

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver St.  
Flagstaff, AZ 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## CONFIDENCE IN THE CRISIS

2 Chronicles 20:1-30

By

Steven J. Cole

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Kings of Judah Lesson 4

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2 Chronicles 20:1-30

A bricklayer in the French West Indies sent this letter to his boss, explaining why he needed to take some sick leave:

I arrived at the job after the storm, checked the building out and saw that the top needed repairs. I rigged a hoist and a boom, attached the rope to a barrel and pulled bricks to the top. When I pulled the barrel to the top, I secured the rope at the bottom. After repairing the building, I went back to fill the barrel with the leftover bricks. I went down and released the rope to lower the bricks, and the barrel was heavier than I and jerked me off the ground. I decided to hang on.

Halfway up, I met the barrel coming down and received a blow to the shoulder. I hung on and went to the top, where I hit my head on the boom and caught my fingers in the pulley. In the meantime, the barrel hit the ground and burst open, throwing bricks all over. This made the barrel lighter than I, and I started down at high speed. Halfway down, I met the barrel coming up and received a blow to my shins. I continued down and fell upon the bricks, receiving cuts and bruises. At this time I must have lost my presence of mind, because I let go of the rope and the barrel came down and hit me on the head. I respectfully request sick leave.

Have you ever had a day like that? Some of you are thinking, "A *day* like that? That describes a typical *week* for me, if not physically, at least emotionally! It's just one thing after another, until I'm left feeling battered." Whether our trials are of the crisis sort or whether they are the more steady, relentless pressures that just wear away our resistance, we've all got them. And, while most of us know that we should pray more and trust God more, for some reason, we don't do it. I struggle with the question, "Why don't I pray as I ought to?"

The answer, I think, is fairly simple: I don't pray as I ought to because I'm self-sufficient, which the Bible calls pride. My pride

makes me think, erroneously, that I can handle things by myself, with a little help now and then from God. So, I rely mostly on myself and a little bit on God. I don't really believe the words of Jesus, "Without Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). So God graciously brings me trials to show me my great need so that I will look to my great God in prayer and trust Him to work on my behalf.

The story of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:1-30) shows us how to have confidence in a crisis--not confidence in ourselves (the American way), but confidence in God. As we saw, Jehoshaphat had a character flaw of making wrongful alliances with the godless King Ahab, but he was a man who followed the Lord and brought spiritual reform to the nation (19:4-11). But, then Jehoshaphat was shaken one morning when his intelligence sources came running in with the horrifying news, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, out of Aram [or, better, Edom] and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi)" (20:1, 2). This meant that this enemy coalition was about 15 miles south of Jerusalem, on the western shore of the Dead Sea. Jehoshaphat's life and his entire kingdom were on the brink of extinction! Talk about a reason to panic!

So what did he do? What would *you* do if you heard some threatening news that affected your future and maybe your life? This godly king did the right thing: He called a national prayer meeting and encouraged the people to trust God in the face of this overwhelming crisis. They did it, and literally won the war by prayer alone, without swinging a single sword! Their story teaches us that ...

We can be confident in a time of crisis if we let our great need drive us to prayer and faith in our great God.

In 20:1-4 we see their great need; in 20:5-13, Jehoshaphat's prayer reveals their great God; and in 20:14-30 we see their faith in their great God and the victory He brought about.

1. A recognition of our great need should drive us to prayer (20:1-4).

That's obvious to any believer, of course. But just because it's obvious doesn't make it automatic.

- A. A recognition of our great need does not automatically drive us to prayer.

It's easy to read this story and miss what a great thing it was for Jehoshaphat to call the nation to prayer over this crisis. Put yourself in his place. It would have been very human to *panic*. When he heard the news of this army within his borders, we could understand if he yelled, "Call all my top generals! Get the army mobilized immediately! We don't have a second to waste!" As soon as the troops were mustered, if there was time, he could have stopped for a quick word of prayer. But turning his attention to seek the Lord and calling the nation to prayer and fasting was not automatic.

Not only could Jehoshaphat reacted with panic, he also could have had a twinge of *anger* at God. He had just instituted a number of reforms to bring the nation back to the Lord. The text states, "Now it came about after this" (20:1). After what? After his reforms (19:4-11)! It would have been easy for Jehoshaphat to have said, "What kind of deal is this, God? I tried to bring the nation back to You! I taught them to put away their idols and follow You because You're worthy to be trusted. And now we're facing annihilation at the hands of this pagan coalition! See if I follow You again!"

A lot of people feel that way when they've tried to follow God and then get hit with difficult trials. They get angry and complain, "This isn't fair, God! I was trying to follow You and do Your will. I get hit with trouble while my pagan neighbor enjoys the good life!" So they pout and feel sorry for themselves. Instead of humbly submitting to God in prayer, they lash out at Him in anger. But Jehoshaphat didn't do that. He did what was not automatic in a crisis: He prayed.

