

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for March 29: Stay spiritually alert

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Consistency is a companion of alertness. Being alert does not insure avoidance of failure but certainly helps. Knowing the issues in a timely matter also requires combining experience with appropriate decisive action.

Had Hezekiah remained alert, he might have sensed the danger and not been taken in by the pandering of the Babylonians. Pride is not mentioned in the passage but seems evident enough. Pride, inordinate self-esteem, is subtle, the common fault of all mankind, and a creeping and insidious assault on human goodness.

One of the best ways to maintain consistency against pride is to stay mentally and spiritually alert. Alertness works by providing a good substructure for making good, consistent decisions. Pride happens to the best during success. Under stress, Hezekiah was at his spiritual best; when all was well, he failed and brought judgment upon the nation.

Hezekiah ruled Judah from about 715-687 B.C., coming to the throne about the age of 25. He was a good king with pious affection for Jehovah and vigorously restored Judah after the diabolical leadership of Ahaz, his father. Under the influence of Isaiah, he brought about religious and moral reform with a return of the worship of Jehovah, intermingling spiritual revival with patriotism. He removed the pagan places of worship, strengthened the military, cleansed and sanctified the temple, and restored the great Jewish festivals.

Practice fervent prayer (Isaiah 38:1-6)

Hezekiah was confronted with two dangerous and terrible trials or challenges. One was a national challenge by the military power of his time, Assyria. The other was a grave, life-threatening disease.

Hezekiah sought God in prayer in both instances and discovered God could be counted on as the best possible help, resource and guide. The chronicler inserted these remarkable prayer experiences which occur before the Assyrian assault.

Isaiah, chapters 36-39, divides the Assyrian period and the Babylonian period as a kind of historical bridge, recorded, as well, in 2 Kings 18-20 and 2 Chronicles 29-32. Assyria had conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and looked to Judah and Jerusalem as an easy victim. Hezekiah had succeeded Ahaz and ruled Judah when Sennacherib came to assault Jerusalem in the 14th year of his reign (36:1).

Receiving the threat and the demand for complete surrender, Hezekiah “went into the temple of the Lord” and called for Isaiah (37:1-2) who assured the king (vv. 9, 22-29) that God would deliver his nation. Hezekiah entered the temple again and prayed, “Oh Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God” (v. 20). His prayer is answered when “the angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp” (v. 36) with Sennacherib withdrawing back to Nineveh, where his life was taken by two of his sons, as prophesied by Isaiah.

Hezekiah showed remarkable faith in God and the prophecy of Isaiah in the face of extraordinary danger from an enemy that could have easily destroyed Jerusalem. The arresting part of the motivation of God to bring about this miracle is found in Isaiah 37:21, 35: “because you have prayed to me ... I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of

David my servant!" Hezekiah experienced an immediate response by God to his prayer.

Hezekiah became seriously ill and "at the point of death" (38:1), afflicted by some kind of incurable "boil" (v. 21, God's healing implemented by common remedy). Hezekiah is near 38 years of age with many personal goals and affairs of state to accomplish. Isaiah had the responsibility of telling Hezekiah he should attend to his affairs because "you are going to die" (v. 1).

Devastated by this word, Hezekiah turned inward and prayed fervently with many tears. No doubt his prayer as recorded was a shortened version of a longer prayer: "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes."

Assuming a fervent and righteous spirit, the content of this prayer provides great interest. The words given in the text focus on his faithful life and complete devotion, rather than confession of sin or an appeal for healing and to live longer. Perhaps, Hezekiah recalled the accuracy of Isaiah's prophecy regarding Sennacherib and accepted death as inevitable, therefore the prayer is more for God's grace and mercy in anticipation of entering the place of the departed.

A willingness to accept the will of God is an important part of powerful praying (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). God's grace is sufficient in all and every circumstance in life. Acceptance is an act of extraordinary faith and, in this case, prompted a divine response of healing with God saying: "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears: I will add 15 years to your life. And deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend the city" (v. 6).

Healing Hezekiah's body and prolonging his life were extraordinary signs to encourage the king to trust God regarding Assyria's threat against

Jerusalem. This favor to Hezekiah was furthermore the means to carry out God's purpose through the nation, Israel (2 Kings 20:6, for the Lord's sake and David's sake). Good king Hezekiah could be trusted to continue the covenant and move Israel along toward the goal of the coming Christ. His fervent praying indicated to God a sincerity and faithfulness that would be a force for the future.

Notice Hezekiah goes directly to God, the Creator Almighty, in prayer, speaking his heart and found the ear of a caring Lord who listened and supernaturally met his need.

Guard against pride (Isaiah 39:1-2)

Soon after the miraculous healing of Hezekiah and the delivery of Judah from the Assyrians, the envoys from Babylon appear on the scene around the year 703 B.C. Feigning a courtesy call with royal gifts and blessings for his recovery, Hezekiah was enamored and flattered by the overtures of such a great and powerful nation. Under such a ploy, Hezekiah proudly gave the delegation the political tour of the treasury and military.

There may have been important papers suggesting an alliance with Babylon to besiege Assyria or for protection against them, most probably the later for he surmised there would be "peace and security in the land" (v. 8). Though God had blessed Hezekiah and proven his power over the enemy and death, the comfort of a powerful friend and the conceit of prideful feelings took the king in the wrong direction. How human the king is to wilt so quickly to the temptation to depend upon political alliances rather than the guidance and power of God.

Consider long-term consequences (Isaiah 39:5-8)

After two powerful experiences of the power of God in answered prayer, Hezekiah reverts back to reliance upon his own resources and ingenuity. Isaiah, observing the visiting dignitaries from Babylon, asked about the

presence of these envoys. Hezekiah responded by bragging on his “show and tell.” Isaiah then prophesied to the king that the results of his vanity, the disclosure of his strength and wealth, would bring the disaster of Judah’s captivity in Babylon, the very nation that he entertained.

Even some of Hezekiah’s own family (vv. 5-7) would suffer. Pride was one thing, but pride that ignored the counsel of God would jeopardize the future of his people, Israel. It is true selfish pride distracts from the truth and can bring down an empire. The consequences would last for many generations.

When the desire for comfort and security dominated the desire to achieve proper objectives, disaster and failure resulted. In pride, Hezekiah gave up the covenant for peace and comfort, and the godly vision for a mess of political pottage. Isaiah intends for all to see the tragedy of such a mistake.

Vigilance is necessary but notably dependent upon learning from one’s successes and mistakes. Someone said that experience is a great thing; it helps us recognize our mistakes when we do it again.