

Facing Life's Challenges

by Vic Coleman

Introduction

Life is full of challenges. There are times when crisis after crisis occurs and you wonder, "Where is God in all this?" He may seem like He's a million miles away. But the story of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, shows us that *how we respond* to the challenges of life are critical to overcoming those challenges, no matter what they are.

This lesson is a study of an event in the life of King Jehoshaphat during a time when he was surrounded by enemies. He did not provoke the attack. He had nowhere to run; no defense seemed adequate. So, he did the wisest thing any of us can do in a seemingly hopeless situation, and I think there is a lesson in his response for all of us.

Scriptures Used In This Lesson

2 Chronicles 20:1-30

2 Chronicles 17:6

Background:

Jehoshaphat was King of Judah from approximately 872 BC to 848 BC. In his early years as king, we are told that he followed the Lord. During this time, he sent teachers throughout the land instructing the people on the ways of the Lord. As a result, the Lord gave him peace from his enemies. Then one day this peace was disturbed.

The Enemy Surrounds Jehoshaphat v.1-2

In these verses we are told that enemies of Israel came to make war against Jehoshaphat. Notice that three different groups are involved: the Moabites, the Ammonites and Meunites.

There are times in our lives when all seems to be going well. Then all of a sudden trouble comes - we get a phone call that someone close has died, we are diagnosed with an illness, we find out that our spouse has lost his/her job, we find drugs in our child's room. These things may not be our fault. They may be totally out of our control. But they happen. The key to overcoming life's challenges is in how we respond to them.

Key Point: There is a difference between reacting to a situation and prayerfully responding to a situation.

Jehoshaphat's Response to the Crisis v.3-6

Initially Jehoshaphat was "alarmed". This is a very typical and human reaction to a crisis. But his next action was the key to the victory over his enemies.

The scriptures say, "Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all of Judah." Jehoshaphat *resolved* to seek the Lord for guidance. Not only that, he ordered the entire nation to pray with him.

In every situation, the first step should be for us to "inquire of the Lord". That should be our first inclination. We know that this was the inclination of Jehoshaphat's heart because in 2 Chronicles 17: 6 we are told that "...his heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord..."

What is the condition of your heart? Are you devoted to "the ways of the Lord" or are you "casual" with your relationship with Him? With respect to your relationship with the Lord,

are you a “full time employee” or a “part timer”? Full time employees enjoy certain rights, privileges, and benefits that part timers do not.

The condition of your heart, i.e., the depth of your relationship with the Lord is crucial to the outcome of your battle...victory or defeat. Jehoshaphat was ready to respond appropriately. During non-crisis time, he built up his relationship with the Lord. So, when it was time for battle, he responded appropriately...to “inquire of the Lord”. That should be the “bent” of our hearts. In crisis situations, we should find other godly people to pray with us and for us.

Analogy: American football teams today generate “scouting reports” on their opponents. This is done from pee-wee leagues to the pros. They spend the week before the game preparing for the upcoming battle. When game time comes, they are prepared. They don’t have to run in confusion deciding what to do; they just exercise their game plan. We need to practice *before* game time so that we can be effective.

How much time do you prepare for “battle”? How do you prepare for battle?

Why Do We Have To Go Through Hard Times Anyway?

There are times when we all wonder, “Why did this have to happen? Why did God allow this? Was He angry? Was He trying to punish me? This was a cruel thing that happened, and God allowed it and I’m mad!”

Certainly, God has heard all of this before. People have been angry with God before. So, it’s not anything new. So, what’s up? Why is there so much “junk” going on?

This is a study in itself, but there are several reasons:

- We live in a fallen world. Ever since the Garden of Eden, man has been in a state of decay – physically, morally, and spiritually. Man’s nature is corrupt; he operates by that nature.
- Sometimes we cause our own problems. We deliberately disobey God, sound advice, or common sense.
- Sometimes God wants to bring us to a level of repentance. Repeatedly throughout the scriptures, God allowed his people to be conquered by an invader in order to bring them to repentance. They had fallen into sin, and the only way for them to turn back to God was for them to get into a desperate situation.
- Sometimes God allows us to go through hard times so that we can be an example and comfort to others. If you read the life of Paul, you see a man who went through much hardship for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus even told him in advance. But from Paul’s writings, millions upon millions of people have found comfort, strength, wisdom, power, and Christ himself. (See 2 Corinthians 1:3 - 4)
- God tests us. If we respond correctly, He will be glorified. Let’s look at Hebrews 11. We probably have heard of the “heroes of faith” in this chapter, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, and others. But look at verses 35-38. The scriptures talk about believers, people of faith, being beaten, imprisoned, stoned and even sawed in two. The Bible says that “the world was not worthy of them”. *Remember there is a life after death that lasts for an eternity, either with or without God. Even though some of the “heroes of faith” may have suffered in their earthly lives, they have begun to spend an eternity in peace and joy with the Lord.*
- God is sovereign. Our parents didn’t explain every action to us. We don’t explain every action to our children. Our children have to yield to our sovereignty just as we did. We have to yield to the sovereignty of an all-powerful, all loving God.

Key Elements of Jehoshaphat's Prayer v. 6 –12

1. Verse 6 acknowledges who God is...His sovereignty, power and might.
2. Verses 7 – 8 are reminders of the great things God has done. Do you keep a personal journal of what God has done in your life? Why not document your testimony?
3. Verse 9 declares Jehoshaphat's dependence on God.
4. Verses 10 – 11 finally state the problem. Notice where this falls in the order of the prayer.
5. Verse 12 states their determination to focus on Him.

The Battle is Not Yours But God's v. 14 – 17

God answers the sincere, heartfelt prayer of Jehoshaphat. He encourages Jehoshaphat and tells him something we should always keep in mind, "...For the battle is not yours, but God's." (See James 5:16)

When the battle is God's, we are to leave the circumstances to Him. He is responsible for our well-being and the outcome. Our job is to trust and obey. If the situation is out of your control anyway, what else can you do? You might as well trust and obey. This is how God gets glory.

As The Praises Go Up... v. 21 – 22

Jehoshaphat did an interesting thing in his preparation for battle...he appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise Him for "the splendor of His holiness". This wasn't necessarily a feeling he had...he *chose* to praise the Lord. In the midst of our trial, we should *choose* to praise God. Our praise may be in the form of acknowledging his greatness or the things He did for us in the past. But some form of praise is crucial to our victory over our circumstances.

Verse 22 states that as they began to sing, the Lord set an ambush against their enemies. God often works "behind the scenes", in ways that we cannot imagine. We should never underestimate the power of our God.

The Victory v. 24 – 26

Jehoshaphat and the nation of Judah did not have to lift a sword. The battle was already won by the time they arrived on the battlefield. God even blessed them with so much plunder that it took three days to collect it all.

Summary

What God will do in our moment of crisis will depend on our response and His overall plan for our lives. The response of Jehoshaphat to the impending destruction of his nation and his prayer should be models for us to follow the next time we face the challenges of life. Begin to pray like Jehoshaphat; 1) Acknowledge Who God Is First, 2) Remind yourself of the things He has done for you in the past, 3) Declare your dependence on God; you need Him; you can't do it by yourself, 4) Tell Him your need, 5) State your determination to stay focused on Him.