

Challenges of Faith

From Characters in the Bible

July 2012



***You are More Valuable
Than You Can Ever Imagine!***

Christ E Free Church Pulpit Series
July 2012

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Jesus Christ
Our Highest Calling,
Our Greatest Purpose,
Our Soul's Source and Joy
And Our All Consuming Passion.

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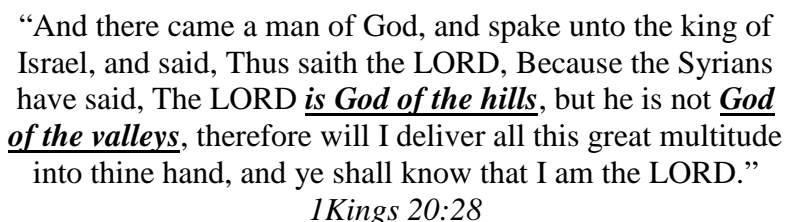
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** Unless otherwise noted, passages of Scripture are in the ESV.*

INTRODUCTION

*“And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are **gods of the hills**; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.” - 1Kings 20:23*

In times when challenges to your faith arise around you, where does your help come from?



*“And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD **is God of the hills**, but he is not **God of the valleys**, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.”*
1Kings 20:28


[The Syrians] take it for granted that it was not Israel, but Israel's God, that beat them; but they speak very ignorantly of Jehovah. They supposed that Israel had many gods, to whom they ascribed limited power within a certain district; thus vain were the Gentiles in their imaginations concerning God. The greatest wisdom in worldly concerns is often united with the most contemptible folly in the things of God. (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary)

They were correct in realizing it was not Israel, but Israel's “gods” who was responsible for their victory. They however were incorrect in assuming He was a God of the hills, but not of the valleys.


Take note of the information given to us from the following Bible dictionaries regarding the *gods of the hills* and the *high places* often referred to in Scripture.

High Places: An eminence, natural or artificial, where worship by sacrifice or offerings was made^{1Ki. 13:32; 2Ki. 17:29}. The first altar after the Flood was built on a mountain^{Gen. 8:20}. Abraham also built an altar on a mountain^{Gen. 12:7; Gen. 12:8}. It was on a mountain in Gilead that Laban and Jacob offered sacrifices^{Gen. 31:54}. After the Israelites entered the Promised Land they were strictly enjoined to overthrow the high places of the Canaanites^(Exo. 34:13; Deu. 7:5; Deu. 12:2, Deu. 12:3), and they were forbidden to worship the Lord on high places^{Deu. 12:11-14}, and were enjoined to use but one altar for sacrifices^{Lev. 17:3; Lev. 17:4; Deut. 12; Deu. 16:21}. The injunction against high places was, however, very imperfectly obeyed... (Easton)

High Places Archaeological and scientific researches have made it evident that in the varying forms of early religions, and in lands far distant from each other, high places were selected for worship of a sacrificial character. This was so especially among the Moabites^{Isa. 15:2; Isa. 16:12; Num. 23:28}. The three altars built by Abraham at Shechem, between Bethel and Ai, and at Mamre, were on heights. Such sites consecrated of old would naturally be resorted to in after times as sanctuaries. Not only these, but heights originally dedicated to idols^{Num. 33:52; Lev. 26:30}. (Fausset)



“A Song of Ascents. I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” *Psalm 121:1-4*



“Moses: When Feelings Threaten to Quench the Call of God”

The Challenge of Failure and Inadequacy

Text: Exodus 3

July 8, 2012



Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, (21) Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. --Eph 3:20-21

INTRODUCTION

How often have you felt that you were unqualified, ungifted or inadequate for some task in your life or ministry for the Kingdom?

How many have ever felt that your spiritual life was not sufficient to merit God using you for anything significant?

How many have ever felt that your past follies and failures threatened to disqualify you from ministry?

What happens when feelings of failure and inadequacy threaten to quench the calling of God in our lives? The Answer is, Satan threatens to have victory over us. We must be able to rise up in faith and confidently declare, “No More Excuses!” “No More Lies!” “No More being plagued by the lies of inadequacy”.

The ability to do that, comes from being informed by Scripture and confident in faith.

SOME BACKGROUND ON MOSES

When we get to know Moses, we will see that he is a man like any other man. He was no superman or extraordinary man. He was a man like us, and we are much like him. The struggles and challenges of his faith, reflect much of the same struggles and challenges each of us experience in our own faith journey.

“I feel like the ‘*gods*’ are against me. “

When The gods are Against You

Growing Fear

Exodus ch.1

Sometimes it feels like “the odds are against us” or as one man stated, “I feel like the *gods* are against me”. After the death of Joseph, the nation of Israel was growing stronger and stronger

within the nation of Egypt. As Israel grew as a nation, fear grew from the Egyptians.

The Israelites were oppressed and persecuted because the King of Egypt was afraid the Israelites might rise up against the Egyptians. In order to attempt to slow their growth, the king ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all baby boys immediately after they were born. But the Hebrew midwives disobeyed.

The Israelites were abused and enslaved, yet they worked hard to do what it took to make life work for themselves, within the context of their present situation. This was not a short term ordeal, but went on for 430 yrs. (Ex.12:40-41)

Making Life Work

Even though they were greatly persecuted, the Israelites were a people who did what it took to make life work. As a result, Moses' mother did what it took to make things work and to save her son's life. If she failed, her child could drown and she would be a fool. If her plan worked, she'd be a hero and her child would be safe. What choice did she have? It was risky, but it worked.

Exodus 1:11-12 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. (12) But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.

The Israelites were multiplying and the taskmasters were increasing the work load as well as the oppression. Yet in the face of such incredible hardship, the people experienced God's grace in a manner in which equipped them to do what it took to make life work. And it did work. That kind of life perspective would prove helpful for what Moses would one day have to face.

The Rescue

Desperate Measures

Read Ex.2:1-9

The king commanded that all the baby boys be thrown into the Nile river. Initially, Moses' mother attempted to keep him

hidden, but the more he grew, the more difficult it became to conceal him and to keep him quiet and unnoticed.

In a desperate act of faith, Moses' mother laid him into a waterproof basket and placed him into the Nile river. No doubt with great fear and with intense prayer to God for his safe keeping, she fully released and entrusted him into the loving care of God alone. Facing desperate situations, Moses' mother took desperate measures and became Moses' rescuer.

God proved to be a God who was not only near and aware of their situation, but one Who was also concerned and involved. He is not a distant God, but one who is near to those who call on Him.^{Psalm 145:18}

Believe it or not, the greater issue was not God saving a baby in the Nile. The bigger picture was God preparing a deliverer for His people whom He had chosen as His own. God was watching over Moses and preserving him for a purpose. God was preparing Moses to be an answer to prayer.

An Answer to Prayer

Scripture tells us God saw the affliction of the Israelites and heard their cry. This is a description of desperate prayer and a God who was faithful to hear and answer. Moses could never have imagined that God would make him an answer to the prayers of his own people.

Exo. 3:7-8 Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, (8) and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, ...

Through all their trials, God had not forgotten His intended purpose and faithful promise to lead them to the promised land, flowing with milk and honey. God never forgets his promises or is deterred from his purposes.

