

Have you ever stopped to think about what you learned from your dad? When I think about my own dad, I think of how many things he did well that I do poorly. My dad was a great fly fisherman, and I'm below average. My dad was a pretty good golfer, and I'm pretty bad. My dad was a pilot with his own airplane, and I prefer big planes with real pilots!

But despite all that, I learned some important life lessons from my dad. I learned to work hard. I learned to be affectionate with my kids. I learned the importance of education. But, like all of us, I also learned some things from him to avoid.

It's good for all of us to think about our own fathers and what lessons we can learn from them. That, of course, will help us to be better fathers and just better people. With any father, there are some things you'll want to emulate, and other things you'll want to avoid.

I want to look at an event in the life of a man named Jehoshaphat. His story is found in the Old Testament book of 2 Chronicles, chapters 17-20. Like all of us, Jehoshaphat had a father; he was someone's son. His father's name was Asa, and as a descendant of David, he was part of that royal line. In fact, Jehoshaphat was the great, great, great grandson of King David. Jehoshaphat's father, Asa, was generally a good king, but he ended his reign badly.

Jehoshaphat learned some important life lessons from his father. Again, there were some good things about his father he'd want to emulate. But he also learned some hard lessons from his father's mistakes. On several occasions, he watched what his father did in a crisis, with his back against the wall, and it didn't go well.

Asa's first mistake was when he was threatened militarily, he took silver and gold from the treasury of the temple and used it to make an alliance with a foreign king — all of which was forbidden by God. So, God sent a prophet to rebuke Asa, but he refused to listen and threw him in prison. And then Asa had a health crisis — a life-threatening disease in his feet. I believe the Lord was trying to get his attention. But the scripture says, "he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians" (16:12). Two years later, Asa died and Jehoshaphat, his son, became King. He was 35 years old when he took the throne, and he reigned for 25 years before he died.

One thing Jehoshaphat learned from his father was what not to do when your back is against the wall. When a crisis struck Jehoshaphat, with his own back against the wall, he did just the opposite from his dad.

What do you do when a crisis hits and your backs against the wall? What did you learn from your father to do? What will you teach your

sons and daughters to do? As fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters, let's learn from the example of Jehoshaphat.

When our backs are against the wall

After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar (that is, En Gedi)" 2 Chron. 20:1-2.

Notice the writer says, "After this." Well, after what? It's significant these armies mounted their attack at a time when Jehoshaphat was on a high. This was a time of great victory for the young king. God had just used him to bring about a great revival. But now, with word that he's about to be invaded by a coalition of three nations, he comes down from his high in a hurry. Hazezon Tamar is only 15 miles from Jerusalem, just a day's march away. That's like saying to us here on the Peninsula, "There are a million ruthless soldiers in South San Francisco right now, and they are headed this way." These armies would cross the Dead Sea, climb up the Judean hills, and strike Jerusalem before they knew what hit them. God's people are about to be snuffed out!

Crisis can come like that — like a thief — uninvited and unexpected. And often, they come after a victory or time of spiritual growth. Of course, as followers of Christ, we're engaged in spiritual warfare. We have an enemy. Paul calls them, "the rulers...the authorities...the powers of this dark world...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). You should expect every advance on your part will be met by a counterattack from the enemy. The question isn't, "Will I be assaulted?" But, "When will I be assaulted? And what will I do when it happens?"

We are afraid, but we resolve to seek the Lord.

Look what Jehoshaphat did.

Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. vv. 3-4

Notice it says he was "alarmed." That word alarmed indicates he's greatly frightened. This, of course, was a totally normal reaction. Sometimes we think it's wrong to be fearful, but it's not. Fear is a natural, instinctive reaction to a situation like this. I'd be concerned about a person who never experienced fear. In *Moby Dick*, the chief mate in Captain Ahab's boat, said, "I'll have no man in my boat who is not afraid of a whale." There is such a thing as healthy fear. I wouldn't want to fly in a small plane with a pilot who had no capacity to be afraid. Someone has said,

"There are old pilots, and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots." Indeed, there are some things a person ought to be afraid of.

The problem isn't fear but our response to it. Fear isn't sin, but it can lead to sin. Fear can paralyze us from doing the right thing, but fear can also lead to courage. Courage is a commitment to do what's right in the midst of our fear. Fear should lead us to do what Jehoshaphat did. It said, "he resolved to inquire of the Lord." Another translation said, "he turned his attention to seek the Lord." And he didn't just do it by himself. He got the whole nation involved. Later it says in v. 13, "All the men of Judah with their wives and children and little ones stood before the Lord." What an impression this must have made on those children! This is more than a foxhole prayer; this is a concerted effort. We see what a great leader he was because he got the whole nation together; not just those in Jerusalem, but those in the surrounding cities as well.

As part of seeking help from the Lord, they fasted. They denied themselves food for the body so they could attend to the things of the soul. But fasting isn't just about food. The idea behind fasting is to deny yourself any resource other than God himself. When crisis strikes, our tendency is to start looking around for some tangible asset we can rely on, like our bank account or another person, or just our own ingenuity. But, when you fast, you're saying, "God, it is you and you alone I'm looking to."

