

When You Don't Know What To Do

Route 66, #15 Jehoshaphat's Prayer - 2nd Chronicles 20

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"Shaken, Jehoshaphat prayed. He went to God for help..." MSG 20:3



◆ In the early nineties, my family was living in the Colorado Springs, Colorado area. ◆ I was enjoying my career with a local school district as their Student Transportation Manager. ◆ Each morning I would hear the deep throated rumble of Cummings, Caterpillar and Detroit Diesel engines — I loved the fast paced life of gears, turbo-chargers, middle school-ers and schedules.

◆ If you recall those times — they were the days of soaring costs and shrinking funds for school districts. ◆ Those were the days of school boards considering the proposals of "contract services." ◆ The private companies did indeed offer reduced costs to taxpayers — but we in the student transportation business figured our jobs were secure, after all — pray tell — where were the "privateers" going to get part-time people for split shifts at reduced wages to drive their school buses? ◆ And what was more, our school district had already made an unpopular decision to "contract out" the student food services division. ◆ At first the food was sub-standard, cold and presentation lacked. ◆ Although, given some time, the company's food services soon worked out the kinks and began offering a quality product at a true cost-per-meal savings.

◆ With bond issues failing, student enrollments growing and aging school facilities needing, the local school board knew they had to display a sense of frugality to the voting taxpayer to ever hope to pass a bond issue in which to build new facilities. ◆ They

knew full well that they must demonstrate their willingness to reduce overall costs -- at any and every level. ♦ So at one school board session, board members voted to "Go Contract." ♦ The district was "getting out" of the school bus business. ♦ Within minutes of the decision we learned — although bus drivers would be able to keep their jobs, all would have their pay reduced. ♦ That's what we knew. ♦ What I didn't know was — that working for the contractor wouldn't be an option for me.

♦ The next morning when I arrived for work, I was told to go to the district office to collect severance pay and on the way out of the building I was told to collect my personal belongings — I was being terminated.

♦ I was stunned. ♦ I had done nothing wrong, in fact by the estimation of management, I had discharged my duties with excellence. ♦ It was simply a policy of the contracting company preferring their own managers. ♦ And I wouldn't be that person. ♦ I wanted to argue my case, to ___ ... but there I sat, in my living room at 9:00 AM in the morning with a banker's box of mementos lying in the middle of the living room. ♦ I was stunned. ♦ I had no idea what I could or should do — it was a personal crisis. ♦ With a mortgage to pay, groceries to buy and a family to support, what could I or should I do?

♦ In the 20th chapter of 2nd Chronicles we read of a man who had no idea what he could do or should do in his moment of his crisis. ♦ His name was Jehoshaphat, the fourth king of Judah, who reigned nine centuries before the birth of Jesus.

◆Read 1 Chronicles 20:1-12

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Some things jumped out at me / caught my attention while reading this text:

- 1) Vs 1 "Three nations came to "make war on Jehoshaphat.** ◆We have no clue as to why these other nations decided to attack King Jehoshaphat and his capital city, Jerusalem.
- ◆All the text says is that the odds were **three—against—one**.
 - ◆The text states three times that " a great multitude," threatens.
 - ◆These odds left the king of Judah shivering in fear for his life.
 - ◆Result: though it is the 9th century B.C. or 1990 or right Now...

Life on planet earth has always had ample reasons for fear.

2) Vs 2 Jehoshaphat is told that a **"vast army"** has positioned itself to besiege Jerusalem. ◆And yet, in view of Jehoshaphat's own military statistics for Judah's standing army (17:12–19) "one million, one hundred sixty thousand" this fear seems a little surprising, however comparison is impossible since no figures are provided for the three coalition forces. ◆Despite the fact that Judah's soldiers seems to have been numerous, well equipped and prepared, the Judeans clearly believed they were outnumbered, and because of that the king was **"alarmed"** (**Vs 3**). **In this world, no matter how much protection you have, or think you have, there likely will come a time when you will become "alarmed."**

3) Vs 2 - The most frightening aspect of the surprise invasion was that the attacking nations were uncomfortably close ...when spotted they were situated at *Hazazon Tamar* (that is - En Gedi). ♦ That distance is a mere 25 miles away, only one long day's march from Jerusalem!

Danger was literally at Jerusalem's doorstep.

4) Vs 3 - This prayer seems to have been a bit different than most prayers. ♦ Where other kings might have said, "This is a time to mobilize the armed forces — not assemble for prayer."

