

# The Ands, Ifs, and Buts of Prayer

## *September 11, 2016*

### I. Introduction

A. Some sermons are TIMELESS. Some sermons are TIMELY.

- This message series is SPIRITUALLY TIMELESS.
- This message series is NATIONALLY TIMELY.

B. The prayer of God's people influences the destiny of a nation.

**2 Chronicles 20:1-2** After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi).

**2 Chronicles 20:3-4** Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

C. How can my prayer be powerful and effective?

**James 5:16** The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

### II. The ANDS, IFS and BUTS of prayer

#### A. *The ANDS of Prayer*

**2 Chronicles 20:5-7** Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard and said: "Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?"

1. Prayer starts with God.

- When our praying begins with us, our prayers are out of focus.

2. AND God is Powerful

**2 Chronicles 20:6** and said: “Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.

**Nahum 1:3** The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet.

3. AND God is Faithful

**2 Chronicles 20:7** Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?

**Psalms 105:8** He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations,

**2 Timothy 2:13** if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

4. AND God is Personal

**Hebrews 8:10** This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

## *B. The IFS of Prayer*

**2 Chronicles 20:8-9** They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, ‘If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.’

- Effective prayer is less about need and more about relationship.

1. God hears us IF we are in trouble.

**Luke 12:6-7** Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

2. God saves us IF we pray.

**Hebrews 4:16** Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

**2 Chronicles 6:28-30** "When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when enemies besiege them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, and when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel—being aware of their afflictions and pains, and spreading out their hands toward this temple— then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive, and deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know the human heart),

**2 Chronicles 7:13-15** "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

3. A prayer for a nation in crisis... "IF my people..."

- God's people must be humble in prayer.
- God's people must seek Him in prayer.
- God's people must repent in prayer.

4. Prayer changes things, but first it changes me.

### *C. The BUTS of Prayer*

**2 Chronicles 20:10-12** "But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

- We can be honest with God in prayer.

1. A "But Now" Prayer

**2 Chronicles 20:10** But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them.

- God is powerful, BUT life has trouble

**John 16:33** “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

2. A "See How" Prayer

**2 Chronicles 20:11** See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance.

- God is faithful, BUT life does not always seem fair.

**Deuteronomy 2:5** Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot on. I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own.

- When trouble comes you can choose to reject God or rely on God.

3. An "Eyes Are On You" Prayer

**2 Chronicles 20:12** Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

- We do not have the power, BUT God does.
- We do not have the answers, BUT God does.

**Ephesians 2:4-5 (ESV)** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—