When crises hits, you'll be afraid, but what will you do with that fear? We tend to seek help from everywhere else and make the Lord our last resort. But you have to make a choice to seek the Lord. There's intentionality behind all of this. You have to choose to get rid of all your normal crutches and focus your energies on him.

In prayer, focus on God's power and his promises.

And much of this energy will be spent in prayer. That's the next thing we see Jehoshaphat doing. Verse 5 states Jehoshaphat stood in front of the people at the Temple and prayed one of the great prayers in all the Bible. I want you to notice three things he teaches us about prayer at a time like this.

First of all, start with God.

Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard and said: "Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. vv. 5-6

He doesn't start with his own need; he starts by talking to God about God. He focuses on how all power and authority belong to him.

Do you do that in your prayers? Do you start with God? Do you talk to God about God? You don't just do this for God's sake, but because you need to be reminded of who he is. I mean he really doesn't need to be flattered, but as you're reminded of who he is, you'll find yourself more and more at a place of peace and trust. "Well, if it's really true that he's the ruler over all kingdoms and no one can stand against him, then I don't have to fear these people."

But it's not just enough to focus on his power. We should also focus on his promises. That's what Jehoshaphat does next as he takes this little trip down memory lane.

Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? v. 7

He reminded God that he promised this land to them by covenant. He goes on and talks about how they built the Temple as a place where when things like this happened, they could cry out to Him, and God promised he'd deliver them.

When you face a crisis, it's not enough to focus on His power; you need to focus on His promises. What has God promised you as a believer in Jesus? Well, for one, there's nothing that can happen to you He will not use to accomplish His good purpose in your life; He'll take all the dissonant notes and turn them into a beautiful song. Eph. 1:11 states that He always "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." And according to Romans 8:39, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ. And that means, according to Phil.1:6, "he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." And in the meantime, He says, "I'll never leave you, nor forsake you." I could go on and on. Peter calls these His "precious and magnificent promises."

In 1678, John Bunyan wrote an allegory called, Pilgrims Progress, about a man named Christian. He's trying to find his way to the "celestial city," or heaven. He goes through many trials and temptations. At one point, he's caught trespassing on a giant's property. The giant's name is "Giant Despair," and his home is "Doubting Castle." Christian is thrown into the dungeon of Giant Despair for trespassing. While in this dungeon, Christian and his friend are struggling deeply with depression and contemplating suicide. Day after day they're beaten by the Giant Despair. Finally, when Christian and his companion are about to break, Christian cries out, "What a fool am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I'm persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle."

God has promises sprinkled like gems throughout the Bible from which to stand on. They're like a key. We need to keep this key in our bosom and pull them out when we're in Doubting Castle being assaulted by the Giant Despair! By trusting in these promises, we can find our way out of the prison of doubt, depression, and despair.

And then, finally, out of all of that history, Jehoshaphat ends his prayer and makes his simple request in v. 12, "Our God, will you not judge them?"

Acknowledge you're both powerless and clueless.

But, once you've anchored yourself in God's power and promises; once you've made your request, take one more step — acknowledge something. I dare say this is the crux of the whole matter. If you don't get this, you won't get anywhere. Look what he said in the rest of v. 12.

Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” v. 12

Basically, he is saying, “We’re both powerless and clueless.” Start with the fact that you’re powerless. He already said in verse 6, “Power and might are in your hand...” But now he states, “For we have no power...” There are some things you cannot do!

A father watches through the kitchen window as his little boy attempts to lift a large rock out of his sandbox. The boy is frustrated as he wrestles with the heavy object because he can’t get enough leverage to lift it over the side. Finally, the boy gives up and sits down on the edge of the sandbox with his head in his hands.

The father goes outside and asks, “What’s wrong? Can’t you lift the rock out?”

The boy says, “No, sir. I can’t do it.”

His dad asks, “Have you used all the strength available to you?”

“Yes, sir,” the boy replies.

“No, you haven’t,” the father says. “You haven’t looked up to me or asked me to help you.”

It’s really such a simple truth but unfortunately, one we seem to resist. The world tells us, “You can do it! You’ve got what it takes!” And we keep trying. But sooner or later, if we’re honest, we’ll admit we can’t. We’re powerless. And if we can just take your head out of your hands long enough to lift our eyes to see our heavenly Father, he’ll help us.

N.T. Wright said, “We live in a world full of people struggling to be, or at least to appear, strong in order not to be weak; and we follow a gospel which says that when I am weak, then I am strong. And this gospel is the only thing that brings healing.”

Let me add this: Whether you know it or not, you’re always weak even when you’re not in a crisis. Even when life is smooth sailing, whatever strength you have comes from God. There’ll be times when you feel strong, but you’re always weak, always inadequate, always in need of God.

