

BACK AGAINST THE WALL PRAYER

ISAIAH 37:14-20

The Bible records many different postures for prayer – *knees bent, eyes upward, hands raised, face-down, the whole body lying prostrate* on the ground... These and more, are all biblically sanctioned stances for prayer.

Once, three pastors were trying to decide which prayer posture was best. As they talked, a telephone repairman worked in the background.

The first pastor felt the key was a bowed head and folded hands.

The second pastor said real prayer could occur only on your knees.

The last pastor insisted the best posture was flat on your face.

It was a big debate... Finally, the telephone repairman couldn't resist jumping into the conversation. He was confident he knew the answer. He told the pastors, "The most powerful prayer I've ever prayed was while I was dangling upside down by my heels from a forty foot power pole."

Here's one last prayer posture... **your back against the wall.**

This is the posture of King Hezekiah's prayer. His back is against the wall. He's in dire straights. He's

desperate... and He's surrounded. A horde of ferocious, cutthroat, bloodthirsty troops are breathing down his neck. Hezekiah has no where to go but God.

King Hezekiah's prayer was a *"Back Against the Wall"* prayer. Have you ever prayed such a prayer? Have you prayed such a prayer this week?

Most of my best prayers have been the *"Back Against the Wall"* variety.

Often my prayers are sparked by scary situations. Circumstances are stacked against me. Troubles have hemmed me in. There's an awful lot at stake. *My back is up against a wall*, and I have no where to turn but up!

This was also the case with King Hezekiah of Judah...

Hezekiah was in big time trouble. A bad boy had moved into the neighborhood, and wanted Hezekiah's spot on the playground.

The bully was the dreaded Assyrian army.

Apparently, Assyria never heard of the Geneva Convention or humane treatment. They were the most heinous, brutal, cruel, bloodthirsty army to ever roam the earth. The Assyrians were *a sword with no conscience*.

After conquering a village they would take a prisoner – hold him down on the ground - reach in his mouth - and rip his tongue out by its roots.

Once a city surrendered the Assyrian torturers would amputate arms and legs - hack away feet - pluck out eyes – cut off lips and ears.

Then as if defeating you and torturing you were not enough, they would set fire to your wife and kids before your very eyes. *Meet the barbarians.*

It became an Assyrian trademark to set a pile of skulls by the gate of a conquered city to remind the folks left what would happen if they rebelled.

Often the Assyrian troops would skin their prisoners alive – like a hunter dressing a deer, or fisherman cleaning his catch. It's believed many of Hitler's crimes against the Jews were borrowed from the ancient Assyrians.

You can't read about the Assyrians without it causing the hair on the nape of neck to stand straight up... These were a cruel and brutal people.

Now, how would you like to see these fiendish foes camped just outside the walls of your city? At least 185,000 Assyrian troops – equal to the population of Columbus, GA - had encircled the holy city of Jerusalem.

You think you've been in some tight spots?

Hezekiah's back was pushed deep against the wall!

It reminds of a story from long ago, when ships sailed the seven seas.

A British naval captain was informed a Spanish galleon was just off his port bow. He called for his first mate, and ordered, “Quick, bring me my red vest, and man the battle stations.” A battle was fought, the ship defended.

The next day the look-out shouted, “Five Spanish galleons off the starboard bow.” Obviously, the enemy had gone for reinforcements.

Again the captain called for his first mate and barked instructions, “Quick, bring me my red vest, and man the battle stations.” Another battle raged at sea, and the crew barely staved off the Spaniard sailors.

The first mate though was perplexed. Why did the captain always go into battle wearing his red vest? When he asked, the captain replied, “If I’m ever wounded in battle I don’t want my men to see me bleeding, and get discouraged. The red vest hides the blood.” The first mate was impressed.

What a brave captain!

But the next day the Spaniards attacked once more, but this time the look-out shouted with a loud voice, “I see the whole Spanish Armada.”

