

Over the last two weeks the nation was shocked and saddened by the news of the flash flooding in Texas. In the middle of the night, around 2 a.m., the Guadalupe River rose 26 feet in just 45 minutes, leaving most people entirely unaware of the threat that was rushing toward them. While tragically 130 people lost their lives, many more were saved by heroes and rescue workers who rushed into danger, including Petty Officer Scott Ruskan. When the sirens went off, Scott boarded a helicopter and flew seven hours, in no visibility, until his team landed at Camp Mystic. Ruskan stayed there as the only rescue worker, doing triage and facilitating evaluations until 165 kids and counselors were rescued. They were in dire need. They were surrounded, and those 165 were evacuated because someone rushed to their aid to save them.

That's an extreme example, but I want to ask you to reflect: What do you do when the waters around you rise? What do you do when you are surrounded, when you are in dire need? Who do you call? Where do you turn? In this final week of our series on prayer, we are going to learn from the prayers of Hezekiah how to pray, "God, deliver me." Turn in your Bible to Isaiah 36. It's important for us to know about King Hezekiah and the type of leader he was. The Bible tells us that he took the throne when he was 25 years old and he reigned for 29 years. During his long tenure as king, he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He removed idolatry throughout the land. He trusted in God, and the Bible says that, among all the kings of Judah, there was no one like him, either before or after him. Wouldn't you love for God to say something like that about you? That of those who came before you and those who came behind you, you loved God with a passion, a zeal, a purity that was beyond compare, truly exceptional. That's the nature of Hezekiah's life and leadership. But in the middle of his reign, the crisis of his lifetime struck.

"In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them" (Isaiah 36:1). Judah was the kingdom where Hezekiah ruled. All the smaller towns and villages around the kingdom were attacked and destroyed by Sennacherib. I want to show you something really cool that should bolster your faith and confidence in the Bible. Every word written in this book is true. This book spans 2,000 years of history, on three continents, and there has never once been a discovery that disproves anything the Bible teaches. With that in mind, in the year 1830, archaeologist Charles Taylor discovered this hexalogical clay prism (Taylor's prism) while digging in ancient Assyria. It was made in the year 691 BC, only ten years after the book of Isaiah was written. On the prism is a quotation from King Sennacherib: "As for Hezekiah of the land Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, I surrounded and conquered forty-six of his fortified cities, fortresses, and smaller settlements. I took (as slaves) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep and goats, which were without number, and I counted them as plunder.

King Hezekiah, in the capital city of Jerusalem, is watching this happen. The most powerful army in the world is marching on his land, sacking his cities, stripping them of all their worth, and enslaving his people. Hezekiah knew that eventually the Assyrians would come for the capital, and archaeologists can clearly see that at this exact time in history, the king strengthened the city walls and hewed a 1,700-foot subterranean tunnel through rock to bring fresh water into the city for additional resources. You can go to that tunnel, hand-hewn 2,700 years ago in preparation for this siege, and walk through it today. The Assyrians did come for the capital, and the Assyrian king had this inscribed on the prism: "As for Hezekiah the Jew, who did not submit to my yoke, I shut him up like a caged bird in Jerusalem."

So the army is surrounding the city, and the officials start speaking threats to the people! The leaders of the city say, "Speak to us in your Assyrian language; we understand it." They said, "No, we want to speak Hebrew so all your people hear what we are about to do to you!" They wanted to intimidate them and sow fear in their hearts. They said:

“(The people in this city) will have to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine...Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, ‘The Lord will deliver us.’ Have the gods of any nations ever delivered their lands from the hand of the king of Assyria?... Who of all the gods of these countries have been able to save their lands from me? How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand?” (Isaiah 36:12, 18, 20)

Dread and despair began to set into the people. The of Assyria sent a letter directly to Hezekiah with similar words:

“Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, ‘Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria.’ 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?” (Isaiah 37:10-12)

He’s surrounded; the situation looks hopeless. What does Hezekiah, this godly king, do? His incredible response is one of the most inspirational moments in the entire Old Testament, and we can learn much from his prayer.