♦ Jehoshaphat's prayer is described by the Hebrew word meaning to "**seek/inquire**," which upon closer examination speaks to its intensity. ♦ One Hebrew language authority says that it can be translated to: **make diligent examination, explore, hunt down, dig for, beg.**

♦ Admittedly, the prayer is a beautiful expression of human despair and total dependence on God. ♦ And if you like looking "under the hood" on Bible prayers, you'll notice Jehoshaphat follows the structure of the laments found in the Psalms, such as Psalms 44 and 83.

A) Vs 6, 7 - He **recounts** God's favors in the past;

B) Vs 7 - He **reminds** God that his request for deliverance is based on the land promise made to his "friend," Abraham. Ingenious -- really, Jehoshaphat is jogging God's memory;

C) Vs 8, 9 - The king **asserts** his confidence in God's power.

◆Although this is a dynamically crafted prayer, there's no magic word formula. ***At its core – Jehoshaphat's***

prayer is simply a serious and concerted prayer! Nothing more, nothing less!

◆One of the limitations of a 24 minute sermon is the overall lack of time available to read Scripture passages that go before, and follow after, a given text. ◆And in today's story, that could be a severe limitation to fully understanding the person of King Jehoshaphat. ◆You could get the idea that this king was so distraught by three impending enemy armed forces that he could think of nothing else to do — ***but pray.*** ◆***"It's come down to this: we are in such a tight squeeze that there's nothing more we can do - now let's seek divine assistance!"***

5) Vs 3 - *But nothing could be farther from the truth.*

◆Seeking God's counsel and help — is what Jehoshaphat does in all things and at all times; that's who he is! ◆Seeking is a key word during Jehoshaphat's reign (see 17:3–4; 18:4; 19:3).

◆These references clearly show us that Jehoshaphat has chosen at all times to do what he does in chapter 20, Seek the Lord. ◆In fact, a couple of chapters later (**2nd Chronicles 22:9**) the writer summarizes Jehoshaphat's life by saying he was a person who, "**sought the Lord with all his heart.**"

◆I looked at some preaching notes made years ago, from this same story — and I suppose I should send that church a financial rebate. ◆What was I thinking? ◆My notes indicated I felt people might be so shaken by news of a personal crisis that they would

forget to seek God's help. ♦ I guess I hadn't experienced enough of those "Worst Days of My Life." ♦ I was wrong. Earnestly seeking God's attention in the moment of danger actually comes quite easily. ♦ Apparently Jehoshaphat demonstrated every day — what someday — Jesus would tell us to do ... not only to ask in prayer — but also to seek and knock (Matthew 7:7).

May we seek God in all things, everyday, so that when that Inevitable Day Comes - "When We Don't What To Do" We Will Know Exactly What To Do ... in Seeking God's Help

♦ *When the people of Judah saw the King's example, they gathered together to seek; they came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord (Vs 4).* ♦ *God was honoring the king's intensity in prayer by letting his **seeking attitude** rub off on his people.*

6) Vs 5 - Did you know, there are no rules anywhere in Scripture laid down for the physical posture of prayer? ♦ There is however mention made of people **kneeling in prayer** (1 Kings 8:54; 2 Chr. 6:13; Ps. 95:6; Isa. 45:23; Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60; 9:40; Eph. 3:14, etc.); of **bowing** and **falling face down** in prayer (Gen. 24:26, 52; Ex. 4:31; 12:27; Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:35, etc.); even prayer with the **spreading out the hands** (1 Kings 8:22, 38, 54; Ps. 28:2; 63:4; 88:9; 1 Tim. 2:8, etc.); but here Jehoshaphat simply **stands** (1 Sam. 1:26; 1 Kings 8:14, 55; 2 Chr. 20:9; Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13). ***Again I find, there's no secrets to successful prayer, except to — pray!***

7) Vs 12 Jehoshaphat prayers: "**O our God...we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do...**" ♦ This is a most interesting statement when we remember that all the citizens of Judah were listening! ♦ Not impressive by today's leadership standards. ♦ Can you imagine our king and commander stating publicly that he does not know what

to do — but to pray! ♦ But then again Jehoshaphat wasn't trying to impress anyone.

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Jehoshaphat Demonstrates Total Reliance Upon God (are you there?)

8) Vs 13 - With the prospect of certain defeat the king proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. ♦ He resolved to ask for God's help, and with this decision, he summoned all his subjects to observe a solemn fast at the sanctuary. ♦ Although it was customary with Hebrew kings to proclaim fasts during perilous circumstances, either in a city, a district, or throughout the entire kingdom — this fast was different. ♦ On this occasion, it was a universal fast, which even extended to children and infants.