This time the captain called for his first mate, and ordered, “Quick, bring me my red vest, my brown pants, and man the battle stations.” On this occasion the brave captain was just a little intimidated... *just like Hezekiah.*

Yet Hezekiah didn’t call for his red vest, or his brown pants, he called on the Lord. *He prays...* and his “*Back*

Against the Wall” prayer is recorded in Isaiah 37. We’ll read it... then discuss how we can pray similar prayers...

Verse 14 “**And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it** (It was a threatening letter from the Assyrian General meant to intimidate Hezekiah into surrender.); **and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.**

Then Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, saying: O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands - wood and stone.

Therefore they have destroyed them.

Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD, You alone."

Hezekiah’s prayer – “*A Back Against the Wall Prayer*” involves 5 steps.

First, Hezekiah takes his concern to God.

Second, he spreads it out before the Lord.

Third, he focuses his mind on the truth he knows about God.

Fourth, he looks at his situation from God's vantage point.

And fifth, Hezekiah makes his request with God's glory in mind.

If you're looking to remember – just in case your back is ever up against the wall... Here it is... he ***takes it to, spreads it out, tunes it in, turns it around, and lifts it up...*** here's how to pray "*Back Against the Wall*" style.

First, **Hezekiah takes his concern to the Lord.**

Verse 14 **"And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD"**

Hezekiah receives an ugly, nasty letter – the kind of letter you turn over to the FBI. You examine the envelope for white powder. The letter Hezekiah received from the Assyrian General was a terrorist threat.

Perhaps you've received a troublesome letter lately. Maybe it was from an X-spouse, or an impatient creditor, or your child's principal, or the IRS, or a disturbed neighbor, or an angry vendor. Just this last week I received an angry letter. Over the years I've received my share of nasty letters.

Hezekiah's letter was signed by the king of Assyria. You can read it in verses 10-13. It demands surrender. In essence, it says to Hezekiah...

“Your cause is hopeless. Our army is invincible. You can’t stop us. Other nations tried. They trusted in their gods, but they were impotent to help. Jerusalem will be axed exactly as the other cities have fallen.”

The Assyrian king, Sennacherib was fighting battles on several fronts - and rather than pull troops from the south to lay siege to Jerusalem he hoped he could use a vicious letter to intimidate Hezekiah into surrender.

It reminds me of the bombing of London in World War 2. For months on end the Nazis shelled the British capitol unmercifully. It was intended to break the resolve of the British people as much as it was to cripple their industry. During the bombing a London church posted some advice on their marquee. The sign read, *“If your knees knock, knell on them.”*

This is what Hezekiah did. As soon as he read this letter he took it immediately to the house of the Lord. Before he discussed it with his counselors, or met with his cabinet, or put a phone call into his wife, or posted on Facebook - he left the palace, and took the letter to the Temple!

“Back Against The Wall” prayers eliminate all the formality and protocol. They cut to the chase. There’s no time for discussion, or debate, or friendly counsel. *“Back Against the Wall”* praying runs straight to the heart of God.

It reminds me of the old Superman movies. After the fiendish villain reveals his diabolical scheme, someone

always suggests going to the police. But that's when you'd hear the line, **"No, this is a job for Superman."**

Well, this is the attitude of a *Back Against The Wall prayer*.

Hezekiah walks right past the experts and generals and counselors paid to give him advice. He may listen later, but he knows their opinion is not going to change the situation. *His back is against the wall...* and he knows he needs to hang with God! He takes his concern straight to the Lord.

Then notice the second step... **he spreads it out before the Lord.**

Hezekiah took the letter, and unrolled the scroll and laid it all out.

In doing so, he took the whole situation, and spread out the details before the Lord. Hezekiah spills the beans – he gets it off his chest – he says to God, *"Here it is Lord... I've evaluated the pros and cons – here're the options as I see them – these are the details of my situation."*

Hey, when you receive a troublesome letter, or a nasty bit of news, spread it out before the Lord. Take your situation and roll it all out.

Even when there is no letter... when Sennacherib's threat comes in other forms - it can still be helpful to write it all down in letter form...