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. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: “Lord Almighty, 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 all the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God. It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples 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, Lord, are the only God.” (Isaiah 37:14-20)

Don’t you just love that response? He takes this boastful, blasphemous, threatening letter that was meant to terrify and intimidate him, and he went right into the presence of God, and he spread it out before the Lord and said, “God, you have ears to hear what is being said, you have eyes to see what is being done, you know the power and might at their disposal, but surely you, O God, ruler of the world, can deliver us.” And God did. “Then the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there” (Isaiah 37:36-37). In Sennacherib’s own chronicles, he mentions capturing every other city in the entire region, but not Jerusalem. He broke camp and went home, never to return.

This is the point in this story where everyone breathes a sigh of relief, right? The threat is over. We’re safe. God is God. Hezekiah is safe and sound. Not so fast. Just a few verses later we learn, “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’” (Isaiah 38:1). He goes from relief and celebration right back to calamity! First, he thinks he is going to die at the hands of his enemies. Miraculously that threat is resolved, but then he’s told he’s going to die from illness. “It’s time to get your affairs in order and say your goodbyes.”

Hezekiah is surrounded again. Hezekiah feels threatened and hopeless again. So what does he do? Like before, he calls out to God! “Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ‘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” (Isaiah 38:2-3). Like before, he took the news right into

the presence of God. He wept and he asked God to move, and God did! “Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: ‘Go and tell Hezekiah, “This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.”’” God delivered the city, and then God delivered Hezekiah, because he called out to him.

As we are asking God to teach us to pray, what do we learn from Hezekiah? There are a few lessons that are so practical we can incorporate them naturally into our lives. We’re going to focus on the ABCDs.

Approach God first

Usually, when a king sees an army at the gates, he goes to the war room, but Hezekiah went to the throne room. Usually, a king would seek an audience with his officers and generals, but Hezekiah sought an audience with God. Usually, when a person is told they are terminally ill, they seek a second opinion from a medical provider, they build a healthcare team to see if there is any other way, they start speaking with family members to begin goodbyes, they talk to their attorney to firm up their will. Hezekiah bypassed all those conversations and immediately began to pray.

This is the pattern we see from faithful men and women throughout the Bible. When Daniel was told about the king’s decree to pray to no other gods, he didn’t call a lawyer to talk about staging a defense of his religious liberties; he went into his room and talked to God about it. When Jesus looked at 5,000 hungry people and a few small fish and loaves, he didn’t call the catering company; he called on God. When Peter, the leader of the early church, was locked up in prison, the local believers weren’t knocking on the doors of high-ranking officials, asking for them to advocate for Peter; they were knocking on the doors of heaven. When we face a crisis, our very first step is to approach God! There is a well-known observation: “In times of crisis, your first instinct reveals your true dependence.” We want to be people who depend on God. Listen to the words of Scripture:

- “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).
- “The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” (Proverbs 18:10).

When crisis comes, run to God! I have a good friend in our church, and last week his entire department at work was eliminated, so he unexpectedly found himself without a job. Keren and his wife were talking a few days ago and Keren asked how things were going. His wife said, “We are doing well! And we are praying together more than ever.” That’s what God wants—when hard times come, we come to him!

Believe in God’s power

God is not an emotional support blanket, something that helps us feel better but lacks actual power. He’s the ruler of the universe and has real power to act on our behalf. Hezekiah said, “Lord Almighty, 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” (Isaiah 37:16). Hezekiah was not reminding God about who God is and all God has done; he was reminding himself who God is and all God has done. My God is the God who created the universe—the galaxies, the solar systems, the sun, the moon, the stars—those are his! God made the mountains and the oceans; he made life itself. That’s my God! Even if your problems are the size of the Assyrian army, your problems are nothing compared to God’s ability.

Do you remember when Jesus was with his disciples in the boat? A furious storm came upon them. The wind was howling, the waves were raging, the disciples were terrified for their lives, and what was Jesus doing? Napping! “A furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’” (Matthew 8:24-25). The disciples were panicked and terrified. Jesus was sound asleep in perfect peace.