As much as we would like to think that "fasting" belongs to a long departed dispensation...the Bible repeatedly reveals there are times when fasting is necessary.

9) Vs 31-37 - For those of you who read the Route 66, Daily Bible selections that accompany this sermon series, please...avoid the temptation of making King Jehoshaphat out to be a saint — there's more to his life than the thumbnail sketch I highlighted for you to read. ♦ There's much more to Jehoshaphat's life than chapter 20. ♦ While it's true that he demonstrates great faith in God (*exemplary faith*) — avoid the notion of making him out to be a 'Super Hero.' ♦ For later on, Jehoshaphat fails the Lord by becoming an ally with the wicked king of Israel, Ahaziah. ♦ Together the two of them make an alliance and build a fleet of ships in which to trade goods, but it never sets sail from port. ♦ For God destroyed the wicked venture (1 Kings 22:41–50).

For better and worse, Jehoshaphat is, reassuringly

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– just-like-you (me).

◆Enter Jahaziel. ◆Although you're likely to forget his name, Jehoshaphat undoubtedly remembered what God said in response to his prayer through this Levite. ◆Jehoshaphat was instructed to: March forward to the battle line...Take up their positions ... Stand firm ... and Watch to "see the deliverance of the Lord" Vs (16-17).

◆This he does. ◆But King Jehoshaphat does one more thing (Vs 21) he appoints a praise group -- a "praise God for all the splendor of his holiness" team. ◆Nothing has looked as silly to an enemy since Joshua's priests were observed marching around the fortified city walls of Jericho.

◆But this may be the greatest faith lesson of the text. ◆The group is to sing the Lord's praises before the battle. ◆They thank God "Ahead of Time!" ◆Now that's faith, that's Knowing What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do."

◆And then, after the battle, Jehoshaphat and his people assembled in the valley of Beracah. ◆Beracah is a Hebrew word for blessing. ◆What looked like a valley at Waterloo turns out to be instead the Valley of Blessing.

◆Will you humor me and take a simple preacher type quiz?
◆See how high you score in **Self-Reliance**.

◆ **I can control all of my moods.** ◆ I am never grumpy or gloomy. ◆ I can't relate to Drs' Jekyll and Hyde. ◆ I am always upbeat and upright. ◆ Does that describe you? ◆ No? ◆ Well, let's try another.

◆ **I am at peace with everyone.** ◆ Every relationship as sweet as fudge. ◆ Even my old flames speak highly of me. ◆ I love all and am loved by all. ◆ Is that you? ◆ If not, how about this description?

◆ **I have no fears.** ◆ We could call you the Teflon toughie. ◆ Wall Street plunges downward — no problem. ◆ Faulty heart condition discovered — mere detail. ◆ World War III begins in your backyard — so what! ◆ Does this describe you?

◆ **I need no forgiveness.** ◆ I have never made an error or a mistake. ◆ I am as square as a Monopoly board. ◆ I am as clean as Mr. Clean's kitchen. ◆ I have never been resentful, I've never told an untruth. ◆ Is that you? ◆ No?

◆ Let's evaluate this.

1) You **can't** control all your moods.

2) A few of your relationships are **shaky**.

3) You have **fears** and **faults**. ... Hmmm.

◆ Do you really want to hang on to your title of Mr. or Mrs. Self-Reliant? ◆ Are you and Frank Sinatra the only ones to make a personal anthem out of his hit song "I Did It My Way"? ◆ **If you, like me didn't score so well on this quiz,** it may mean that we could

use a Father who answers prayer — especially when "We Don't Know What to Do.

◆ Oh yes, back to my prayer on that day in Colorado, "When I Didn't Know What To Do." ◆ I stood in the middle of that living room and sought passionately God's attention to my crisis. ◆ I asked for things that God has surpassed a number of times over. ◆ I asked for a position with a transportation company (eventually, the bus contractor hired me to manage a facility in another state). ◆ I did indeed have enough to eat, enough money to raise my family and...eventually, the best thing in my life — coming to work and live with this church in Arlington, Virginia.

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◆ So after spending a week looking at this Scripture text, and reflecting upon my "Worst Day," ask me this question. "Kurt, what do you think about when you read of Jehoshaphat's "Worse Day?"

◆ Only one thing: the words to the song sung by those ancient believers in Jerusalem (Vs 21):

◆ **"Give Thanks to the Lord,
for His Love Endures Forever."**