Seldom do I go to pray and not take a pen and paper. I'll write down the pros and cons as I see them – even list my

options - knowing full well that God may choose to work in a way I never imagined, but at least it helps to have a starting point – and a good place to begin is to *spread it all out*.

Of course, spreading out the problem is for our benefit – not the Lord's.

Jesus told us in Matthew 6:8, “**your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him**” God is aware of the circumstances that have you surrounded. Never is our prayer “*breaking news*” to God. He knows us.

Here's why it helped Hezekiah to spread out the letter - *when he spread it out, he laid it down*. That's what God is after in us... He wants you and me to turn our problems over to Him. Lay them down and leave them...

1Peter 5:7 tells us, “**Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.**” And I love Peter choice of words. The Greek word translated “*casting*” means “*to throw upon.*” It was used of the blanket that draped over the horse. Here's what the Lord wants us to do with our cares and worries – *spread them out and throw them down* over His shoulders.

He promises to carry those burdens for us.

This is my theory. The Bible doesn't tell us. This is according to the Prophet *I-say-a...* I believe Hezekiah

took the letter, spread it out before the Lord, and just left it there. He walked out of the room without the letter.

By far this is the toughest part of prayer – to leave it once you spread it out. *Have you had this problem?* You cast your care upon the Lord - then you take it back. You have to cast it again, and again, and again.

Your prayer life is like a futile fishing trip that catches no fish. You have to keep casting out the line and reeling it back in... over and over and over.

This is why the next three components of Hezekiah's prayer are so vital.

He left His problem with God because He focused on who God is.

He sees his situation from God's perspective. And he makes his request with God's glory in mind. He **tunes it in... turns it around... lifts it up...**

Third, **Hezekiah focuses his mind on the truth about God.**

Verse 15 tells us, **Then Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, saying: O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim..."**

Hezekiah could look over the wall and see Sennacherib's royal tent. It was surrounded by battalions of troops, and chariots, and battering rams.

But Hezekiah is leaning on a king far greater.

Remember, Hezekiah is praying in the house of the Lord, Solomon's Temple. God's presence rests over the Ark of the Covenant - on top of the box were two golden angels - archangels – it was a model of the heavenly Temple, and the real angels that live in the presence of the Almighty.

Sennacherib is surrounded by a puny, mortal, earthly army - but God has angelic, supernatural, invincible forces awaiting their next command.

And here is where we need to correct a misconception.

When you think of angels you probably picture short, chubby, baby-faced angels flitting around like humming birds pointing their little toy bow and arrow at boys and girls in love. This couldn't be further from the truth.

I had to straighten this out once for my Little Leaguers. One year our baseball team was the *Angels*. I reminded the kids that angels are God's mighty warriors. Armies have been wiped out by one angel on a rampage. One boy said, "Coach if we win the championship, we'll be the archangels!"

Hezekiah sees Sennacherib camped among wimpy mortals – in comparison He sees the God of Israel seated in the heavens attended to by mighty angels who can wipe out the earth in a single swipe of judgment.

As Hezekiah's perspective sharpens his faith in God begins to swell.

It is amazing to me how often we can lose perspective.

Take for example the price of gasoline. We're up in arms because it's hovering around \$2.50 per gallon, but that's still cheap in comparison.

Think of it this way, if 20 ounces of **Gatorade** cost \$1.59 that means a gallon of Gatorade costs **\$10.17**. If a 7 ounce bottle of **white-out** costs \$1.39 - a gallon of white-out costs **\$25.42**. At \$3.15 per 12 ounces, a gallon of **brake fluid** would cost **\$33.60**. A travel size bottle of **Scope** mouthwash costs \$.99 for an ounce-and-a-half – that's **\$84.84** per gallon. And Vicks **Nyquil** costs \$8.35 for a 6 ounce bottle. That's **\$178.13** per gallon.

Like I said, \$2.50 for a gallon of gasoline now sounds like a bargain.

