

Read also Philippians 4:6-7. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Take a look at this man's sign – "Everybody Love Everybody." You might have seen him on the news. His name is Chris Bailey and he said, "The night the officers were shot in Dallas, I posted on Facebook, 'Everybody love everybody,' and the very first reply I got was **it's impossible.**"

He was depressed. Bailey said, "I was actually crying on the way to my first appointment the next day." So he thought about what to do and decided to do something that was "the opposite of hate." He went to the store, bought a poster, made it for \$4, and walked around downtown Dallas where all the streets were blocked off. An Associated Press photographer snapped his picture. It went viral.

He now has an "Everybody Love Everybody" Facebook page and in four days he got 17,000 members. He did a simple thing which became amazing. He continues to carry the sign around in the D/FW metroplex.¹

Disunity and division have become common and threatening. In fact, on our vacation people from other countries as far away as Australia told us that their country is experiencing the same. When division arises, what are we to do? What can communities do to diminish the threat? What can we do to change the culture?

The Bible talks about those kinds of threatening times. One of those times was during the life of King Hezekiah. He was a good king. At the time he reigned, worship of God had fallen by the wayside because the former king, an unbeliever, had closed the temple. People quit going to worship. There was no giving to sustain the priests so they all took jobs elsewhere. Nevertheless, the Bible says, "He went about his job as king seeking his God with all of his heart." He was also a man of action. Hezekiah called the priests and Levites together and said, "My sons, do not now be negligent! The Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him, and to lead the people in worship and make offerings to him." (2 Chronicles 29:11)

The Lord chooses and uses US to do His work. That may seem incredible—maybe even questionable! But I assure you, *God has great confidence in you.*

Hezekiah's church leaders stepped up, cleaned up the whole temple, which was dilapidated, and opened the doors for worship. They contacted all the officials, singers and musicians, and all the townspeople gathered and sang and worshiped. They brought their sacrifices and offerings and worship was restored after a long period of low trust in God.

Remarkably, this all happened suddenly. It was a blessing from God. The whole community rejoiced because of what God had done for them. They began living into these words of another God-loving man, King David:

"Praise the Lord, all you who fear him! Honor him. . . . Show him reverence. . . . He has not turned his back on the suffering of the needy, but has listened to their cries for help." (Ps 22:23-24).

¹ <http://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/Everybody-Love-Everybody-North-Texas-Mans-Message-Goes-Viral--387529192.html#ixzz4FcOtHaeY>

The people are making a great change in their town! They had turned away from their faith but now they all decided that they would return to God.

So their enthusiasm grew and they decided to do a festival. Hezekiah wrote a letter, sent by couriers throughout the country to invite everyone all over Israel to return to the Lord—but many scorned and mocked. Only a few humbled themselves and came. But God’s hand was on Judah to give them “one heart (that is, unity) to do what the king and his officials commanded by the word of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 30:12-13). So after a slow start, a huge crowd of men, women, and children assembled at Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival and they were filled with joy. When they went back home they destroyed all of the pagan altars and shrines to false gods which were in all their towns. They began bringing piles of tithes and offerings to the church so that the priests and church singers and musicians could work there again and the needy throughout the land could be cared for.

God had brought them through this dark period of disunity to a place of unity and joy in Him.

When we come here intentionally and regularly to worship God, when we honor and love him, it gives us a sense of wellbeing and hope because Someone bigger—our Heavenly Father who loves us enters—into our life. We remember the truth in our Call to Worship: “When I call upon God the Lord will save me, when I utter my complaint and moan, he will hear my voice; He will redeem me unharmed from the battle I wage.” (Ps 55)

What disunity is going on in your life, or in your family, or your neighborhood for which you need God’s help? What divisiveness and destruction do you see around you which God might turn around?

Well, for Hezekiah and his people things were good. It was easy to say “God is good!” When you seek God with all your heart, and you put it to action, you will prosper. But that does not mean trouble will not come. And soon it did.

To the north of Judah was the country of Assyria ruled by King Sennacherib. Sennacherib aggressively expanded his territory by military exploits. We know this to be true because in 1830 artifacts were discovered at Nineveh, the Assyrian capital which recorded all of Sennacherib’s conquests, including forty-six cities in Judah and over 200,000 people. These artifacts are now in The British Museum. And that king invaded Judah and encamped against their fortified cities, “thinking to win them for himself.” (2 Ch 32:1) He was an arrogant, ambitious king.

So we have two different kings –

- One trusts the Lord and seeks Him with all of his heart.
- The other wants to invade a nation and win them for himself.

