

# Praying for little things and big things

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[ 0 : 00 ] So just for a few moments, we're going to think about these verses, recognizing here an invitation! to pray about the little things in life and the big things. Here's another one of these great moments! where God in his providence gives us a text that directly connects us with what Rudy was talking about.

Let me start with the kind of big idea takeaway, and then we'll get into it, and it's this. When faith connects us to the God of the Bible, we can confidently pray about all things, the little things and the big things in life. In the October holidays, we went down to the Lake District, we went to an old slate mine, which they turned into an adventure area, and one of the things that we got to do was to do an infinity bridge. So it was walking on a steel cable across a 1,000-foot drop.

Now, I'm not an adrenaline junkie, and I'm not a trapeze artist, so how was it that I could do that?

And the answer is easy. I was locked on by a harness and by a carabiner.

Faith is locked on to God, the God that we meet in the Bible, the God of grace and resurrection power. Our faith locks us onto God, our Father in heaven, a God of compassion, who knows us and loves us.

Faith locks on with reliance to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. And when we are locked on in faith and dependence, then it allows us to pray with confidence. Now, we can follow the example of Elisha, the man of faith and of prayer. We've just been encouraged to be praying, to be active participants in God's mission. I wonder how we would describe our prayer life at present.

[ 1 : 47 ] I imagine many of us, when we're honest, would say, well, we'd love to make more time to pray, to have more focus when we pray. Maybe we're at a stage where we never or we hardly ever pray.

I hope and I pray that what Rudy was sharing will be an encouragement to us. And I also hope that Elisha's story is an encouragement to us, that it would motivate us and help us to be a praying people about the big things and the little things in life. I've got three simple questions. The first is this, why do we pray? So, I'm going to use these two stories as examples to give us principles. So, in the first story, it was there in the first seven verses, we've got a prophet, and a prophet who's helping to build an extension to a meeting room. And he's gone to his neighbor and he's borrowed an axe and he's gone down to the river because that's where the trees are. And as he's trying to cut down one particular tree, the axe head flies off and sinks to the bottom. And we have his response recorded, oh no, my lord, he cried out, it was borrowed. He brings the problem to Elisha, who is God's representative. This is a form of prayer. And now we read this, this seems a small thing. It's one prophet and it's one tool. I am sure the rest of the prophets would a man is just fine without him, but the fact is, this matters to God. And the second story, verse 8 to 23, sounds very different. So, we've had this move. We've gone in chapter 5 to the story of Naaman, a great political figure. We've got, you know, global politics involved. Then we go to one prophet and one axe head, and then we go political again. We've got the king of Aram who wants to attack again.

But what happens is that Elisha isn't able to act as if he was a spy in the camp. You know, the king asks the question, who is it among my advisors who's advising the king of Israel? And the reality is it's no one. God is giving those messages to Elisha so he can warn the king of Israel time and time and time again. Well, Aram's response, as we see it there, is to send an army to go and capture Elisha. In verse 13 and 14, when he discovers he's in Dothan, he sent horses and chariots and a strong force and they went by night and surrounded the city. So, Elisha's servant wakes up the next morning. Verse 15, we hear the same words, oh no, my Lord. What shall we do? Same words, same idea.

Here's a problem. Let's take it to Elisha, the man of God. It's again, it's a form of prayer. Now, this is definitely not a small thing. This is a big thing. This is the threat of capture and death and fear. Isn't

it interesting these two different scenes are deliberately placed by our authors side by side. Why is that? To say to us that God cares about it all, the little things and the big things.