Significant Mistakes

*It was not
Moses who was
extra ordinary,
But the God
of Moses.*

Sometimes when we are a victim of uncontrollable circumstances, we believe God can be compassionate God. But when we know our circumstances are a result of our own mistakes, failures or even sinfulness, we often consider God not to be quite so compassionate or forgiving. And yet, in all Moses' problems and mistakes, God remained faithful to His intended purpose and did not reconsider His calling upon the life of Moses.

Exo 2:11-12 One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. (12) He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

Moses lost his temper as well as control of his actions. He killed a man and then, to make things worse, he attempted to cover it up. That would surely be a devastating blow to your ministry. That would certainly be something Satan could use to bring discouragement and defeat.

That is how it often is. Satan takes a flaw or a mistake or a weakness and makes the most of those, in order to cause us to feel like worthless, failures and even ashamed to even think that we had considered ourselves as a candidate for serving Christ.

Considerable Setbacks

There is a verse that has always been a source of tremendous encourage to me and to many Christians. Some say it is used as a crutch or an excuse. Nevertheless, it is the voice of Truth to us today when we are facing the devils taunts and threatens to defeat us through guilt. And guilt can be a giant of defeat

Rom 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his

purpose.

God uses all things, including our mistakes, our failures, as well as our personal inadequacies to accomplish His intended purposes through His chosen people.

Take note of the phrase, “and we know”. This is to be the Christian’s confidence and foundation of victory over the devil’s verbal attacks. We must KNOW that even though we may be responsible for our own messy circumstances, yet God is able to redeem even the most devastating of failures and work them out for our own good and His own glory.

Moses apparently spent 40 yrs. in the Pharaoh’s palace. He also spent 40 yrs in the wilderness, plus he was leader of Israel for 40 yrs in the wilderness. Acts 7:23-36

We don’t think like God thinks. We view problems and delays – even failures – as setbacks rather than as training sessions.

Moses had 40 yrs to think about what he had done and 40 yrs to learn the lessons of a shepherd. Imagine the number of times he rehearsed his actions. Imagine the number of times he saw himself killing that Egyptian, over and over and over and over. How many times he must have wished he’d stayed in bed that day or that he hadn’t acted so rashly.

*Our challenges
will reflect
the source,
depth and object
of our faith*

Imagine the mountains of guilt he heaped upon himself after 40 long years of regret. Yet imagine the subtle lessons of patience, of carrying for a flock of wanderers, of being the leader of these little, helpless, easily scared, totally dependent and easily straying sheep.

THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH

God clearly met Moses. The question was, “will Moses trust God?”

God Reveals His Presence

The burning bush was an unmistakable, and undeniable meeting with God. It was not a vision, a dream or his imagination. It was

clearly and literally, God and Moses would never forget it.

What will Moses make of this? God offers a challenge of faith. Will Moses believe and receive God's call?

Exo 3:2-5 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. (3) And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." (4) When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." (5) Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

God Reveals His Identity

God reveals Himself to Moses.

Exo 3:6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

In other words, "I am the miracle working God".

Exo 3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

God Reveals His Concern

Exo 3:7 Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings,

God Reveals the need (3:7

God Sees (3:7a

God Hears (3:7b

God Answers (v3:8

God Reveals His Purpose

Exo 3:8 and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey,

God reveals his purpose to rescue His people.

"I have come to deliver the Israelites..."

Who is God sending as a deliverer? Who is God making an answer to the prayers of His people? The *inadequate* Moses.

Exo 3:9-10 And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. (10) Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

God calls Moses specifically.

God Reveals His Promise

Exo 3:12 He said, "But I will be with you,"

THE EXPRESSION OF FAITH

Moses' faith is formed through the asking of questions.

Who am I? (Exo.3:11) Why me Lord? I'm so unworthy. I'm a murderer. I'm a coward. I'm a failure. I'm not fit for service. I am inadequate!

God's Response: "But I will be with you..." (Exo.3:12)

What will I say? (Ex.3:13) I'm too afraid. I'm too much of a stutterer.

God's Response: "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exo.3:14)

But What If They Don't Believe Me? (Ex.4:1) He thinks the worst and he fears the people won't listen or they will never believe him.

God's Response: "What is that in your hand?" (Exo.4:1-8). God presents 2 undeniable and unmistakable miracles to display the power and will of God.

But What If I can't speak? (Ex.4:10) He is not thinking clearly. Fear is blocking realistic understanding and faith judgment.

God's Response: "I will be with your mouth". (Exo.4:11-12) The very area of Moses' self-perceived weakness, God promises to be there and to be actively helping and strengthening in that

particular area, for the purposes for which He has called him.

*Our perceived
weaknesses or
inadequacies
are never
a hindrance
to what God
wants to do
through us.*

“But What if...?” How many times have we considered the Lord’s will for us and have gone through all the negative reasoning and potential excuses we can think of, and yet all we can come up with is “*but what if...?*”

There will always be “*what ifs*”! Our minds can conjure up innumerable potential possibilities and negative situations that could arise.

The bottom line is this: Sometimes our lack of faith is not that which keeps us from realizing God’s will and call on our lives, rather it is our will. God gave Moses adequate evidence that He

would work through him, to accomplish that which He had called him to do.

THE ANSWERS TO FAITH

God sent helpers (Exo 4:14)

Moses Mother and Sister helped by preserving his life. (Ex.2:1-9)

Aaron was his helper and initially spoke for him. (Exo.4:14)

Aaron and Hur held up Moses’ arms during the battle with the Amalekites. (Ex.17:8)

Jethro, Moses’ Father in law gave wise and helpful advice in the formation of Moses’ leadership abilities. (Ex.18:14)

God sends helpers, provides other tools, and works through situations to being about His will and purposes. We are to be willing and obedient faith filled faulty followers, who allow a powerful and all wise God to use us to bring glory to Him.

God used the Inadequacy of Moses

God chooses inadequate and ordinary people to evidence His extraordinary ability, so that people will believe (Exo.4:5)

It is not God’s purpose to see your great abilities or skills and

believe you have done some great deed. It is God's purpose and desire for others to see the power of God in your weakness and inadequacies and consider *His* greatness, *His* power and *His* ability so they might believe in *Him*.

Consider the words of Jesus.

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." -- Mat 5:16

God Bridges All Gaps

The situation of Moses might remind us of Paul's situation and his prayer to God to change his situation.

2Cor. 12:8-9 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. (9) But he said to me, "***My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.***" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

OFF THE PAGES AND INTO MY LIFE

What is my challenge and response?

God Uses the Weak

God uses the very ordinary people. He uses the weak, the ordinary, the inadequate, the unskilled, the unexpected people among us.

God used a coal miner to spark the 1904 Welsh Revival.

God used a shoe salesman to reach the heart of Chicago and around the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God used a blind woman and a suicidal hymn writer to encourage the faith of the church. Evan Roberts, DL Moody, Fanny Crosby and William Cowper were all ordinary people who allowed an extra ordinary God get ahold of them, fill them and use them for His glory.

Whom God Calls He Equips

God never calls anyone to work alone. He never expects anyone of us to do what only He can do.

1Thes. 5:24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

God calls, equips and enables, in order to accomplish that which He has planned. Notice the emphasis in this promise.

