

earth would have to stop spinning and go backwards. Hezekiah realized that, so he said, “*It is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps....Rather, have it go back ten steps.*” So it did. This time, there was no doubt. It couldn’t be a coincidence. Actually, nothing is a coincidence. Prayer works!

Now, I know what some people would say, “That’s impossible! It’s impossible for the earth to spin backward.” Here’s where your worldview affects everything you see. If there’s no God, of course it’s impossible. If there’s no God, there’s no spinning the earth backward. There’s no communicating with a higher power. There’s no rising from the dead. There’s no heaven. But if there’s a God, impossible is not a problem at all. Remember what the angel told Mary when she asked how a virgin could have a baby? “*Nothing is impossible with God*” (Luke 1:37). Just think about this: You can communicate directly with the Guy who controls the sun. Isn’t that cool?

But maybe there’s still this question or a doubt in your mind. “So why hasn’t prayer worked in my life?” “Why don’t I receive what I pray for?” There’s a false assumption about prayer that we all fall into from time to time. We think that prayer is a means for me to get what I want. Do you ever find yourself thinking that? “Prayer is the way for me to get what I want.” Do you remember how Jesus prayed? On the night before he died, he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed that there might be a different way to save the world. Did he get what he wanted? Yes! Because do you remember how his prayer ended? “*Not my will, but yours be done*” (Luke 22:42). Prayer isn’t asking God to do what we want. Prayer is trusting God to remember us. To see our situation. To hear our concerns. And then to do what’s best for us according to his will.

It was God’s will for his Son Jesus to die, to forgive you and me for every doubt and worry and lack of trust in God. It was God’s will for his Son to rise, to prove once and for all that with God all things are possible. Jesus’ cross proves that God wants what’s best for you. And now the God who moves the sun and who gave you his Son as your Savior asks you to trust in him and pray about anything and everything. He even invites you to pray that situations in your life would be different than they are now. He just asks you to trust that he will answer in the best way.

About the same time as those locust plagues in Minnesota, there was a man named Joseph Scriven who was living in Canada. You don’t recognize that name. You probably won’t remember it. This Joseph had a hard life. His fiancé drowned on the night before his wedding. He fell in love again, but then his second fiancé died suddenly of pneumonia. After all the struggles he himself had been through, his mother in Ireland was going through a very hard time. So Joseph wrote a poem to comfort her. You know it. “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer...” Prayer works!

**2 Kings 20:1-11**  
**Pastor Nathan Nass**

**Heroes of Faith: Hezekiah**  
**August 28, 2016**

**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.”<sup>2</sup> Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,<sup>3</sup> “Remember, O 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.<sup>4</sup> Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him:<sup>5</sup> “Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD.<sup>6</sup> I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.’ ”<sup>7</sup> Then Isaiah said, “Prepare a poultice of figs.” They did so and applied it to the boil, and he recovered.<sup>8</sup> Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, “What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me and that I will go up to the temple of the LORD on the third day from now?”<sup>9</sup> Isaiah answered, “This is the LORD’s sign to you that the LORD will do what he has promised: Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?”<sup>10</sup> “It is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps,” said Hezekiah. “Rather, have it go back ten steps.”<sup>11</sup> Then the prophet Isaiah called upon the LORD, and the LORD made the shadow go back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.**

### **Prayer Works!**

In the second week of June 1873, a strange brown cloud started to sweep into Minnesota. At first, the farmers thought it might be rain or dust. Do you know what it was? Grasshoppers—or locusts as these were called. For four straight summers, the locusts ate everything in sight. Farmers could hear them chewing every leaf and stalk in their fields. The farmers desperately tried everything they could to get rid of them. They started their fields on fire, hoping to burn them up. They dragged around metal sheets covered with molasses to trap them. They went through their fields banging tin cans together hoping it would drive them away. But every year was worse than the one before. By 1876, it was worst locust attack in the history of the Midwest.

The spring of 1877 didn’t look good. One farmer estimated he had 150 locust eggs per square inch of his land. He did a little math. That meant he had 6,586,272,000 locust eggs on his little seven acre farm. The state legislature actually passed a law requiring all men to spend one full day every week destroying locusts. The people were losing hope. So, Governor Pillsbury decided to try something different. He declared April 26, 1877, a statewide day of prayer for God’s help. Can you imagine that happening today? The very

next day started out as a beautiful spring day, but in the afternoon, the weather turned bitter cold. That night, a late April snowstorm killed most of the locust eggs. The rest of the locusts strangely vanished by July, and 1877 was the best wheat crop in history.

