

## When Your Back is Against the Wall....

2 Chronicles 20:1-30 The Voice

Have you ever had a day when life gangs up on you? You find yourself threatened in some way? The Israelites felt like that one day. They heard three armies were coming toward them. This news was right after King Jehoshaphat did some good things that pleased God. We can read about this in the previous chapters.

Our reading begins with the word, “**after.**” They should have anticipated the next thing to happen to them was going to be bad news. A fact of life is anytime you have mountain top, it’s possible the next stop is a valley. We need to be alert that whenever God has been at work in our lives, the devil increases his attacks.

I have discovered this in my personal life and in observing congregations that are turning around. The devil simply wants to sabotage us by making us discouraged, distracted, less committed, unfocused, and energy less.

In one church, once the fighting was done, peace was made, and a good plan to move into the future was completed, each of the 5 key leaders became sidetracked. One had a parent in sudden crises. Another’s spouse had a major health situation. A third had a child who caused lots of worry & needed extra attention. A fourth had marital problems. Another was involved in major issues at work. All normal life issues. But they sucked out the energy of forward momentum as the congregation was getting back to good health & forward focus. The devil’s timing was astounding!

What is your natural reaction when life gangs up against you? Go along with the distraction? Become alarmed? Denial? Become preoccupied with anxiety and fear? Go into high-energy problem-solving mode? Delay and become discouraged with church plans and even give up? Sometimes we become intimidated, but hopefully we become even more motivated and action oriented, better focused, and not allow the distractions to sideline our plans.

How do we respond to the enemies we face -the world, the flesh, & the devil? They gang up on us, sometimes all at once. So, we need a plan. We need to be sensitive to when this is going on in us, among us, to us. This Old Testament story gives us some ideas of what our action plan should be in times of trouble and stress.

**First, verse 3,** King Jehoshaphat led the people to **tune into God.** So often we problem solve, panic, or get discouraged. But the solution is to make the time to face the Almighty. To seek out God’s perspective. This step is so important to take first, so that we are oriented rightly. We need to slow down and realize that our help and best response comes from the Lord. So, we need to first just “be” instead of “do.”

**Second, (3-4)** King Jehoshaphat led the people in **prayer & fasting** to seek help from the Lord. We need to do this individually, as families, as groups, and as a church. We need to follow Jesus’ example of fasting. When we do not eat, the blood that normally would be digesting the food in our stomachs goes to our brains & gives us some clearer insights. Fasting is an activity that physically reminds us we are in a battle, and we need to get into the fight by praying.

So, let’s learn to pray like Jehoshaphat did. He makes some **bold statements. (vs 6)** *“Are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over the kingdoms of the nation. Power and might are in Your hand.”* This kind of question reminds us of who God is. God made this world, so no problem is too big or too difficult for him to solve. This kind of prayer reminds us that with God all things are possible. We must dream big enough and have faith bold enough to ask of the Almighty the impossible.

Along with this, let’s **remind ourselves of what Yahweh has done in the past.** This is a constant command to us and the Israelites – to remember. **Verse 7.** *“O our True God, You demonstrated that power when You exiled inhabitants of this land for Your people, Israel, and gave it to Your friend Abraham’s children forever. Please demonstrate it again, now, as*

*we are attacked.*” When facing tough times & decisions, God wants us to remember how we have been blessed in the past, so we keep our faith. This is an important activity to help us keep & regain confidence when life is difficult.

Then in **verses 9 to 11**, Jehoshaphat begs for help. *“The enemy is coming to take the land you gave us. Your reputation God is at stake. So, take care of this army. Protect and preserve us. We can’t solve this threat on our own.”* That is being specific. It is kind of a challenge to God. When we need help, let’s recognize this and be humble enough to ask for it.

Next in **verse 12**, the king prays, *“We want you Almighty God to bless us again like you did in the past. We need another miracle. We don’t know what to do, so we are asking for Your help.”* The king is modeling for us and the people, how to pray when we face difficulties. Don’t just ask for help, also ask for blessing. So, stop our business, spend time with God, pray, fast, and be specific in our requests.

**A third response** when we are between a rock and a hard place, is to **admit our need**. Confess our inability and our inadequacy to solve the problem. We usually cannot receive a miracle in our lives until we recognize we need help. As long as we work to solve our problems on our own, God says, “Go ahead! Good luck!”

But when we say, “I can’t solve this marriage problem on my own. I need you Lord.” Or “God I am in trouble financially I cannot fix it. Or, “I know someone going in the wrong direction in life, they need you to intervene Jesus.” “Or we fear for the future of our church, we need your help. We do not have the power, knowledge, or wisdom, we need a miracle.”