*"He who calls you is faithful; **HE** will surely do it."*

God wants to be known as *Your* God

1Cor. 1:25-31 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (26) For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. (27) But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (28) God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (29) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (30) He is the Source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (31) Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Great athletes, boast in their coaches. Great race car drivers, boast in their pit crew. Great victims, boast in their rescuers. And great Christian celebrities, are not great at all, but *must* boast in their great God, not in flippant, fleeting verbal references, but in a clear and certain boast in His power and purposes, through a verbal and visual reflection of His character and attitude.

Phil. 2:15-16 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, (16) holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

It is not God's will to make Christian superstars. It is God's will to

place Christians in situations to shine like stars

Personal Faith Inventory

A popular question in churches used to be - *What are your spiritual gifts?*

1) The Fact is Inadequacy is not a hindrance or a weakness – it is not the reason for failure – rather it is a necessary **prerequisite** for success. Worthless? NO. Inadequate? YES.

We are all inadequate. We are all unqualified. We are all weak. We are all in desperate need for God to strengthen us, help us, and use us.

2) The Fact is God may intend to use you as an answer to someone's prayer or outcry for help.

3) The Fact is personal failure does not disqualify us from ministry or minimize our usefulness for God.

God can take our failures and mistakes, and use them as building blocks for His purpose. He can use the things we mess up, as a means of preparing us for something else in our future.

So ask all your questions, and gather up all your excuses – get them all out of the way. Acknowledge the fact that the only reason God will every use you is not your own greatness, but God will choose to use you to bring about His greatness, which is most often done so, through the weaknesses of those whom He calls.

Moses was a friend of God. And we are told that God spoke with Moses as a man speaks with his friend. (Ex.33:11)

Can my own mistakes or failures thwart Gods' purposes and calling in my life?

Rom 11:29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.
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Personal mistakes don't bring about failure. But personal sin does.

2Ti 1:8-9 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, (9) who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose
--

and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

1 John 1:9 calls Christians to be quick to repent and confess our sins as soon as we are aware of them. Just as God restored Moses (after 80 years), God can still restore you from your sin, if you allow Him to convict, teach and restore you.

What is it that can keep us from experiencing Gods best for our lives and ministry?

- 1) Lack of repentance** when we make mistakes or fall into sin.
- 2) Lack of full surrender** when God wants to lead us and use us for His purpose.
- 3) Lack of desire** for What God wants to do and a God squelching desire to do my thing and go my way.
- 4) Attitude more than actions** keep us from being greatly used by God
- 5) Failing to purposefully and sincerely** reflect God as the sole source of our help and strength and accomplishments.

What set backs in ministry or in your faith have you experienced? Are you able to consider them as God's tools for teaching and a time of training for your task ahead?

- Consider the People of Faith -

Heb 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (14) For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. (15) If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore **God is not ashamed to be called their God**, for he has prepared for them a city.

If God was known by you as the God of “_____” (insert your own name), what would He be known for?

“The God of _____, _____, and _____ is the True

and Living God!”

“_____’s God is the God of all Gods”. “There is no God like _____’s God”.

Through your faith and obedience, ---*how will God be known?*

There will always be voices telling us we are failures, that we are below average, or that we are totally inadequate. There will always be voices telling you, “*you can’t*”.

We must listen to the voice of truth that says “God can and He will!”

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, (21) to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

--Eph. 3:20-21

Voice of Truth

Mark Hall, Casting Crowns

Oh what I would do to have
The kind of strength it takes to stand before a giant
With just a Sling and a stone
Surrounded by the sound of a thousand warriors
Shaking in their armor
Wishing they'd have had the strength to stand

But the giant's calling out my name and he laughs at me
Reminding me of all the times I've tried before and failed
The giant keeps on telling me
Time and time again "boy, you'll never win!
"You'll never win"

But the voice of truth tells me a different story
And the voice of truth says "Do not be afraid!"
And the voice of truth says "This is for My glory"
Out of all the voices calling out to me
I will choose to listen and believe the voice of truth

“Jehoshaphat: A Good Man In Times of Trouble”

The Challenge of Adversity and Anxiety

Text: 2 Chron. 17, 19, & 20

July 15, 2012



*O our God, will you not execute judgment on them?
For we are powerless against this great horde
that is coming against us. We do not know what to do,
but our eyes are on you."*

*Meanwhile all Judah stood before the LORD,
with their little ones, their wives, and their children.*

--2Chron. 20:12-13

INTRODUCTION

Missionaries throughout history have lost their lives serving Jesus Christ. Good people in trouble, facing adversity and handling anxiety – have always been those whom we observe and wonder about. Good people in trouble – why does it happen?

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus states “... *your Father who is in heaven...makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*”

So our question is this: In your opinion, does living right before God really pay off? What happens when we find ourselves in trouble and faced with adversity? Adversity might be people or circumstances. And when faced with adversity, how do we deal with it and how do we handle the inevitable anxiety that comes along with it?

Adversity can be something we may be able to walk away from. But the inner angst of anxiety can't be ignored and most often cannot be avoided.

Today, we look at the life of Jehoshaphat for helpful encouragement about adversity and anxiety.

JEHOSHAPHAT – A GOOD MAN

Jehoshaphat was a king of Judah and overall, he is presented as a good king. There were times when he seemed to be lacking in good judgment, but for the most part he was a good king who was pleasing to God.

God's blessings on Jehoshaphat (2Chr.17:4-6)

Before the blessings, we are given some insight into the inner man of Jehoshaphat.

He sought after God

2Ch 17:3 And Jehovah was with Jehoshaphat because he walked in the first ways of his father David and did not seek to Baals.

The Bible says David was “a man after God’s own heart”. ^{Acts 13:22}
Psalm 128:1 says, “*blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways.*”

Those who seek God, find God. Those who seek and find God are pleasing to God. They demonstrate the affections of their heart and the focus of their attention. Jehoshaphat was a man who sought after God.

He walked in God’s commands

2Ch 17:4 *But he looked to the God of his father, and walked in His commandments,* and not after the doings of Israel.

To walk by God’s commands means to know and live by them in true obedience. Not just talking about Scripture, but being obedient to Scripture.

Psa 1:1-2 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; (2) but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Concerning those who love His word, God promises...

Psa 1:3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

*It is not Christian perfection that brings about
God’s blessing, but the intent of the heart and relationship
with God through Jesus.*

He did not follow the ways of Israel

2Chr 17:4 But he looked to the God of his father, and walked in His commandments, *and not after the doings of Israel.*

He was not evil, idolatrous or God rejecting in his ways. What a reputation Israel had to overcome and what a symbol of Godlessness.

Because Jehoshaphat was a man like David, he was not associated with the disobedient and idolatrous behavior of the overall people of Israel. He neither took up idols or Baals, nor did he live like the Israelite people who turned from God, over and over and over again.

His Heart delighted in the ways of the Lord

He was devoted or “*his heart soared in the ways of the Lord*. The idea is that he was High on God. Thrilled, joyful and celebrating the very presence of God in his life.

Psa 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

In verses 1, 7 and 8, those who delight in the Lord need not fret or worry themselves concerning life, worries, circumstances or trouble outside their own doings. When fear or worry arise, we must not allow it to dominate our lives. We are to trust in God, and stand firm in His promises to help and protect us in the adversities that face us.

Philippians 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

When we do this, the promise is “...*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” (Phil.4:7)

Psalms 37:39-40 tells us to take refuge in God as our safe place and our security.

The Lord blessed him

Jehoshaphat physically prospered. Remember the promise of Psalm 1:3?