Another natural reaction would have been for Jehoshaphat to *trust in his army*. Chapter 17:12-19 tells about the organization and might of his forces. He was equipped for war. It would have been easy to think, "This is the sort of thing we're prepared for. Call out the army! Let's go get them!" But Jehoshaphat, rather than trusting in his army, publicly admits his lack of strength and calls on God as his only help in this crisis.

He put prayer first. He realized that he could do some things *after* he had prayed, but he could not do anything worthwhile *before* he prayed. Prayer was his strongest weapon. So, he resisted the temptation to panic, get angry at God, or trust his army. He recognized his great need, so he prayed.

You say, "That's what I want to do the next time a problem hits." Do you? Be careful before you glibly say that! To understand this story, we have to see that Jehoshaphat's call to prayer was a humiliating thing for him to do.

- B. A recognition of our great need requires humbling ourselves before God and others.

Jehoshaphat was the king of Judah. In the ancient Near East, kings were a proud lot. They had an image to maintain. Leaders have to be tough and inspire confidence in their leadership. What kind of leader admits in front of his people, "I'm scared, folks, because we're helpless against our enemy!" That's not good politics!

But that's what Jehoshaphat did. He admitted his fear, called a national prayer meeting, and then prayed in front of everyone about how helpless he was (20:12). Surely, it would have been better politically to pray in private, but then to get up in front of the people and say, "We've got a little problem, folks! But our side is strong. Our troops are going to wipe them out! Pray for us while we go out and defend our nation against these intruders."

But Jehoshaphat wasn't worried about politics or his public image. He just knew that he was in deep trouble if God didn't answer, and so he openly admitted his weakness and called upon the Lord.

A major detriment to godly prayer is the wave of worldly teaching flooding the church that says that you need to build your self-esteem. I myself got sucked into that teaching for a while. One of the things the Lord used to correct me was reading John Calvin's classic, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In a great section on prayer, Calvin gives several rules for prayer. He writes,

To this let us join a third rule: that anyone who stands before God to pray, in his humility giving glory completely to God, abandon all thought of his own glory, cast off all notion of his own worth, in fine, put away all self-assurance--lest if we claim

for ourselves anything, even the least bit, we should become vainly puffed up, and perish at his presence. We have repeated examples of this submission, which levels all haughtiness, in God's servants; each one of whom, the holier he is, the more he is cast down when he presents himself before the Lord (J. T. McNeill, ed. [Eerdmans], III:XX-:8).

He goes on to cite examples from Scripture, such as Daniel, David, and Isaiah. The point is, we're too proud to admit that we're needy. Our pride, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem robs God of His glory. When we recognize our great need, we should humble ourselves and pray, not just by ourselves, but with other Christians who can bear our burdens with us.

But, once our need drives us to God in prayer, we need to understand how to pray. Jehoshaphat's prayer gives us some important instruction in how to seek God in prayer.

2. A recognition of our great God should direct our prayers (20:5-13).

There are two things to see here:

- A. In our prayers we should not only seek answers to our problems, but we should seek God Himself.

Note verse 3: "Jehoshaphat ... turned his attention [lit., "set his face," i.e., "determined"] to seek the Lord." Verse 4 states that the people not only sought help from the Lord, but also that they sought the Lord. This was nothing new for Jehoshaphat. Earlier (17:4), he is described as a king who "sought the God of his father." As we've seen, the Hebrew word "seek" means, literally, "to trample under foot," to beat a path to God because you frequent that way so often.

It's significant that in Jehoshaphat's prayer, the first four verses (6-9) focus on God Himself; finally, in the last three verses (10-12) he mentions the problem. But even in mentioning the problem, God is prominent. I wonder, if we were facing imminent annihilation, would we be so God-centered?

In a crisis, if we pray at all, what do we usually pray? "God, get me out of here!" We want relief and we want it *now!* But in so praying we miss something crucial: In a crisis, we aren't supposed

to run and get God off the shelf, like Aladdin's genie, rub Him the right way, get what we want, and put Him back until the next crisis. Trials should cause us to seek God Himself, because He Himself is what we need. God is our sufficiency, our very life. If we have God and cling to Him, then even if we aren't delivered from our crisis, we can go through it--even through the loss of children and possessions, as Job went through--because, as is said here of Abraham (20:7), the living God is our friend.

This is at the heart of the current controversy over the role of psychology in the church. Is God Himself, His indwelling Spirit, and His Word (and the many provisions given in it, including Christ's body, the church) sufficient for a believer in the crises of life, or must we turn to the therapies and counsel of the world to enable us to cope? Incredibly, Christian psychologists are saying that God and His Word are not sufficient; we need psychotherapy!

As Calvin pointed out (in the quote above), God alone deserves *all* glory. If we turn to the world for help, the world gets some of the glory. If we turn to God as our *only* refuge and strength, He gets the glory. Our trials should force us to lay hold of God in new ways that we would not have done if we had not been driven to pray. We should come away, not just having presented our requests to God, but also knowing God better, who Himself is our refuge and strength in times of trouble (Ps. 46:1).