My point is - it's easy to lose perspective. This is the biggest problem with a problem – not the problem itself, but how it distorts our perspective.

If we let it, the problem can become so pressing, so intimidating, so threatening that we begin to think the problem is bigger than our God. We focus on the strength of the problem, rather than the superiority of our God.

In his book *"Pain's Hidden Purpose,"* author Don Baker writes, "Pain speaks a strange language – it plays funny tricks on us. It makes us think things and say things and even believe things that are not true... like God is dead, He's gone fishing, or He just doesn't care."

Pain causes me think my problem is the one that finally stumped God.

Hezekiah refuses to yield to confusion. In verse 16 he addresses the one true God of Israel, “**You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.**” God doesn’t need this information – He’s well aware of His own position and prominence – but it’s a needed reminder to Hezekiah. He needs to keep His eyes on God.

CS Lewis once made this statement, “**The first of all prayers is this... May it be the real I that prays, and let it be the real You that I pray to...**”

Spreading out my desperate situation, being honest with my true thoughts and feelings, makes sure it’s *the real I that prays...*

But it’s focusing on the truths of Scripture – the power and supremacy of the one, true God – that’s what insures it’s *the real You that I pray to...*

When our back is against the wall, it’s critical to our faith, that we get a clear perspective of the goodness, and glory, and greatness of our God.

Then fourth, **King Hezekiah’s prayer looks at the situation from God’s point of view.** He prays in verse 17, “**Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God.**”

Hezekiah turns the whole situation around. The king of Assyria's letter was addressed to Hezekiah, but it was really an offence to God. As Hezekiah puts it, *"the words of Sennacherib... reproach... the living God."*

If Hezekiah had dwelt on this for awhile... he might even have felt sorry for Sennacherib. Think about it, the man who blasphemes, and curses, and defies, and degrades the Almighty – the Holy One - *needs to be pitied.*

It's as if he's blind-folded, speeding down the wrong side of the expressway, headed straight for an 18-wheeler. It's only a matter of time. God's judgment is going to wipe him out before he realizes what hit him.

Look at what Hezekiah prays in verses 18-19, *Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands - wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them.*" When Assyria went to battle they viewed the conflict as *our gods* against *your gods*. *Who's got the greater god?* And because Assyria always won they figured they did.

In his letter Sennacherib points out to Hezekiah that the gods of the nations Assyria had conquered did nothing to help the people who trusted in them. Thus, he concluded, why would the God of Israel be any different?

But Sennacherib's logic had a fatal flaw...

The proud king never considered the nations he conquered served worthless idols and his army had never faced the one, true God!

“Back Against The Wall” prayers major on this very point. They remind us that if we serve the one and only God, then our situation *is different*.

Often, doctors point to precedent. They point out that no one has ever survived the disease you’ve contracted – but isn’t that what Sennacherib says to Hezekiah? Up until now, Assyria’s march through the Middle East has yet to be contested... so why should Israel survive an Assyrian siege?

Doctors can be just like Sennacherib, they quote you the statistics, but they don’t consider that your disease has just run into an all-powerful God!

Perhaps you’ve been told by friends - or a counselor - there’s no way your marriage can be reconciled. Every other couple with similar problems has seen their relationship dissolve... *why is your marriage any different?*

Well, if your focus is only on the problem, it won’t be - but if you add *the God-factor* – and put your faith in Him - nothing is impossible. Pray a *“Back to the Wall”* prayer and God might just work a *“Back to the Wall”* miracle.

Finally, **Hezekiah makes his request with God’s glory in mind.**

Verse 20, **“Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may**

know that You are the LORD, You alone." Hezekiah knows God's glory is on the line in his dilemma.

His conflict with Assyria is not a battle against two earthly kings - or even two earthly armies – this is a battle against God and Satan. And Hezekiah wants God to win, so all the world will recognize His sovereignty!

Yet Hezekiah exemplifies the submission we all should emulate.

Does he care about his own hide? Sure he does! Who wouldn't? But is his own hide – his own welfare - Hezekiah's chief concern? I don't think so.