2Chr 17:5 Therefore the LORD established the kingdom in his hand. And all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honor.

2Chr 17:11 Some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents

and silver for tribute, and the Arabians also brought him 7,700 rams and 7,700 goats.

2Chr 17:13 and he had large supplies in the cities of Judah. He had soldiers, mighty men of valor, in Jerusalem.

Jehoshaphat was not a celebrity personality, yet was a sought out leader. He was not a self-focused person, but reached out to others. He had no TV ministry of asking for money, yet God moved people to give lavishly to him – *even pagan people*.

Jehoshaphat enjoyed the blessings of God's prosperity. It was not something he sought. It was the result of Gods blessing a man whose heart genuinely delighted in Him and in His holy word. He enjoyed the good pleasure of God.

Consider the blessing of God upon Ezra.

Ezr 7:9-10 (9) "... for the good hand of his God was on him. (10) For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

When people genuinely love God, He faithfully blesses them. Sometimes the love and delight we have for god is the greatest blessing of all.

Jehoshaphat's blessing to God (19:4

Jehoshaphat blessed God by...

Turning people back to the Lord

In 2 Chronicles 17:7-10 Jehoshaphat sent his officials, Levites and the priests to teach in the cities.

2Chr 17:9-10 And they taught in Judah, having the Book of the Law of the LORD with them. They went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. (10) And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, and they made no war against Jehoshaphat.

Likewise, Jehoshaphat himself went out as an ambassador of his God to his people.

Note: God's word was taught in Judah, and awe toward God fell

upon all surrounding kingdoms. Safety and peace fell upon Juday.

2Chr 19:4 Jehoshaphat lived at Jerusalem. And he went out again among the people, from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and brought them back to the LORD, the God of their fathers.

Jehoshaphat was a blessing to God by demonstrating His delight in the Lord by turning others to Him.

He was just and honorable

2Chr 19:5-7 He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, (6) and said to the judges, "Consider what you do, for you judge not for man ***but for the LORD***. He is with you in giving judgment. (7) Now then, let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, or partiality or taking bribes."

Jehoshaphat was a good man and enjoyed the good pleasure of God on his life.

A GOOD MAN IN TIMES OF TROUBLE (20:1ff

We see Jehoshaphat as a good man, but we also see him as a good man in times of trouble. He faces the challenge of adversity and anxiety.

Adversity = trouble from outside

Anxiety = trouble from within. Anxiety affects our feelings, attitudes, responses, and disposition.

When we are in trouble or problems arise, feelings of guilt, anger, pity, confusion, and disbelief can flood our hearts and minds. Anxieties of every kind can threaten to take us over.

When trouble arises we experience anxiety and that anxiety often manifests itself in a variety of ways.

Guilt: "I must have really messed things up. Its all my fault. I'm such a worthless person." - *I'm such a lousy wife or lousy student or a lousy father, etc.*

*Adversity and
Anxiety affect
our human
feelings in
unexpected
and perhaps
even in
unseen ways.*

Pity: “Nothing ever goes my way”, “I must not be living right”
“No one has it as bad as I have it.” “You can’t treat me like that!”

Anger: “How could they do this to me?” or “God, looks like we need to have a little talk.” “How dare you not do what I asked you to do? or How dare you not give me what I asked you to give me.”

Confusion: “Now what have I done? or What have I done to deserve that? Don’t things ever let up?” “Why is God allowing this?”

Disbelief: “How could this have happened?” It just doesn’t make sense. I’ve been doing my devotions and everything.” “Surely I deserve better than this!”

THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH

The Adversaries Gather (20:2-4)

2Ch 20:1-2 After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle. (2) Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea; and, behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar" (that is, Engedi).

I wonder if they had any concept of Paul’s statement of faith in Romans 8:31. “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*”

Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Sometimes our greatest enemy is not our immediate adversary, but our inner Anxiety. The toughest battles are often not from the outside, but those from the inside.

God’s blessings and our Personal goodness is no guarantee that we will have no worries, no troubles, no problems, no adversaries, or no anxieties.

The Righteous suffer and experience trouble. The Righteous worry

and experience anxiety. The good and the righteous experience adversity and suffer anxiety.

One summer in Liberia I met a man named “no problem” or at least that was the name he went by. At first, I was not sure whether I should call him “No”, or “Mr Problem”. When you asked him how he was doing, he would respond, “no problem”. When someone noticed he had a flat on his bicycle tire, he responded with “no problem”. When I asked him about his son who had been sick, he stated, “no problem”. As I grew to know him, I understood he was not responding with some frivolous Christian response. Rather His response was from a faith that looked at his troubles from God’s perspective – “no problem”.

We might have problems, but from God’s perspective there really is *no problem*.

FACING ADVERSITY & HANDLING ANXIETY (2CHRON.20:2-12)

Jehoshaphat Had A resolve to get God’s input (v3

2Ch 20:3 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

Fear is a good thing when we allow it to drive us toward God. Fear drove Jehoshaphat to action – appropriate Christian action. He resolved to seek God and invited all of Judah to join him.

Too often we make decisions, even weighty ones, too quickly. Fear with sober minded prayer, together with fasting, led Jehoshaphat to get help and answer to the prayers that he needed.

Jehoshaphat Lead People to seek God for help (v4

2Ch 20:4 And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

Fear did not paralyze or defeat him. It drove him to take action that would soon prove beneficial to everyone around him.

He prayed (v5-12

1) He declared His understanding of God (v6-7

2) He professed his faith in God (v8-10
“you will hear and save us...”

3) He Identified his problem and talked to God (v10f

I once heard someone say, “don’t tell God about your problems, tell your problems about God.” I was never sure why it was considered inappropriate to talk to God about any of our problems. That is certainly the example Jehoshaphat gives us – he talked to God about his problems.

4) He also Expressed total dependence upon God (v12

a. powerless (v12b – “We have no power...” Not a statement of lack of faith but of total dependence upon God.

b. ignorance (v12c– “We don’t know what to do Not many would issue statements like that. Ignorance doesn’t sell books, nor does it gather followers. Ignorance impresses no one, but it certainly gets God’s attention and receives a response.

c. Hopeless (v12d – “Our eyes are upon You...” Focus is not on the gurus, the experts or the best selling Christian book, but on GOD.

He experienced the Power of Prayer and Praise
(20:13-28

Anxiety and Adversity can dominate us. Nowhere are we safe from them. We experience these at work, at school, in our finances, within our families, through illnesses and affliction, through relational disappointments and even as a result of our own sinful habits.

So in v.13, we see all of Judah humbly waiting on God for help. Then a prophet rises up and encourages them. “The battle is not yours but God’s” (2 Chron.20:15)

They are then instructed by the prophet, that the next day they are to go meet the enemy. They are not to be discouraged. Go face your enemy. God will be with you. Then they humbly bowed and

*It has been said
that Prayer and
Praise are two
great wings of the
Christian faith.
Failure to
implement both,
can result in an
unfortunate
handicap.*

worshiped God.

The next day they were assigned singers, a choir and a praise team which went ahead of the army and the people. (v21) It was during that time of praise that God set an ambush for the enemy. And when the people of Judah arrived on the battle field, all they could see were dead bodies. Each enemy army had defeated the other opposing army, until there were no other opposing armies to oppose Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah.