What's the difference? Their focus! The disciples were focused on the storm. Jesus' focus was on the power of God. "He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'" (Matthew 8:26-27). Instead of keeping your eyes on the storm, keep your eyes on Jesus. You worship the one who even the wind and waves obey!

Years ago, a man from our community came into my office and shared about hardships he was facing. A crisis with his marriage. A crisis with his kids. A crisis at work. He was overwhelmed. At a practical level, there was very little I could do. But I asked if I could pray for him. I put my hand on his shoulder and prayed the first few verses of Psalm 27:1-3.

The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.

It was like a damn broke in his life. He was exhausted from spending all his energy trying to hold it all with his failing strength, and what he needed to do was relax his grip and rely on God's strength instead.

Cry out to God

Don't just approach God and believe in his power—cry out to him and tell him exactly what you need! When Hezekiah read that threatening letter, look at what he did: "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. And Hezekiah prayed... 'Give ear, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see'" (Isaiah 37:14-15,17). He takes the letter, lays it before the Lord, and says, "God, please, please, do something about this!" This is the difference between panic and prayer. Panic says, "I don't know what to do." Prayer says, "God, my trust is in you." Where do you have a situation in your life like this right now? What papers do you need to spread out in the presence of God and ask him to move?

The other day I was going through a drawer looking for my passport, and I came across my mom's death certificate. It's been two years, but it was a fresh punch to the gut. Why isn't she here? Why doesn't she get to watch her grandkids grow up? She was way too young. I had to just sit with that paper in the presence of God and allow him to bring the healing and hope that comes in the name of Jesus.

Maybe today you are looking at divorce papers and you need to spread them out in the presence of the Lord and ask for a miracle. Or maybe you are looking at severance papers from your company and you need to spread them out in the presence of the Lord and ask for a miracle. Or maybe you are looking at an MRI or blood work that has no earthly medical solution and you need to lay it out in the presence of the Lord and ask for a miracle. Expose your deepest hurt, your greatest needs, in the presence of God and say, "Give ear, Lord, and hear! Open your eyes, Lord, and see!" Cry out to God! There is a beautiful example of this in the Old Testament when another king by the name of Jehoshaphat was facing a dire circumstance. He prayed, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chronicles 20:12). God responds to the cry of his children.

Desire God's glory

Hezekiah not only sought God for deliverance, but he also sought God's glory. He said,

"It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples 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, Lord, are the only God.” (Isaiah 37:18-20)

The Assyrians boasted about taking captive all the other deities that their captors believed in. And Hezekiah says, “Of course they did, because their “gods” are just wood and stone, things fashioned with human hands. But not you. Lord. You are the one true God. You are the living God. You are the all-powerful God. Lord, defend your people, defend this city, so that your name is held in esteem, so that you will be honored among all the kingdoms of the earth and they would know you are not like Baal, you are not like Asherah, you are not like Molech. You cannot be taken captive. Deliver us for the sake of your name!”

This should be the rationale behind our desperate prayers! God, don’t just give me health and extend my days; with my strength and more years on this earth, let me serve you, honor you, and tell others about you. God, don’t just save our marriage so we don’t have to go through the pain of divorce and so we can be happy in our home; use our marriage as a testimony to the power of your grace and allow our marriage to tell the story of redemption and renewal, a living picture of Christ and the church. With my new job, I’m not just looking for a paycheck; I’m asking for a platform to honor you and influence others for you.

When you are surrounded, when you need to cry out to God for deliverance, these are the ABCDs. Most of all, look to Jesus. He was the king who, when enemies were at the gate, was not delivered from the enemy but rather was delivered over to the enemy. He could have avoided death but rather chose to suffer and die on the cross, so that our life could be extended for all eternity. When we cry out to God to deliver us, the most important thing for us to do is to look to Jesus, and see that in every way that matters most, he already has!