This is not just about Hezekiah's outcome. He cares about God's glory.

In verse 19, Hezekiah merges his obvious *desire to be rescued* with his *desire for God to be glorified*. And I believe any prayer that can't merge *my concerns* with *God's glory* is a prayer that shouldn't even be prayed!

Remember 1John 5:14, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." The key is to pray according to God's will.

It reminds me of the man who complained, "When I was 20 I prayed for a million dollars. When I was 30 I prayed for a million dollars. When I turned 40 I prayed for a million dollars. Now that I'm 50 I've come to two conclusions... either I'm praying for the wrong thing, or

God isn't picking up his messages." Let me assure you - your unanswered prayers are not God's fault. We can pray the wrong prayers – in the wrong way.

I've prayed prayers I'm glad God didn't answer. They were misguided.

I know folks who've made terribly selfish requests, and because God didn't cater to their every whim, they concluded He wasn't taking His messages. To these people, God is a blessing dispenser in the sky – plug in a prayer and out pops a blessing. That's not the God of the Bible!

What if a five year old kid sat down at the dinner table, and asked for ice cream instead of vegetables. Just because his mother didn't satisfy his request, doesn't mean she doesn't love him, or doesn't care about him.

How foolish! The mother sees the bigger picture.

She cares about him in a deeper way – a way he can't yet grasp or appreciate. In reality, the very fact his mother hasn't caved in to his demands, and given in to what he wants, is *the proof* that she loves him.

“Back Against the Wall” prayers are bold, desperate prayers. They cut to the chase and exude passion. But if you can't humble yourself with you're back against the wall, you have a bigger problem than Sennacherib.

And your bigger problem is your pride!

If your back is against the wall, and you're still making selfish demands you've missed the point... why *do you*

think you're going through tough times? God wants to humble you, and expose your need for Him.

Whenever you're backed up against the wall it's time for you to submit to God's ways and will, regardless of how the outcome might affect you.

We can't leave this story without reading God's answer to Hezekiah's prayer. Jump to the end of the chapter... *Remember the macho angels that surround God's throne?* God dispatches one of them to handle the Assyrians. Verses 36-37 provide us the play-by-play of what happened...

“Then the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses - all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh.” Obviously Sennacherib has run into *the real-deal God* - and a king who trusted Him.

Will you trust God? When your back is against the wall will you pray Hezekiah's prayer? God can rescue you, just as He did the king of Judah!

Today, if you're surrounded, don't *hesitate*... be a *Hezekiah*.

Take the letter and spread it out before the Lord!

This is the time of the year for kick-offs. High School football kicked off this week. College football kicks off this coming weekend. We've got a few things we're kicking off at Calvary! Here's the kick-off date, *September 12*.

First, we're kicking off a new combination of our TTBS, and home fellowships. We're calling them **TBGs – Through the Bible Groups**.

Eleven different groups will be meeting on 6 different days of the week. The groups are scattered among 8 school clusters. There's one near you!

We think this is an optimum way to take you further in your relationship with Jesus... studying TTBS with the dynamics of a small group. You'll hear the Bible Study, then discuss it and apply it with other believers.

Some of you come to Calvary, but have never gotten involved with a group of folks at CC. We need each other to grow. This is your opportunity.

Also on *September 12* we're kicking off a new series of Sunday AM studies. We're calling it, "***Church Mechanics – Popping the Hood on the Church***." Your car has different systems that make it reliable and efficient.

The brake system, the ignition system, the cooling system, etc...

Likewise the church has different systems that make it effective. A relationship system, a leadership system, an accountability system, etc...

We're going to pop the hood on the church, and seek a deeper understanding of how and why the church is so important to God. I believe our study will have a revolutionary impact *on your life* and *on our church*.

Tonight is our last Sunday night TTBS. We'll cover Isaiah 36-39, and that's where I want us to look this morning. Let's turn to Isaiah 37...

We're going to look at King Hezekiah's dilemma and his response.