Oh, the unexperienced power in prayer and praise. When we offer praise, the focus is on the person, character and worth of God – not on self, problems, adversaries nor anxieties.

Praise – God inhabits the praises of His people.

<p>Psa. 22:3 But thou art holy, O thou that inhabits the praises of Israel.</p>
--

When prayer and praise are working together, it seems God is especially alerted to our need and to our outcry for help. Praise is the Practice of remembering the goodness of God, even in Anxious circumstances. Have faith in God and do not doubt.

<p>Pro 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (6) In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.</p>
--

When we develop a practice of praise, we are also developing a plan for victory against the enemy within us and outside of us. Praise evidences our faith filled expectation of God's ability and willingness to hear and help us.

Praise acknowledges that the battle we are facing is not ours but the Lord's. (vs.15, 22-23) Praise declares ahead of time by faith, that the devil is defeated and God is the Victor.

Resting indicates we have indeed put the troubles behind us and considered the plan of God to be done, (v.30) and we trust the result to be fully in His all-competent hands.

Jehoshaphat rested. Rest in your faith. Rest in your situation. Rest in facing your Adversary. Rest in nurturing your worry and

anxiety. Rest. Put it to rest. Rest does not mean we cease to work. It does however, mean we cease to worry, as though things outside our control depend upon us.

OFF THE PAGE AND INTO MY LIFE - Application

1) Delight in God above all else (Ps. 37:4)

2) Trust in the Lord above your understanding and above the situations you are facing. (Prov.3:5-6)

3) Pray as Jehoshaphat did – a great prayer of faith and dependence, and anticipate God to meet your needs.

a. powerless

b. ignorance

c. hopeless

4) Practice prayer and Praise

a. Praise God for His faithfulness up until now

b. Praise God for what He will do

c. Praise God and rejoice in the Lord

d. Praise God and rest in Him

Write down 3-5 things each day that you can praise God for. Not just items for prayer but reasons for praise.

1Pet. 5:7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Psa 55:22 Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

Jehoshaphat was a good man in times of trouble. Remember prayer and praise as effective means of facing adversity and handling anxiety.

Consider the Hymn: “Have Faith in God”

“Elijah: The Man The Mountains, and The Valley

The Challenge of Doubt and Depression

Text: 1 Chron.17-21

July 22, 2012



“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.” *James 5:16-18*

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, we have to acknowledge that depression can be clinical and may require professional or medical help. But for most, depression can be situational or a result of the situations we find ourselves in and events we have experienced. Depression can stem from feelings we harbor. We must also acknowledge that some depression can even occur because our faith is being challenged. This is the focus of our lessons today.

The Man

ELIJAH: A MAN OF POWER AND VICTORY

This is probably how most of us view Elijah – a true Bible hero. However, heroes are often perceived as being without problems, troubles or hardships. While Elijah was a hero, he was a man with a nature or make-up much like ours. In other words, he was a man like any other man.

A Man of God

We know Elijah spoke the word of God and demonstrated the power of God.

The Drought and Famine

1Ki 16:32-33 He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. (33) And Ahab made an Asherah. **Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.**

Ahab also married Jezebel.

This drought and famine were of Elijah's own making. It was his response to the wicked king Ahab. Ahab, the king of Israel was the worst and most wicked of all the kings of Israel.

1Ki 17:1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my

word."

And it was so.

Living by Miracles

These were not necessarily miracles accomplished by Elijah's own hand, but miracles from God on behalf of Elijah to provide for him during the time of drought and famine. These miracles from God evidenced His presence and pleasure in Elijah's life and ministry.

Raven's Bread and Water

1Ki 17:1-8 Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." (2) And the word of the LORD came to him, (3) "Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. (4) You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." (5) So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. (6) And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. (7) And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. (8) Then the word of the LORD came to him,

God provided for Elijah through Ravens who brought him bread and meat, and through the creek which provided water---for a time. Once the creek dried up God instructed Elijah to move on to Zarephath.

Marked by Many Mighty Works

The Widow of Zarephath - READ 1 Kings 17:10 and following.

the mighty work of food - 1Ki. 17:9-16 – “bring me water and some bread” (v11). This amounted to a handful of flour and a little oil.(v12) She was preparing their last bit of resources for a last meal before they died.

Elijah instructed the widow to prepare something for him first, then something for themselves (v13). The Widow obeyed (v15) and the flour and oil lasted until the rains came (vs.14-15)

the mighty work of raising the dead

Later on, the widow's son became sick and the widow called to Elijah to help. Elijah then prayed to God and raised her Son from the dead (1Ki.17:17-22).

1Ki 17:24 And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.

Elijah helped them trust in God. He helped others trust in God's word of Truth.

A MAN OF COURAGE AND FAITH

Elijah may be best known for the...

Showdown of the gods

1Ki 18:17-18 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" (18) And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals.

Elijah gathered the false gods of Ahab for a showdown with the True and Living God. (1Ki. 18:16

In 1Ki.18:19-20, Elijah gathered the 450 prophets of Baal (Phonecian god) and the 400 prophets of Asherah (Caananite goddess). There would be 1 bull for false prophets and 1 bull for Elijah. Build an altar and call on your gods to light the fire for the sacrifice.

They prayed to their gods, crying out all day long with loud cries and cutting themselves.

1Ki 18:29 And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

1 Ki.18:31 – Elijah rebuilt the altars to God

v.32) he dug a trench around the altar

In 1 Ki.18:33, Elijah called for 4 containers of water to be filled up and poured out on his sacrifice – 3 times.

Elijah prays to God

1Ki 18:36-39 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. (37) Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." (38) Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. (39) And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."

Elijah's faith affected the faith of others (v39).
How does your faith affect others? If God were known as "your god", what would He be known for?

A Man known for prayer

Interesting that in Scripture, Elijah is a man known for prayer. And yet when the specifics are given, he is not always known for his prayer at Mount Carmel showdown of the gods, but for his prayer for rain.

*When you are remembered,
what will people
say about
your mountains,
your valleys
and how you
met your faith
challenges?*

1Ki 18:42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees.

1Ki 18:45 And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel.

Elijah was a righteous man who prayed effectively.

Jas 5:16-18 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. (18) Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Elijah is not remembered so much for his sensationalism, but for effective prayer. He prayed for rain to stop and it stopped. 3yrs and 6 months later, he prayed for rain, and it rained! Elijah was a man of power and of victory, as well as, courage and of faith.

A MAN WITH CHALLENGES TO HIS FAITH

Along with his mountains, Elijah experienced valleys – deep valleys. Yet even in his valleys, he experienced God to be not only the God of the hills and the mountains, but also the God of the valleys (1Ki.20:28)

The Challenge of Jezebel

1Ki 19:1-3 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. (2) Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." (3) Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

Fear can overtake the best of us. It can also debilitate and defeat us.

The Challenge of Deception and Disillusionment

Deception and disillusionment threatened to defeat Elijah. We allow ourselves to be deceived when we allow ourselves to see things bigger than they really are.

We are deceived when situations, people or relationships appear

far worse than they really are.

1Ki 19:4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

Fear leads to deception and deception is believing a lie. Whether it is from the Devil or from our own making. Deception can take a deceived person into the imagined darkness of life and make it as though it were reality.

Deception and Disillusionment feed on our mis-placed thoughts and our mixed up feelings and allows them to lead us to inaccurate perceptions and conclusions. These inaccurate perceptions and conclusions formulate our beliefs.