B. In our prayers we should seek God as revealed in His Word.

Jehoshaphat's prayer is steeped in Scripture. He starts by (20:6) reciting God's *attributes*: "You are the God of our fathers" (implying, "You took care of them.") "You are God in the heavens, the ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations" (including those threatening to wipe us out!). "You are so powerful and mighty that no one can stand against You." Why is he telling God all this? Certainly not for God's information! It was to rehearse in his own mind and in the people's minds the greatness of God, so they could trust in Him.

Next he recites God's *actions* (20:7): "You drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and You gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever." (Abraham is

called God's friend here, in Isa. 41:8, and James 2:23.) He reminds God of His agreement to hear the prayers of His people when they cry to Him in their distress (almost a direct quote from the dedication of Solomon's temple, 2 Chron. 6:28-30).

Then Jehoshaphat mentions the problem which, he reminds God, stems from the fact that Israel obeyed Him by not wiping out these very people who are now invading the land (20:10-11)! They are about to drive Israel out, *not* of *their* possession, but of *God's* possession. Finally, he calls attention to God's *ability* to deal with the problem, in contrast to Israel's inability (20:12).

That's a great prayer because it's saturated with Scripture. It focuses on God as He has revealed Himself in His Word! If we fill our prayers with the greatness of our problems, we'll shrink our faith. But if we fill our prayers with the greatness of our God and how He has worked down through history, we'll stimulate our faith. God delights to answer believing prayers where we put our finger on the promises and truth in His Word and ask Him to make it so in our case.

Thus, a recognition of our great need should drive us to prayer; a recognition of our great God should direct our prayers. Finally,

3. Reliance on our great God should follow our prayers (20:14-30).

As the nation was gathered at the Temple in prayer, the Spirit of God came upon a prophet in the assembly (20:14) who encouraged them not to fear and assured them that God would undertake for them in this battle without their fighting at all (20:15-17; not God's usual means!). When they heard this word through the prophet, everyone fell down and worshiped and then they stood up and sang loud praises (20:18-19).

By the way, we further see Jehoshaphat's humility here. If he had been proud, he would have said, "Wait a minute! I'm the king! I called this prayer meeting! Who does this prophet think he is to get a message from God? God has to give the message through me!" But he was humbly willing to submit to God's word through this other man.

Then, based on the prophet's word from God, the people got up the next morning and marched out to the battlefield, led by a choir singing praises, of all things (20:21)! God caused the enemy armies to turn against each other, so that all Israel had to do was collect the spoil and celebrate the victory! Two thoughts:

A. Reliance on God means being obedient to His Word.

The promise given through the prophet (20:15-17) was one thing; believing and acting on it was another. These singers were staking their very lives on the truthfulness of that word from God. They were doing a crazy thing--marching unarmed in front of the army, singing praises to God, against a powerful enemy that was armed to the teeth! As they went out on this seemingly crazy mission, Jehoshaphat encouraged the people by saying (20:20), "Put your trust in the Lord your God, and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets [i.e., His Word] and succeed." Their trust was put into shoe leather in that they kept marching!

This deliverance is a picture of our salvation. In salvation, we cannot do anything; God does it all: "Stand and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf" (20:17). Even faith is the gift of God, so that we cannot boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Yet at the same time, our faith in God's promise which lays hold of His salvation is not just intellectual assent, where we say, "I believe" but don't act on it. Saving faith is always obedient faith. Just as these singers' faith was demonstrated by their marching out to battle, armed only with songs of praise, so genuine faith in Christ as Savior will be demonstrated in a life of joyful obedience to His Word. "Faith" that says, "I believe, but I'm not going to act on it" is not saving faith.

B. Reliance on God is always rewarded by God.

He never fails those who trust Him and obey His Word. That is not to say that He delivers everyone who trusts Him from suffering or even death. There are many who have trusted God and lost their heads (Heb. 11:36-40)! But this earthly life isn't the final chapter. All who suffer loss for Jesus will be richly rewarded in heaven or else God is a liar! Just as Israel was enriched literally by the spoil of victory, so we will always be enriched spiritually through our trials if we recognize our great need, pray to our great

God, and rely on Him alone, not on any human schemes or support.

### Conclusion

A popular T-shirt reads, "Bottom of the ninth, down by three runs, bases loaded, two outs, full count--*No Fear!*" That shirt is promoting an American folk virtue--self-confidence in a crisis. Christians should join Jehoshaphat in rejecting all self-confidence and acknowledging, "O God, we're powerless and we don't know what to do, but our eyes are on You!" *God* is our confidence in the crisis!

Corrie Ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place* and survivor of the German concentration camps, used to have people come up to her and say, "Corrie, my, what a great faith you have!" She would smile and reply, "No, it's what a great God I have!" We can be confident in a time of crisis if we let our great need drive us to prayer and faith in our great God.

### Discussion Questions

1. How can we keep from growing bitter toward God when trials hit?
2. Agree/disagree: Pride is the main thing that keeps us from prayer.
3. If we only pray to get what we want rather than to seek God Himself, what does it reveal about us?
4. How can we trust God when we feel He has let us down about something in the past?

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