fierce and impressive as the Assyrians are, Lord, would you deliver us from them?

Praise

- Why? So, everyone will know that you are God and that you will be glorified accordingly.

What can we learn from this prayer of faith?

1. Don't just ask, remember, first and foremost, to praise God regardless of the circumstances.
2. Ultimately we are in the hands of God, and there is no better place to be.
3. Pray desperately!

One last thing to understand...

5. God Always Answers His People's Prayer (19:20-21; 35-37)

God may not always answer in such a dramatic form as he does with Hezekiah, but he always answers his people

2 Kings 19:20–21 NIV84

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. ²¹ This is the word that the LORD has spoken against him: " 'The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises you and mocks you. The Daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee.

Isaiah's prophecy against Assyria

2 Kings 19:35–37 NIV84

³⁵ That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! ³⁶ So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. ³⁷ One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.

Wow! What a dramatic answer to prayer and end to this story!

After all that smack talk, Judah didn't even need to raise a hand. God literally went in and took care of the whole situation! Hezekiah could not take credit for this. Judah could not take credit for this. God accomplished this – God alone!

Angie and I prayed a desperate prayer a long time ago. God answered in an amazing way.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

¹³No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Review - When Confronted with Impossible Circumstances Run Desperately to the God of the Impossible !

Conclusion

What is your desperate prayer?

It is not the quality of my prayer but the quality of the God who answers.

Hezekiah and his people were dramatically delivered by God from the evil Assyrians by a simple prayer of desperation.

I prayed a simple prayer of desperation in 1991.

I was so lost in my sin, selfishness, and pride that I saw no way out.

I understood that I was in trouble with God and in need of rescue.

God provided me a way of escape from my inevitable death sentence through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

That day I repented and placed my faith in Christ as my only hope of rescue.

God rescued me. He heard my desperate prayer.

Many of us are facing desperate situations today.

But if you are not saved, there is no more desperate situation in your life because you are facing eternal separation from God.

You must not only understand this, but you must, today, call out in desperation for God to save you.

Will you?

Connection Group Reflection Questions

1. Why is it important to understand Hezekiah's situation?
2. How can you relate to what Hezekiah faced? What is your desperate situation?
3. How has God answered your desperate prayers over the years? Have the answers always been what you hoped they would be?
4. How can you help people turn to God when they are facing desperate situations?
5. What can we learn from 2 Kings 18-19?

