

## SESSION 4

# PRAYING FOR OURSELVES

### ▶ **The Point**

Take your needs to God daily and trust Him to answer.

### ▶ **The Passage**

Matthew 6:11; Isaiah 38:1-6,15-17

### ▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

I love homemade bread. A dear lady in our church knows this and regularly brings me a loaf of delicious bread she makes from a starter mix that has been in her family for over one hundred years. She even slices the bread before she delivers it. How awesome is that?

As much as I enjoy her homemade bread, it's a luxurious treat, not a necessity. But bread—or rather, food in general—is something we all need *daily*. Many of us don't give a second thought about where our next meal will come from. What we need is always readily available. That's not true of everybody, however. It certainly wasn't true in the first century. The average man worked for a daily wage, which essentially covered his family's expenses for that day only. If he missed a day of work, he might miss feeding his family.

We all have things we need, but where do we look for those needs? God knows we have physical needs, and in His Model Prayer, Jesus encouraged us to go to God with those needs.

### ▶ **The Setting**

Jesus taught His disciples how to live as citizens in the kingdom of God. (See Matt. 5–7.) He instructed them to pray in a way that would enable them to serve Him faithfully. His model for prayer showed how to ask the Lord to provide what they would need. (See Matt. 6:11.) Generations earlier, King Hezekiah took a critical need in his life to the Lord. In turn, the Lord responded to his prayer. (See Isa. 38:1-17.)

# What does the Bible say?

## **Matthew 6:11; Isaiah 38:1-6,15-17**

**Matt. 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread,**

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**Isa. 38:1 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover."**

**<sup>2</sup> Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,**

**<sup>3</sup> and said, "Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.**

**<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah:**

**<sup>5</sup> "Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.**

**<sup>6</sup> I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.**

.....

**Isa. 38:15 What shall I say? For he has spoken to me, and he himself has done it. I walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul.**

**<sup>16</sup> O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh restore me to health and make me live!**

**<sup>17</sup> Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back.**





## **Matthew 6:11; Isaiah 38:1-3 Commentary**

**[Matthew 6:11]** Jesus intended for His disciples' prayer lives to make a marked difference to them. He carefully instructed us to tell our Father what we need when we pray. In a prayer shaped by submission to Him, we're invited to ask God for the resources we need so we can serve Him as kingdom citizens. We don't come with a list of items to nourish our self-indulgence. Instead, we bring to God what we think we'll need to accomplish kingdom tasks. The word picture of **daily bread** resonated well. Jesus' disciples usually didn't have a stockpile of food. Neither did they enjoy the luxury of money or grocery stores from which to buy food whenever they wanted. Bread was a basic necessity, and it came to represent sufficiency. If they had bread, they had enough. When Jesus taught them to ask our Father for bread, He led them to trust God to supply what they would need for the day.

Asking our Father to give us what we need each day can be difficult. Some of us prefer to get what we need all by ourselves. Asking God to provide for us can be a serious challenge. We overcome that challenge when we understand we cannot provide on our own everything we need. We're wise when we daily ask God to provide what we need. The Lord encourages us to trust Him to provide what we need to carry out His kingdom plan for our lives. Each day should find us asking God to give the material and spiritual resources necessary to serve Him.

**[Isaiah 38:1]** King Hezekiah had a personal need and took it to the Lord in prayer, a helpful example for us. Hezekiah ruled as king over Judah during a time of national peril. Assyria, a large and growing empire that attempted to overtake Judah, posed a dangerous threat. (See Isa. 36–37.) In the context of that threatening situation, another crisis loomed like an ominous shadow over Hezekiah's life—a personal health crisis. The prophet Isaiah reported that Hezekiah had a terminal illness and gave him no hope he would recover. By telling Hezekiah to get his **house in order**, Isaiah meant he should give attention to making royal, personal, and spiritual preparations before he died. Death would soon come his way; he didn't need to delay his preparation for it.

**[Verses 2-3]** Pay close attention to Hezekiah's response to the bad news. He didn't ask Isaiah to plead with God for him. Neither did he explode in uncontrollable anger out of a sense that God had mistreated him. Instead, he turned to the Lord in prayer. By facing the wall, he tuned out other voices. Hezekiah only wanted to talk with the Lord. As he prayed, he confirmed the value of God's hand in his life. He asked the Lord to remember the way he had lived. His prayer reflected his sincere humility, and his tears underscored his inconsolable sorrow. Hezekiah had given no consideration to the possibility his life might end sooner than he anticipated. As he came to terms with death, instinctively he turned to the Lord in prayer.



## **Isaiah 38:4-6 Commentary**

**[Verse 4]** Not long after Hezekiah prayed, God gave him an answer. Earlier that day, Isaiah had given Hezekiah the bad news about his terminal illness. Then Isaiah left the king's residence and made his way through the courtyard. That's when God told him to go back to Hezekiah with His answer to the king's prayer. (See 2 Kings 20:4-6.) The Lord's response says something about His grace in response to our requests. Also, it validates the truth about the Lord's desire for us. He wants us to enjoy an intimate relationship with Him. He's not eager to keep His distance from His people. Neither does God turn a deaf ear when we bring our needs to Him. God's response to Hezekiah's prayer points to His attentiveness as well as His compassion toward us. He listens when we pray, and He intends to answer when we bring our requests to Him.