Once you believe something, it is reality, whether it is accurate or inaccurate, whether it is truth or a lie – it becomes reality to us. Once we believe something it becomes reality for us. Once deception and disillusionment enters the house, they take up residence, and quickly open the back door to doubt and depression.

The Challenge of Doubt and Depression

Once we are disillusioned, in comes doubt. Doubt doesn't typically happen all at once. Doubt is more like a balloon of faith – with a leak. AS the balloon leaks, faith dissipates – subtly - little by little, until one day faith has not suddenly disappeared, but has faded away, almost undetected.

1Ki 19:10 He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."

Deceived and Disillusioned, - for whatever reason, Elijah feels alone. "and I, even I only, am left..." (v10)

Doubt and Depression often feed on loneliness, past mistakes and missed opportunities. D & D magnify normal life difficulties shared by everyone and begin to consider their own situation as unique and out of proportion.

Doubt and Depression can even enter in following a great victory, a great time of excitement or some positive spiritual experience. Good times are often followed by hard times and highs are often followed by lows. Mountains can even be followed by valleys.

Israel experienced amazing heights as they followed God and trusted Him. They were part of unimagined feats of God's miraculous power. Then we see them going right back into idolatry or grumbling in distrust.

Perhaps you've experience going to an amusement park or going on a family vacation and you have a great exciting time. Once you get home, the excitement dies down and you enter into a sort of depressed state.

Youth go off to camp – they experience a fantastic week of fun, friendships and spiritual challenges and once that's over, they can find themselves in a sort of depressed feeling. Even in the non-spiritual realm, a low point, following a great highpoint, is normal.

1Ki 19:11-13 And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. (12) And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. (13) And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "**What are you doing here, Elijah?**"

Is it excitement, entertainment or sensationalism you seek? Some new experience perhaps? Or do you desire first and foremost the presence of God in your life, however He chooses to reveal Himself?

Here is a good personal inventory question for Elijah: "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*"

We know Elijah truly sought God. There was a strong wind, but God was not in the strong wind. There was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. There was a great fire, but God

was not in the fire.

Then there was a low whisper, and when he heard it, he knew he was in the presence of God. Elijah was not meant to be known solely as a man of sensational feats. He was to be known as a man of prayer.

God is not merely a God of the sensational. He is a God of the still small voice – A God of the quiet and of the ordinary. God is not merely the God of the mountains, but He is also the God of the valleys as well.

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” Stop and take inventory. Where are you? What are you doing here? Where was he? On the mount – in the quiet. What was he doing there? He was standing in the presence of Almighty God.

OFF THE PAGE AND INTO MY LIFE

Doubt and **D**epression can cause a person’s focus to become completely self-focused. All they can see are their own grim circumstances. D & D can take a 2 way relationship and quickly turn it into a 1 way dead end.

D & D can cause people to be fired or quit their jobs. D & D are often nurtured by those who are sinking into it.

Without purposeful spiritual intervention, doubt and depression only feed themselves with further poison and darkness from the soul. As believers, once we are deceived and disillusioned, we begin doubting who we are – are value – our worth – the reason

we’re here – the purpose of living as Christians. They doubt their calling or neglect it all together. Some fall to the level of doubting their own salvation and identity as Children of God in Christ.

When aimless doubt is fully formed, then the darkness of depression begins filling the person with sense of sorrow and emptiness, with no identifiable cause. Depression begins to expect the very worst about things we did, that we should not have done, or things we didn’t do that we should have done.

Depression thinks the worst regarding present circumstances

– thinking ‘no good can come from this’ and ‘only the worst can happen now’. Depression purges out the last drop of faith, should any remain.

Doubt and Depression will completely remove any hope in any of God’s promises for the future. God created us to serve Him. Once we get sidetracked from that purpose, deception, disillusionment, doubt and depression can fill anyone of us – because all these problems come due to our lack of focus, understanding and direction.

We were created to have God as our sole Source and joy. He is to be our greatest purpose and our highest calling. He is to be our reason for living and our all consuming passion. Once anything begins to take that place – we are destined to deception, disillusionment, doubt and depression.

“What are YOU doing here?”

Have you taken inventory lately of your spiritual journey?

“What are YOU doing here?”

What steps are you taking to change your thought patterns and get out of your depression?

Please consider taking your own personal spiritual inventory. Find a time and place to be alone.

Prayerfully work through the inventory. Identify some possible causes of doubt and depression.

Take time to formulate some possible 1st steps in progressing through these challenges to your faith. Consider including another person in this process.

Take the initiative to share your struggle with someone. This person must be someone who will listen to you without judging you – someone who will pray for you - and someone whom you trust to keep your information confidential.

God’s blessings as you seek His light and encouragement in the challenge to your faith.

Personal Spiritual Inventory

1) Note some events and/or experiences in my life where I felt near to God? _____

2) What were some circumstances that have made me feel God was far away? _____

3) List some times when it seemed God was really leading me or using me? _____

4) What were some past situations that caused me to begin thinking God had no use for me or no calling for my life?

5) **Identify:** When I find myself doubting God's love or wondering if I am really part of His family, on what facts am I basing those thoughts? _____

6) When I begin feeling depressed: Is it following some meaningful spiritual time when God seemed close? Or was it following some specific negative or discouraging event?

7) How would you validate your thoughts or feelings?

8) **Identify:** I am feeling _____. Therefore, I am feeling _____, because _____

9) **Reality:** It seems I have little or no reason for my feelings of depression. The fact is, I may actually be deceived. T or F?

Thoughts: _____

10) It seems that due to recent disillusionment, I actually may have substantial reasons that validate my feelings of depression. The fact is, I may need to talk to someone about my feelings of depression.

Thoughts: _____

10) I regularly spend time in God's word washing my mind with His Truth. _____

Eph 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (26) that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (27) so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

11) I regularly spend time in prayer, including praise to God for who He is and for all He has done in my life. _____

Psa 22:3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

12) **Reality:** The fact is, I rarely spend meaningful time reading God's word, and being fed by His doubt defeating Truth.

I seldom spend time in prayer beyond asking for things for myself.

I seldom spend much time praising God or interceding on behalf of others.

I find myself focusing mostly on the negative things I perceive around me and worrying a lot. I tend to replay and rehearse conversations, and events over and over in my mind, thinking about how unkind and unpleasant other people are.

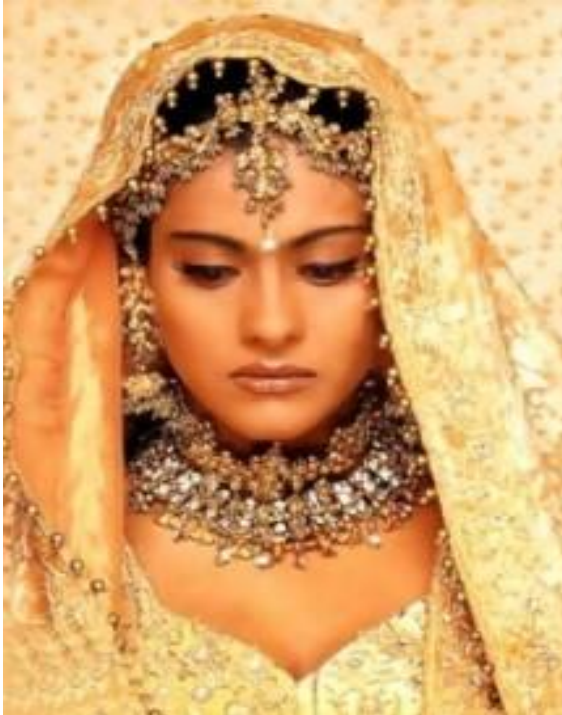
13) **Reality:** I need help changing my thought patterns. (2 Cor.10:5) Where will I go for help? What will be my 1st Steps toward finding freedom from deception and disillusionment, as well as from doubt and depression? _____

“Esther: God’s Sovereign Plan and Timing”

The Challenge of Life and Death

Text: Esther Summary

July 29, 2012



“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

-Esther 4:14

INTRODUCTION

For Such a Time as This!