But that’s not all. Not only are we powerless, but we’re clueless. Jehoshaphat said, “We do not know what to do.” Wow! What kind of leader is this? They never taught this in all of the seminars and conferences I’ve attended on leadership. You don’t learn this in business school, and I didn’t learn it in seminary. You want to rally the troops. You want to get them going in the right direction. You want to inspire confidence. “Okay, Mr. Leader, here’s what you do. You go before your people and say, ‘We’re powerless and clueless.’” I’ve never heard that. But that’s what he did, and that’s what we must do.

But with that, we can take one more step. It’s not just, “We’re powerless, and we don’t know what to do,” but he also said, “but our eyes are on you.” You see, God is NOT powerless and he’s NOT clueless. So, with our eyes on him, we wait.

Stand and believe his word

And when we wait, we’re ready to see him work. That’s what happened here. As they were waiting on the Lord, someone spoke up from the crowd. The Spirit of the Lord came on a guy named Jahaziel.

He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.’” v. 15

God speaks to his people through this prophet. He tells them flat out the battle is the Lord’s. They don’t have to fight. God would do the fighting for them. But they did have to do something. What was it? First, he said in v. 16, “Tomorrow march down against them” (v. 16a). Then he said,

“You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.” v. 17

Sometimes we think if we know we’re powerless and clueless and have our eyes on the Lord we don’t have to do anything, but that’s not true. We have to take our stand. It reminds me of how in his letter to the Ephesians, as Paul is addressing them about spiritual warfare, over and over again, he tells them to stand. Listen to what he says, “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes...put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then...” (Eph 6:11-14a).

How many times is the word stand used in this passage? This idea of standing is a mental posture as much as a physical posture. We don’t retreat into self-pity. We don’t flee towards self-indulgent devices that numb our fear. We stand. We stand on God’s power and His promises. We put our trust in Him.

So, Jahaziel tells them what to do and look how they respond.

Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. v. 18

I guess they believed him. Would you have? A more practical Israelite might nudge his neighbor: “Uh, isn’t this a little premature? The enemy is still knocking at our gate, and we’re having a worship service!” But for the king, who fell to the ground, and for the people, who fell down in worship, His word was enough. If the Lord is with you, you can’t lose! Then look what happened.

Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.” v. 20

It almost seems their fears returned, and so Jehoshaphat reminds them to trust in the Lord and trust in what God said through his prophet.

Whatever battle you’re facing, admit you’re powerless, and you’re clueless. Put your eyes on him. Take your stand on the Word of God. Don’t

let the enemy convince you God has gone AWOL or you've messed up one too many times, and God is done with you.

After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever." v. 21

They march out to face their foes. The band strikes up a tune, and they all begin to sing an old song, "Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever." Jehoshaphat even stations the worship leaders at the head of the army. It's like his battle strategy is a song service. They sing their trust. Worship is a way to move our beliefs 18 inches from our head to our heart!

And when they come to the final hill and look down into the valley:

As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated... When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped. vv. 22, 24

Their enemies are DOA and Jehoshaphat leads his people back to Jerusalem with the spoils of war. Look at how the story ends.

Then, led by Jehoshaphat, all the men of Judah and Jerusalem returned joyfully to Jerusalem, for the Lord had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies... And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side. vv. 27, 30

It's nice to know our backs aren't always against the wall; not every moment of life is a crisis. There are also sweet times when we're full of joy and have peace and rest on every side.

Jehoshaphat's response to crisis was quite different from his father's. With his back against the wall, his father didn't seek help from the Lord, and it cost him dearly, but Jehoshaphat did, and God gave him and his people peace and rest.

Sooner or later, your back will be against the wall, and you will be faced with a crisis. It'll probably come out of nowhere when you least expect it.

- **Maybe you get a registered letter from a lawyer.**
- **Or your boss wants to have a talk with you.**
- **Or a summons comes from the IRS.**
- **Or a warrant is served for your son's arrest.**
- **Or a doctor leaves a message saying your lab test looks bad, and you need to come in ASAP.**

Your heart begins to pound. The fear you feel is perfectly normal. But what do you do with that fear? It's okay to be afraid, but in your fear, you must set your mind to seek the Lord in prayer. And when you pray, focus on God's person and his promises, and confess you're powerless and clueless. Then put your eyes on God and wait. In faith, take your stand on His word. Praise Him and trust He will do the rest. He'll either do away with your enemies or give you the grace to continue to stand against them. Whether it's here on earth or in heaven, He will deliver you from evil and surprise you with joy.

This isn't a formula that says if you just pray and stand on God's word, you'll always have the wonderful ending like Jehoshaphat did. That's not the point, but rather things will happen to you in the face of which you're both powerless and clueless, but in those time when you put your eyes on Him and stand, He'll fight for you.

The greatest proof of this is the cross. Think about it. As sinners, every one of us had our backs against the wall in the face of a holy God. We were powerless and clueless to do anything about it. But He sent his only Son to fight the battle for us. He lived, He died, He was raised up, and sits at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for us right now. And if it's on Him and in His victory that you stand, you're on a firm foundation. You can sing that song, "Give thanks to the Lord, for His love endures forever!" It doesn't matter what crisis your confronted with, victory is yours because of Him on whom you stand.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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