[ 4 : 56 ] I've almost finished a really gripping book called *The Wager*, which tells the story of an 18th century British naval ship sent off to try and capture some Spanish gold, but it ends up getting shipwrecked and there's storm and there's disease and there's all kinds of things. Well, at one point in the story, a group of sailors build themselves a makeshift boat from their wreckage and they try and set sail some 1,200 miles to reach port in Brazil. And there's a point where a sudden storm whips up, the boat almost floods and capsizes, but then it writes itself. And the guy who's in charge of this little party on this desperate little boat is a guy called Bulkley. And he's a Christian man and he wrote in his diary. And here's what he wrote. He said, we prayed earnestly for the storm to clear up for nothing else could save us from perishing. He prayed and God answered. And when they found land, he goes on in his diary to say, we call this harbor the port of God's mercy. The most abandoned among us, no longer doubt of an almighty being and have promised to reform their lives. And we've probably heard stories like that. People who pray in storms. We pray when we face crises. We pray when all hope seems lost. But we also pray for lost property. We also pray when there's transport connections we want to make. When there's a good conversation that we need to have. When we simply want enough energy to get through the day. Because we believe in God's sovereign rule and we believe in his father-like care for each of his children. His eyes on the sparrow and we know he watches us. So just by way of connecting this with mission for a moment, I like to use the Prayer Mate app and I've got a few mission feeds. And so on Thursday, my prayer diary included these. To pray for the failure of signal jamming.

So there's gospel radio that goes out in northern China and the authorities are trying to stop those signals. And so we're invited to pray that they would fail to jam those signals. The next prayer feed was praying for an end to the hateful ideology of Islamic State in Mozambique as they persecute the Christian minority there. He was praying for ways for Christian kids in persecuted countries to be able to take part in simple activities with other Christians. To pray encouragement for a team working in northeastern Thailand where it's very hard to share the gospel. Praying courage for a group who've heard the gospel in Senegal that they would have the courage to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. All of life matters to God.

And so all of life can be taken to him in prayer. And that applies personally, but it also applies as we think about mission. So that's why we pray. Second question is this, who do we pray to? And this is crucial. You know the buses or the posters that say try praying on them, sometimes outside churches as well, is really helpful. But I would love if somebody would add some brackets or just give a little bit more detail. Try praying to the one true and living God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Or, you know, try praying to God the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now that would be less catchy, and if you're, a bus is passing, you're not going to get it. But I think it'd be really helpful because prayer is an invitation to connect with the personal God, the God who is. And that means we need to know the God who is to know the God who is. And the better we understand the one whom we are connected to, the more confident, the more bold, the more persistent our prayers will be.

When Jesus gives the Lord's Prayer, he begins with our Father, and begins with his holiness, and begins with his kingdom and his will. It's why we pray Scripture. Because we're catching hold of God's character and God's promises, and we can claim those promises as God's people. And so that strengthens our faith in God and encourages us to pray. So I just want to think about these two stories and what they tell us about the God that we pray to for our encouragement. And this is going to be really brief. So think about what we learn about God in story number one. Well, don't we discover he's the God who is in control over nature?

Because he works a nature miracle. You know, iron does not generally float to the top of the surface when a stick is thrown into the water. That's a miracle of God.

[ 10 : 22 ] When we believe that God is the sovereign creator of all things, that he is self-sufficient, and that he longs to and actively involves himself in the world, then we can confidently and boldly pray.

Because God's in control over nature and over everything. We also pray to the God who can redeem bad situations. What did the guy say? Oh, no. I was borrowed. Now I've amassed some debt. Now my neighbor has lost his property. But what God does in this very simple story, miraculous story, is to redeem a bad situation. Now there is no debt. Now there is no loss. That's

just a really small example of God being able to bring good from evil. Principle we first see in the story of Joseph.

Joseph would say to his brothers, you intended evil by selling me into slavery, but God intended it for good to save many lives. And of course the cross stands as the ultimate example. You conspired to kill Jesus, the author of life, but God intended it for good, for the saving of many lives. So we pray to a God who can redeem a bad situation, and he's shown it to us in the cross and the resurrection. We also pray to a God who shows mercy to meet needs. So we've been thinking in the story of Kings that this is a time of famine. This is a time when resources are scarce. This guy does not have, like we do, screw fix city to nip around to to get another axe head. And even if he did have one, he probably didn't have the money to buy it. And wonderfully, in this very simple story, we see God cares and God extends mercy in response to prayer. Story number two, we discover some new things about God, but they are related. We discover God's total wisdom and God's total sovereignty.

Verse nine again, the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, beware of passing that place because the Arameans are going down there. How did he know that? Because God told him. It's really striking, if you go back to chapter five, verse one, and the story of Naaman, we discover that in the past, God had actually given the nation of Aram victory and success. But now, God is passing on military intelligence via Elisha so that Israel has success. God is totally in control and is altogether wise.