So Hezekiah shored up Jerusalem and took measures to protect his people and the city. He built a tunnel, which is still there, to divert water from springs in the area into Jerusalem. He repaired the city wall and built another secondary wall around the city, manufactured weapons and shields, and appointed military officers over the people. He encouraged them by saying:

“Be strong and courageous! Don't be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria or his mighty army, for there is a power far greater on our side! He may have a great army, but they are merely men. We have the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles for us!”
(2 Ch 32:7-8)

Hear what happened: 2 Kings 18:28–36

²⁸ Then the chief of staff stood and shouted in Hebrew to the people on the wall, "Listen to this message from the great king of Assyria! . . . Don't let Hezekiah deceive you. He will never be able to rescue you from my power. ³⁰ Don't let him fool you into trusting in the LORD by saying, 'The LORD will surely rescue us. This city will never fall into the hands of the Assyrian king!' ³¹ "Don't listen to Hezekiah! These are the terms the king of Assyria is offering: Make peace with me-- open the gates and come out. Then each of you can continue eating from your own grapevine and fig tree and drinking from your own well. ³² Then I will arrange to take you to another land like this one-- a land of grain and new wine, bread and vineyards, olive groves and honey. Choose life instead of death!" Don't listen to Hezekiah when he tries to mislead you by saying, 'The LORD will rescue us!' ³³ Have the gods of any other nations ever saved their people from the king of Assyria? . . . So what makes you think that the LORD can rescue Jerusalem from me?" ³⁶ But the people were silent and did not utter a word because Hezekiah had commanded them, "Do not answer him."

It must have been hard to stay unified. The voices assaulting their ears came from prominent men of the most powerful nation of their day. Power is persuasive and their message tempted them with promises of security, prosperity and possessions. They did not have comparable resources, and could have easily fallen prey to these enticing promises and implied threats.

But there was God's voice, too. And with their new trust in God, new unity, and the hope of committed action, they did not give in! Did their devotion to God make a difference? Let's see.

2 Kings 19:1-4:

When King Hezekiah heard their report, he tore his clothes and put on burlap and went into the Temple of the LORD. . . . "Today is a day of trouble, insults, and disgrace. It is like when a child is ready to be born, but the mother has no strength to deliver the baby. ⁴ But perhaps the LORD your God has heard the Assyrian chief of staff, sent by the king to defy the living God, and will punish him for his words."

This is when faith has to take hold. When your problem seems so bad that you feel you have no strength to do anything, then you must place your fears in God's hand. You must say to yourself "Perhaps the Lord has heard and will defeat my enemy." And if you can't pray for yourself, find a friend in this room who can pray it for you! Hezekiah went to Isaiah for prayer.

Then remember the words, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6).

Hezekiah did just that. A few days later Hezekiah received a letter with further threats but with each threat, Hezekiah prayed. Do you continue to pray when your problems just get worse or do you give up? He took that letter and went to the house of the Lord, and spread it out before him. It was like he thought *God you need to see this letter—can you believe what he has said??!*

2 Kg 19:15-19:

¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed this prayer before the LORD: "O LORD, God of Israel, you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth. ¹⁶ Bend down, O LORD, and listen! Open your eyes, O LORD, and see! Listen to Sennacherib's words of defiance against the living God. ¹⁷ "It is true, LORD, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations. ¹⁸ And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all-- only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands. ¹⁹ Now, O LORD our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O LORD, are God."

When someone threatens you, that person threatens God too. God so cares that God takes on your problems as if they were His own, and so when you pray, it matters.

Let's go back to the wall. What if half those people on the wall said, "We are surrendering. We are going with Sennacherib. We want all that security he is going to give us because our God might not save us." But because they had each other, in unity, they trusted the Lord, which in itself decreased the power of Sennacherib.

A second time God rose up. God's voice became clear through Isaiah the prophet. God's voice did not intimidate, discourage, or mislead with false messages. And this is what the Lord says about the king of Assyria:

2 Kgs 19:32-36

³² "And this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria: "His armies will not enter Jerusalem. They will not even shoot an arrow at it. They will not march outside its gates with their shields nor build banks of earth against its walls. ³³ The king will return to his own country by the same road on which he came. He will not enter this city, says the LORD. ³⁴ For my own honor and for the sake of my servant David, I will defend this city and protect it." ³⁵ That night the angel of the LORD went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere. ³⁶ Then King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and returned to his own land. He went home to his capital of Nineveh and stayed there.

In all those records of Sennacherib's conquests there is no record of his ever conquering Jerusalem. Hezekiah prayed.

You don't have to do something amazing. Just stand together in unity, invite the whole town, and do something simple—like pray. Your God will fight for you and it will be amazing.

AMEN