I like this poem.

“The world had a hopeful beginning,  
But people spoiled it by sinning.  
Now we that trust the story,  
Will end to God’s glory.  
But right now, it seems the other side is  
winning.”

Do we sometimes feel like that? But compare verse 12 – “God we have **no power**, *“We can do nothing to stop this huge army,* with verse 6 – God, You have **all power** – *“You are so strong that none can survive when they oppose You.”* So, spend time with God. Boldly pray & fast about your problems. Confess and admit we need help. And be specific about that help.

Next, the **fourth** response in difficult times, is **focus on our Creator, not our problems**. We can become so problem focused, that we lose sight of Jesus. Circumstances are like a mattress. We get on top and we rest easy. But we tend to get under them and suffocate. It is too tempting to become the heroes in our own stories, instead of turning to Jesus. It depends on what and especially who we focus on.

Corrie Ten Boom says, “If you look at the world you will be distressed – a lot of bad things happen in the world.

If you look within you will be depressed – I see my own failings, faults, and shortcomings. If you look at Christ, you will find rest.” When we do not know what to do, copy the example from King Jehoshaphat and Israel.

Look at how **God responded. Verse 14**. He sent a messenger. “There, in the Temple, the Spirit of the Eternal descended on a *Levitical singer, Jahaziel,*” who offered this assurance.

**Verse 15.** *“Listen to me, all Judah, citizens of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat. The Eternal has responded to your pleading: ‘Do not fear or worry about this army. The battle is not yours to fight; it is the True God’s.’”* God wants to get into the fight for us. And he wants us to be able to hear our Creator’s messengers.

But our tendency is, “Lord, I am going to clean up this world for you. Just watch what we do on your behalf!” When we do this, often failing, God goes, “What about me?”

The reality is, God holds us up. We are in God’s hands, not vice versa. Especially when we face incredible odds, and we forget that the

battle is the Lords. We get so focused on our problems that we miss seeing the Almighty, and all the reasons that some idea may not work. But when we ask our Creator for help, He responds, "Great! I want to work with you, in you and for you." So, when we are between a rock and a hard place, we need to slow down, tune into God, pray and fast, admit we need help, and turn to and listen to Jesus.

A **fifth response** King Jehoshaphat models for us is, take in, look for, **all the support you can**. Do not face times of difficulty on your own. Reach out to others. It is true that God plus one equals a majority, but God plus one plus others equals the community of the Kingdom of God.

Notice **verse 13**. "*All Judah, men, women, children, and infants, were waiting in front of the Eternal's temple when the king asked for help.*" Everybody was involved. What a great example for us. And what a wonderful witness for our children! God never meant for us to face our problems on our own. We are told to build each other up, encourage each other, pray for each other, lift up each other, to support and love each other. Scripture instructs us to one another, not be lone rangers. So, get support.

The next step in response to a difficult situation in our lives is to **relax and trust God**. Jahaziel told King Jehoshaphat and the people of Israel, **verses 16 & 17**, "*Tomorrow, travel through the ascent of Ziz. Meet the enemy at the end of valley before the wilderness of Jeruel. There, I will be watching. Stand and watch, but do not fight the battle. There, you will watch the Eternal save you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not fear or worry. Tomorrow, face the enemy armies and trust that the Eternal is with you.*"

What fascinating instructions! Go out and meet the enemy. Face them. Stand and watch. Do not fight. Do not worry or fear. Trust God. Relax in faith. That is a very unique way to solve a difficult problem or to fight.

Twice in this story we are told to not fear and to not be discouraged. Why? Because God

says it's His battle. Has the Almighty ever lost a battle or war? No. God has a 100 percent success rate. He never loses. He always wins. He always has the last word. If we allow God to fight our battles, victory is assured. Sometimes it is hard to believe and see. Often, we do not fully understand what is going on or why bad things are happening. But this story invites us to trust that God is in control.

I don't think it's just a coincidence that **2 Chronicles, chapter 20, verse 17** is the middle verse in the Old Testament. I think it's another symbolic message to us that we are to fully turn to our Creator, admit we can't solve problems on our own, ask Jesus for help, trust in the Holy Spirit's leading, & then watch for the Almighty to act on our behalf. Do not be discouraged or afraid. Instead, stand firm, trust God, & relax. Have faith – we have a mighty, loving Savior.

A **sixth response** is: **We rely on our Creator's character**. **Verse 20** tells us, "*Early the next morning they went out to the wilderness of Tekoa. There Jehoshaphat's message to Judah was **not about courage in battle.***" We often think we need to gear up and go into action. But notice here, the message to us is to not buck up, start fighting, and have courage as we usually think of it.