You can read Esther and you will probably think, what a great story about the greatness of God and His divine intervention on behalf of His people.”

Then if I told you, “God is not mentioned in the book of Esther”, you’d probably say, “sure He is, I just read all about Him – God’s sovereignty and salvation of His people are throughout the book. It is full of God protecting and helping the Jews – and Esther leads her people in prayer and fasting. God is everywhere in Esther”.

God is never mentioned in the book of Esther, only implied.

Yet if you go back and read it again you realize it is true – God is not mentioned by name in Esther, only implied. Esther is all about the faith challenge of life and death AND Christian obedience to God.

“Do all I have commanded you. “

James 1:25 But whoever looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues in it, he is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work. This one shall be blessed in his doing.

In this old testament book, we see the need for Christian obedience and personal sacrifice.

Q: Are we performing the good works that Jesus Himself has commanded us to carry out – especially in helping others become true disciples of Jesus Christ? Never say, “that is not my calling”. That is like saying to God, “I have no intention of obeying you and living the obedient Christian life you have given me.” That is disobedience to God, regardless of what excuse you present.

I Believe too many Christians are bored. One man has told me, he thinks Christians are too distracted – filling their lives with so many things, that the eternal things that really matter are often

neglected or ignored all together.

Q: So am I performing the good works that Jesus Himself has commanded me to carry out?

God has placed a Kingdom call before each of us – An eternal purpose worth risking everything and expending ourselves so completely to accomplish.

THE BACK GROUND

We need to know that God has a plan in process and our Christian obedience is key to that plan coming together.

In the TV series, *The A-Team*, Hannibal had a quote. “I love it when a plan comes together.” Hannibal would love the book of Esther.

King Xerxes and Queen Vashti

The king displays his wealth for 180 days and holds a banquet in honor of himself for 7 days.

He then decides to display the beauty of his wife and calls her to put her on display along with his other possessions and she refuses.(v12)

In his anger, he consults with his advisors and they advise him to get rid of her. So the king banishes Queen Vashti and sends out a decree that all men will be the leaders of their households and that the women should honor their husbands. (v19-20, 22)

The Right person, at The Right Place At The Right Time

The king then held a beauty pageant to find the next beauty queen who will become his new royal queen.

The most beautiful young girls in the land are brought in and paraded before the royal administration. Esther stood out over all the rest. Before any of the girls could be presented to the king for his evaluation, they had to endure 12 months of beauty treatments. (2:12) How beautiful were all those beauty queens in the first place?

Nevertheless, the selection was made and Esther was the winner

and was given the royal crown (2:17). This was actually the out workings of Gods' divine sovereign plan and timing coming together for a special time, for a special people, with a very special person, Esther.

THE RISE OF A QUEEN

God's sovereignty is accomplished and Esther becomes Queen. Then in chapters 2 and 3, Mordecai, Esther's cousin, uncovers a plot to kill the king. (2:21). As a result, the kings right hand man is executed and replaced with Haman, who is also an evil man, seeking his own exaltation. When Haman was honored, it was Mordecai who refused to bow in his presence. This was more than Haman could bear, and he began hating Mordecai and all the Jews because of him.

God's Sovereign Plan and Time (4:14

With Haman's growing hatred for Mordecai and the Jews, he began to devise a scheme to kill both Mordecai and annihilate all the Jews from the land. (3:6).

Mordecai heard of the conspiracy and got word to Esther in the palace, urging her to go to the king and do something. (4:10)

Esther responded by calling Mordecai's attention to the fact that no one, including the Queen, can approach the King with out his invitation. If they do, he may extend his golden scepter to the person and they will be allowed to approach. If not, they will be executed.

"Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Est. 4:13-14)

This was a challenge of life and death. Esther must trust God to protect her as well as all her Jewish people. Perhaps she was in deed, brought into the kingdom "For such a time as this".

The Challenge of Life and Death (4:16)

Esther agreed to approach the king. She calls her people to fast (and pray). Her attitude was... “If I die, I die..”. In other words, I will live my life with purpose until God says “*its over*”.

If I live, I live *with* a purpose. If I die, I die *for* a purpose.

This reminds me of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as they were facing the fiery furnace,.

Daniel 3:17-18 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. (18) But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

The challenge of life and death. Most of us are not faced with the challenge of life and death. But we are faced with the challenge of daily Christian obedience.

Q: How do we as Christians respond when our faith is challenged?

Characters in the Bible who faced challenges to their faith were devoted to living or dying for God and for His cause.

Esther had already chosen to live for God and to die for her people if it came down to it. She understood that she was where she was, due to the sovereign plan for her, for such a time as this.

For Such a Time as this – Wayne Watson

Now, all I have is now To be faithful
To be holy And to shine Lighting up the darkness
Right now, I really have no choice
But to voice the truth to the nations
A generation looking for God

CHORUS:

For such a time as this I was placed upon the earth
To hear the voice of God And do His will Whatever it is

For such a time as this For now and all the days He gives
I am here, I am here And I am His
For such a time as this

This is not a song just about Queen Esther. It's a song about the challenge of faith and the sovereign plan of God for each of us.

When that time comes, will I be obedient??

GOD'S PLAN UNFOLDS

The Drama between Haman and Mordecai continues. Haman's hate grows.

Hate builds to murder (CHS. 4-7)

God's plan unfolds and as the drama between Haman and Mordecai continues to grow, Haman's hatred continues to grow. Haman makes plans to kill Mordecai and exterminate the Jews (4:1, 5:14). The end result is one more lesson of God's Sovereignty and believer's obedience.

Humility turns to honor

The king however, remembered Mordecai as the one who thwarted an assassination attempt and decided to honor him. (6:3) . The king, not revealing his intentions to Haman, asks Haman, "what should be done for the man whom the king desires to honor"? (6:6) Haman thinks the king is referring to himself and says that the person should be placed upon the king's best horse, covered with the King's robe and someone appointed to lead the horse around the town hailing, "this is what happens to the one whom the king delights to honor".

At which point the King identifies Mordecai as the one whom he desires to honor and designates Haman as the one who is ordered to lead him around on the king's best steed, hailing Mordecai's greatness. As a result, Haman's pride turns to humiliation and Mordecai's humility is turned to honor.

God's Sovereignty and Believer's Obedience

During this time, Esther has planned a great banquet in honor of her king and requested that Haman attend with him. At the banquet the King extends an invitation to Esther for a request to be made of him. She asks only that her life and the life of her people be spared.

With the king's surprise, Esther reveals the conspiracy and that she is a Jew.