So prayer works, right? You want to believe it does, but I bet hearing a story like that makes you feel a little skeptical. It almost sounds too good to be true. I think that skepticism a product of our society. Was it really prayer that did it? The governor thought was it was. He wrote in his diary: "The very next night, it turned cold and froze every grasshopper in the state stiff — froze them solid." Naysayers, though, called it a coincidence, or argued that other factors drove the locusts away. As much as people talk about prayer, I wonder how many people actually believe that it does any good. I bet there's a little skeptic living inside you too. Does prayer really work?

People today like to make it seem as though your faith doesn't have that big of an impact on your life. They imply that whether or not you have faith in God really isn't a big deal. That's simply not true. Your faith determines your worldview. Your faith is like the glasses through which you see the world. It colors and changes everything you do. Everybody sees the same events, but they interpret them in different ways based on their faith. In 1877, the locusts mysteriously left Minnesota. That's a fact. Did God hear the prayers of his people? Or was there just a strange set of natural coincidences? That depends on your faith in God. This is important! Does prayer work?

If there's a doubt about prayer in your mind, then you're in the right place, because today we get to consider one of coolest stories about prayer in the Bible. It has to do with King Hezekiah. If you made it to church last week, we heard about King Hezekiah then too. King Hezekiah and the people in Jerusalem were attacked by hundreds of thousands of Assyrian soldiers. There seemed to be no hope left. But, of course, there was still hope. Hezekiah prayed to God. The angel of the LORD killed 185,000 Assyrians, and the rest of their army fled. Hezekiah was a godly man and good king who believed in God.

So how would you expect his reign to go? Smooth sailing, right? He had God on his side! Don't we have this built-in idea that if I believe in God, everything will go well? We have to get that out of our heads. That's not God's promise. That's not reality. "*In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death.*" Hezekiah was only 38 years old. A faithful believer and king. 38 years old. Dying. That's not how it's supposed to be, right? So God's great prophet, Isaiah, went to see him, and you'd think he'd him bring some good news. Here it was: "*This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.*"

What would you have done? If you had spent the first 38 years of your life faithfully following God, only to find out that at just age 38 you were going to die, how would you react? Despair? "Why me?" Anger? "God, this isn't fair!" That's not what Hezekiah did. Your faith shows itself most in adversity. Here's what Hezekiah did. He prayed. "*Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, 'Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before*

*you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.*"

I want us to think for a second about Hezekiah's prayer. It's interesting what he doesn't pray for. He doesn't try to tell God what to do. How many of us do that in our prayers? He doesn't say, "God, here's a better way for this to work out!" He also didn't complain against God. How many of us do that in our prayers? He didn't say, "God, this is terribly unfair." He just asked God to remember his faith. To remember how in his life he had trusted in God and done everything he could to follow God's will. He just asked God to remember his faith. He trusted and prayed.

Do you think his prayer would work? That depends again on your worldview. Remember, your faith affects the way that you see everything in your life. Let's imagine, for a second, that you don't have faith in God. Would this prayer work? No way! Hezekiah stands in front of a wall and talks to an invisible God. This is crazy. Prayer is crazy! You can see why someone would mock this. It's like praying for the locusts to go away when nothing else has worked. What good would prayer do? That's a common attitude about prayer. Maybe it's your attitude about prayer. Prayer as a last resort. Throw up a prayer. This affects us more than we'd like to admit. Our lack of trust in God's promises leads us to doubt whether praying to God does any good at all.

So does prayer work? Do you remember how the story went? Hezekiah said his prayer, and "*before Isaiah had left the middle court...*" God turned him around and sent him back to Hezekiah. The prophet couldn't even get out the door. In our second lesson, James reminded us that "*the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*" (James 5:16). Wow! That was fast! As Hezekiah was still there, facing the wall, praying, Isaiah walked right back in with another message from God. "*I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life.*" God heard. God saw. God acted.

I guess it worked, huh? Prayer works! It just can be hard for us to wrap our minds around exactly how it works. We know that God knows everything. Before you were born, God knew and planned everything that would happen to you in your life. That's a great comfort! Yet, somehow he lets your prayers right now influence his plans for you. It's amazing, and kind of hard to understand. But here are some of God's promises: "*Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me*" (Psalm 50:15). "*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you*" (Luke 11:9). Prayer works!

But then you get back to the story about the locusts. How can you know it really was God? How can you be sure it wasn't just a coincidence? Even King Hezekiah must have thought the same thing. "Maybe this nice bandage of figs healed me, and not God." So he asked God for a sign. And God was ready. "*Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?*" Think about that. What would it take to do that? Not much, just rotating the whole earth! Science today actually makes God that much more amazing! The whole