Courage is often defined as the quality of mind which enables a person to encounter difficulties and danger with firmness, or without fear, or fainting of heart; valor; & boldness. Biblically we understand courage as taking a stand for God, being bold, having fortitude & bravery.

But Brene Brown's highlights the link between courage and **vulnerability**, which she describes as "having the courage to show up when you can't control the outcome." Courage is a heart word. The root of the word courage is cor – c, o, r - the Latin word for heart. In an early form, the word courage meant "To speak one's mind by telling all one's heart." Over history and time, this definition has changed. We typically associate courage with heroic and brave deeds.

But the popular definition of courage, fails to recognize the inner strength & level of commitment required for us to actually speak honestly and openly about who we are and about our experiences - good and bad. Speaking from our hearts is what I think of as "ordinary courage."

**Verse 20** continues, Jehoshaphat says, "*Listen to me, inhabitants of Judah & Jerusalem. Trust in the Eternal One, your True God, not in your own abilities, and you will be supported. Put your trust in His words that you heard through the prophets, and we will succeed.*"

The courage described here is first trust in God, not our own abilities. Then it is stand firm in what the prophets have said, what scripture has said. But also, it is courage to let God handle the situation. We get a, we must fix this mode, so we ignore God, and worry and go to work on the problem, instead of having the **courage to be vulnerable, to show up, to simply watch**, as God goes to battle. This is different than how we normally attack a problem.

In this story, we are told, go near the enemy, be vulnerable, then watch God do battle. Usually, we think we need to run from the enemy or go fight them ourselves. Instead, here, we are to foolishly move toward the enemy and let God fight for us. That takes a different kind of guts!

The **seventh response** we see in this story is also very different than how we normally work at a problem. **Verse 21.** "*Having addressed his people, Jehoshaphat asked those who sang to the Eternal to lead the army and praise His magnificence and holiness. Give thanks to the Eternal because His loyal love is forever!*"

That is what they did. Before the battle began, the people sang, praised and thanked God, because His love endures forever. Notice the power of expecting God to go fight for us. Anyone can thank God after we receive help.

But **thanking God in advance**? Faith is thanking God in advance, praising God in advance, that the odds will be overcome, the

solution will arrive, the difficult situation will be resolved, the miracle will take place. It is trusting that our Creator will hear us & respond

Notice what occurs when God is thanked in advance. **First, there was victory. Verse 22.** "*As they sang and praised, the Eternal was ready to cause great confusion in battle for the men from Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir who had come to attack Judah. They were utterly defeated, turning on one another...No one escaped.*" Somehow these three armies killed each other as the Israelites were watching.

The **second result** of thanking God in advance was, **verse 25**, "*Then Jehoshaphat & his people took various goods, clothing, and valuables off the dead bodies and seized the abundant livestock. There was so much that it took three days to recover it all.*" That is quite a benefit of watching God go to war and fight for you!

And then on the fourth day, **the third result, vs 28**, they gathered together again for worship. Therefore, that place was named, the Valley of Barraca, which is the Hebrew word for blessing. Notice, they worshipped before, during & after the battle – blessing God and being blessed.

And the **fourth result** of obeying and praising God was, **verse 29 & 30.** "*For the rest of his reign, Jehoshaphat's kingdom was peaceful because the Eternal had fought the Southern Kingdom's enemies, making all the surrounding kingdoms fear the True God.*" This is quite a blessing because Israel was vulnerable enough to depend on the Almighty.

To conclude, sum up: We are invited to copy this model of responding in a crisis. When our backs are against a wall; when we are between a rock and a hard place; may we:

First, Slow down, calm down, stop, and tune into our Savior. Choose "be" over "doing."

Second, Make prayer and fasting a priority. Remind ourselves, of what our Creator has done for us and his people in the past.

Third, Admit our need. Boldly ask for help. Remember how our Creator has blessed us in the past.

Fourth, Focus on the Almighty.

Fifth, Get all the support we can. Relax and trust God.

Sixth, Rely on our Creator's character. Have vulnerable courage. Face the enemy.

Seventh, Thank the Almighty in advance of the solution as we worship and praise together – before, during, and after receiving help.

Going back to the beginning of the sermon. We need to expect that when we are serious about doing God's work we will be sabotaged and find opposition in various ways. But we are promised, "Do not be afraid or discouraged because the battle is not yours, but God's."

We are in God's hands, not vice versa. Our Creator wants us to ask for help and responds by saying, "Great! I want to work with you, in you and for you. Let's get to work so people will recognize my love and power."