Est 7:5-6 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?" (6) And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

The king stormed out in a fury. Upon regaining his composure, he returned, only to see Haman clinging to Esther, begging for his life. Perceiving Haman to be assaulting the queen, Haman's execution is ordered.

The King then sent out new decree to save all the Jews (8:1). Ultimately, Haman was caught in his own trap to murder Mordecai and Haman himself is executed by the King for high treason. In his place, Mordecai is ultimately positioned. And the plan has come together for God to use Esther to save the Jews.

OFF THE PAGE AND INTO MY LIFE

What are you living for? What is holding you back from living for God's greater Kingdom cause? One of the most important questions any human will ever attempt to answer is "What am I doing here?" "Why am I here?"

If your life seems aimless, or if you feel you are living without purpose, you need to know that God has a cause for you. There is no need of living a pointless, aimless, purposeless life with no direction and no motivation. There is no need of living a hopeless life, always wondering "who am I?" and "why am I here?"

Even some Christians feel like they never fit in, or they never feel really needed or involved in some cause that is bigger than themselves. Many live their lives with an unidentifiable frustration and depression – even boredom.

I believe this is more prevalent among Christians than we want to admit. But it happens and I think it is often due to the fact that so many believers in Jesus, still live the same life as they did before they trusted Jesus Christ. They have the same goals, the same purpose, the same causes, - the same reason for getting up in the morning.

Too many true believers have never realized that they are, where they are for a reason - that Gods' sovereignty is at work in their lives and He has a purpose for them. They are living Christians, but they are not Christians living for Jesus Christ.

They are disobedient Christians

As a result they are bored, depressed, aimless and apathetic regarding the Christian life. Please Note: The Kingdom of God needs both Esthers and Mordecais

Once we get to the end of the book of Esther, the final chapter is a summary of the entire book. Take a moment and read chapter 10.

Est 10:1-3 King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. (2) And all the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honor of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? (3) For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

8Notice anything missing? There is no mention of Esther. We tend to think of Esther as the most important character, or the person in the spotlight. Perhaps it was actually Mordecai.

Esther was in a position to make an eternal kingdom **impact**. And she had definitely come into the kingdom for such a time as this. (4:14) And yet, Mordecai was the person of *influence* behind the person who made an eternal kingdom **impact**. Both Esthers and Mordacais are crucial for God's kingdom purposes.

Q: How many of you feel you are living your Christian life with purpose and meaning? How many feel you are missing that "greater cause"?

Do you feel you are not the impact person you had hoped to become? Are you willing to be the person of influence in the lives of others that God wants to use to make an eternal difference in His kingdom plan and timing?

Francis Chan gives an illustration of *How Not To make Disciples*. Have you ever asked a child to "Clean up your room" . Suppose you instruct him or her to clean their room, then you go out on an errand. Several hours later you return, only to realize the room is still not cleaned. You ask the child, "Why haven't you cleaned your room?"

-- "I memorized your instruction to me." "I learned it in Greek and in Hebrew".

--"I even called some of my friends together and we studied your instruction." "--We even drew up a missions statement of what it would look like if we carried out your commands." Yet the room is still not cleaned.

You and I are that child! How many of us shared Christ with 1 other person this month? How many have 1 other person you are regularly praying for and have regular contact with, for the purpose of discipling them, reaching them with the gospel and teaching them what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ?

This seems to a highly disobeyed command of God We memorize it. We study it. We draw up a missions statement about it. Yet the command remains disobeyed!

Here are some things I need to put into practice in my own life.

1) Identify: Why am I here? What am I doing with my life?

Answer this question: Who it is I am living for?

2) Observe: Take note of the places, the circumstances and the people into which God has placed you. –your friends –people you work with –other students –your sports team –your neighbors

** anyone whom you might have opportunity to impact or influence for Christ.*

3) Consider: Begin to view *where you are* as God's placement. Consider your job, your surroundings, you situation as God ordained and the opportunity He has placed before you to make an eternal kingdom difference.

4) Obey: Carry out the calling of God in your life. He has a purpose and a cause for you to live for – even something worth dying for.

** Don't just memorize God's commands. Don't just study the great commission. Don't spend your life learning, but never living out that risky adventure God has chosen for you.*

If the people you work with don't know where you stand, you may be a disobedient Christian. If the people on your sports team don't know what you believe about Jesus, you may be a disobedient Christian. And if the people around you don't know who it is you represent, you may be a disobedient Christian.

At some point, we must resolve – No longer will I be afraid to talk about my faith in Jesus. –No longer will I remain a closet Christian at work or on my team.

No longer will I remain silent about Jesus (4:14)

TODAY – if you are willing to obey Jesus and begin letting others know... where you stand, what you believe and who it is you represent... ***I ask you to stand up where you are.***

You are here for a purpose – to be used by God to accomplish His eternal kingdom cause. You are here for such a time as this – You are where you are, for such a time as this.

“For Such a Time as This” (verse 2)

You - Do you ever wonder why
Seems like the grass is always greener
Under everybody else's sky
But right here, right here for this time and place
You can live a mirror of His mercy
A forgiven image of grace

BRIDGE:

Can't change what's happened till now
But we can change what will be
By living in holiness
That the world will see Jesus

CHORUS:

For such a time as this I was placed upon the earth
To hear the voice of God And do His will Whatever it is
For such a time as this For now and all the days He gives
I am here, I am here And I am His
For such a time as this.

Don't close this booklet yet

without considering this all important question.

Is Jesus Christ the Savior of your soul and the Lord of your life?

Every person is born guilty of sin and in need of forgiveness.

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;
--Romans 3:23

Our sin is against God, therefore our forgiveness can only come
from God.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only
begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should
not perish, but have everlasting life. --John 3:16

God has appointed His Son as the payment for sins and sent Him
to die in our place.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is
eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
-- Romans 6:23

God's love is demonstrated through the sacrificial payment of
Jesus Christ in our place for our sins.

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were
still sinners, Christ died for us. ---Romans 5:8

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord
will be saved." -- Rom 10:13

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God, - John 1:12

Before you close this book, why not be absolutely certain that you
are truly a citizen of God's eternal kingdom and loving family?

*Trust in Jesus Christ today and receive forgiveness for your
sins and citizenship into God's family and His Kingdom.*

The ABCs

A - Admit you have sinned and are in need of a Savior.

B - Believe Jesus died in your place, and you can no way help yourself.

C - Confess your sins to God. *He already knows.*
- also Confess Jesus as you LORD.

Prayer: Take time to talk to God right now and open your heart and life to His instruction and leadership.

Connect with a local Bible believing, Christ centered church.

Commit yourself to meeting regularly with other Christians who are growing in their faith.

Heb 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, (25) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Act 2:41-42 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (42) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

For more information or for spiritual help, please contact us at:
Christ E. Free Church, PO Box 619, 19682 Hill Rd,
Saegertown, Pa, 16433, Ph: 814-763-2934, www.christefca.org

We have a free booklet on:

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A New Creation: *Beginning Your New Life In Christ*

It is our prayer that you find Jesus Christ to be, your greatest purpose, your highest calling, your soul's source and joy, and your all-consuming passion.

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May each lesson bring a growing submission, a deeper obedience and an increase of the righteous reign of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the fullness of His Spirit, in His Church and throughout our mission field.