**[Verse 5]** Isaiah faithfully returned to the king's residence. He assured Hezekiah the Lord had been listening to the king's prayer and had seen the sincerity in his tears. In response to what the Lord had heard and seen, He poured out His grace. Hezekiah could not have twisted God's arm to force Him to respond in such a gracious manner. God responded wisely and compassionately in keeping with His will for His kingdom. Observe that Hezekiah didn't ask the Lord to heal him. In fact, he didn't ask the Lord to do anything for him. When he prayed, he only poured out his heart to God, grieving over the report about his terminal disease. The Lord listened lovingly and responded graciously. He promised Hezekiah fifteen more years of life. Given the bad news Isaiah had delivered at first, the promise of extended life must have been welcomed as a surprise blessing. The Lord had responded in a fashion that exceeded what Hezekiah could have ever imagined.

**[Verse 6]** The Lord went on to give Hezekiah another promise. God promised He would deliver Jerusalem from danger. The Assyrian king had begun to take steps to invade Jerusalem, and only God could rescue the city from the terrible disaster that awaited His people. According to Isaiah 36-37, the Lord provided the miracle His people needed. In a powerful demonstration of His sovereign power, God kept His promise and rescued Jerusalem from destruction. God's promise about Jerusalem demonstrated how He planned to lavish His grace on Hezekiah. Without God's intervention, Jerusalem would have been doomed. Hezekiah's fate would have been just as tragic.

The Lord's response to Hezekiah's need sheds light on the wisdom of the apostle John's instruction to believers. He urged us to bring our requests to God and assured us God will listen and respond graciously in keeping with His will for us. (See 1 John 5:14-15.) Growing Christians take John's assurance to heart. We know God might not answer our prayer for healing in the same way He responded to Hezekiah. However, we rest in the assurance that God listens to us, and He will be gracious to us when He answers us. At the same time, His response will be given according to His kingdom plan.





# STUDY THE BIBLE

## NOTES

### Isaiah 38:15-17

**15** *What shall I say? For he has spoken to me, and he himself has done it. I walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul.* **16** *O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh restore me to health and make me live!* **17** *Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back.*

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Isaiah 38:15-17 on page 97 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** **Question #4** on page 98 of the PSG: **“When has answered prayer changed your perspective toward life?”**

**RECAP:** It doesn’t require much spiritual depth to rejoice when things are going well, but the person who can praise God in the midst of difficulties is a role model for us all. Hezekiah stands out as a hero of the faith because he walked with God, prayed, and praised God through his suffering.

Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread—not because we are full, but because we are so frequently hungry. Our emptiness on any level can drive us to despair or lead us to prayer. But we can always turn to God, trusting Him and even praising Him before we receive the answer.

**DISCUSS:** **Question #5** on page 98 of the PSG: **“How has answered prayer been an encouragement to our group?”**

**DO:** Direct group members to complete the activity, “Praying for Ourselves,” on page 99 of the PSG to help them focus on their personal prayer requests.

*Answer the following questions and write a prayer to the Lord: What would you say are your five greatest needs? How could God meet those needs?*

**GUIDE:** Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“Take your needs to God daily and trust Him to answer.”**

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

***How does God use our prayer life to get us to where He wants us to be?***



## Isaiah 38:15-17 Commentary

**[Verse 15]** When we take our needs to the Lord in prayer, we can count on Him to pay attention. His answers do much more than simply meet our needs. They also help us to grow stronger in our walk with Him. After Hezekiah learned the Lord would extend his life, he wrote a poem about the dramatic episode. (See Isa. 38:10-20.) He captured in words what went on in his heart at the news he would die soon. The news prompted him to go to the Lord. After the Lord graciously restored his life to him for fifteen more years, he gained a grateful perspective on what had been given to him. Life was a gift from God. Each day was nothing less than a blessing he didn't deserve. His renewed perspective on life caused Hezekiah to slow down and savor the days given to him. In his reflection, he remembered the bitterness within him as he dealt with the news of his certain death. Hezekiah wasn't ready to die, but he couldn't stop death.

**[Verse 16]** That's when Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and began to pray. He talked to the Lord who had given him life and would be responsible for taking it away. He pointed to a significant blessing he had been given—a new attitude about life. Because of what had happened to him, Hezekiah saw himself handling differently the ups and downs that came each day. Instead of dreading or ignoring the challenges life brought, now he could face the challenges ahead because he had been given a fresh start on life itself. Living took on a different meaning. It meant more than simply existing each day. His attitude changed because God listened when he prayed.

Hezekiah's near-death experience also rendered another blessing in his life. He had a renewed sense of gratitude to God. He directed his attention to the Lord and acknowledged the miracle He had performed. Only the Lord could be given credit for the miraculous recovery. When he gave God the glory for his life, he acknowledged that his prayer had been answered. He also testified that God had done something more. He had given Hezekiah a heart full of appreciation for His remarkable grace.

**[Verse 17]** Almost dying had rendered some changes that had reshaped Hezekiah. His testimony centered on what God had done with the bitterness in his heart. When he found out he would be dying soon, remorse seemed to have consumed him. The Lord used the bitterness to bring about a positive spiritual change in his life. Thus, he saw the painful experience as something God allowed him to experience with a purpose in mind. Through the experience, he could begin to see God's hand at work in him. In response, Hezekiah gave credit to the Lord and His faithful love for what had happened to him. Instead of facing destruction because of his sinfulness, Hezekiah enjoyed forgiveness. The image of the Lord tossing sins behind His back captured the wonder of His grace in forgiving sins completely. God's work in healing Hezekiah had strengthened him spiritually too.

Read the article "Judah's King Hezekiah" in the Fall 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "Hezekiah, King of Judah" (Spring 2009), "Sennacherib: King of Assyria" (Spring 2006), and "Isaiah: His Life and Times" (Fall 1984) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at [lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator). Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.