[13:09] Here's another thing we discover about God, that he is the divine warrior who is for and with his church. It's that remarkable moment when the servant is in a panic and he sees the city is surrounded, and Elisha prays. Verse 17, open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see. Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. Unseen protection for just that moment becomes visible to strengthen that servant's faith.

Here is the Lord of heaven's armies, deeply caring for his church, acting to ensure that his prophet will not be lost. And he is the same God who continues to defend, to protect, to sustain his church today so that eternally not one of his own will be lost.

But we also discover we are praying to a God of surprising protection, salvation, and grace.

And that's there as the story draws to that perhaps surprising close, verse 20 to 23. So Aram's soldiers, Elisha prays, strike the army with blindness, and immediately they are.

So they have no power. All of a sudden they're in Israel's hands. And they're led right into the heart of Samaria. And so the question comes, now that they're in our hands, Elisha, should we kill them? Elisha's answer is, no, don't kill them. Rather, give them a feast.

[14:52] Show them kindness. And after, verse 23, after he prepared this great feast, he sent them away. And notice, and this is connected, they returned to their master so the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.

Because God worked for his people's good through this surprising act of them showing hospitality. And those soldiers who were deprived of their ability to see and thought they were in ultimate peril, they're sent home with a new knowledge of the true God and his character and his grace.

The point for our prayers is simply this. We need to behold our God. To know as we pray that we pray to the God of resurrection and new creation. The God of all power and all wisdom.

The God who fights to build and to guard his church. The God of amazing and surprising grace.

And to understand that this God, he's our Father in heaven when our faith is in Jesus.

Try praying to this God, the true God. Well, that makes all the difference in the world. One last question.

[16:07] That's a really simple answer. What do we pray for? Two simple little phrases that connect to our stories that can make a big impact, I think, as we pray.

Here's the first thing. That we can pray to our God. Help me. Or help us. Or help them. Whatever needs we become aware of.

Personally, corporately, in society. We are encouraged to take those to the Lord. However small they might seem. However small they might seem. God is big enough to care and to act for his glory and for our good.

We can be a person of prayer for others. as Rudy was sharing, that we can stand side by side with missionaries, but we can stand side by side with one another. We can provide strength as we pray, when perhaps someone else's faith is weak. And we can pray for those outside of the church who

never pray for themselves. We can pray in a battle against sin, in a struggle with an illness, needing wisdom for a decision, or simply when we can't find our phone and our keys.

In all of those situations and so many more, we can pray to God, help me. And secondly, we can also pray with Elisha, open my eyes, open our eyes, open their eyes, to what? That we would see the glory and the goodness of our God and our Father.

[ 17 : 54 ] Open our eyes to see the reality of His presence with us, His promises for us to experience and to claim. Open our eyes to see the reality of a God who is more than capable of redeeming what is lost, who can rescue when all seems hopeless. Open our eyes that we would believe the gospel, and we would boldly go to share it with others, even to the far ends of the earth. We want to live with eyes wide open to the God who is there, to the God who cares.

And we also want to pray, and with this we'll close, open our eyes to see Jesus, the one who prays for us.

Isn't it interesting that in both of these stories, the impulse of the person in need, let me turn to God's prophet, God's prophet, the man of prayer. And for us, we turn to the one who is greater than Elisha, the greater prophet, the Lord Jesus Himself.

The one who died to redeem us by His resurrection power. The one who fought and won a great spiritual victory for us on the cross. And as we pray to Jesus, we understand that what He's doing now, is He's praying.

He ever lives to make intercession for us. Jesus is always praying for His people. Always praying for His church. While we sleep, Jesus prays.

[ 19 : 28 ] When we serve, Jesus prays. When we're in need, Jesus prays. And so may it be true that Elisha, this story, these stories here, remind us, encourage us, that when faith connects us to this God, to our Father in Heaven, to Jesus, our Lord and Savior, we can confidently pray about the little things and the big things in life.

And we can also pray for missionaries and for one another and all to the glory of God. Let's pray together briefly now.

Amen.