

Inspiring Moments

Pray Like Jehoshaphat

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There are some prayers that move God to act. The prayer of King Jehoshaphat is one of them. What happened?

In 2 Chronicles 20, we see Judah was about to be attacked by a vast army of Judah's enemies. Judah was hopelessly outnumbered and caught unprepared. This was a national crisis. What would you do if you were Jehoshaphat? You would immediately summon your 'war cabinet' to defend Judah, wouldn't you? No. Not King Jehoshaphat. Instead, he called for a 'prayer rally' by gathering all the people in Jerusalem to 'inquire of the Lord'. (v.3) What if God did not answer? They will be slaughtered! A risky strategy. That is not the conventional way to fight a war. But Jehoshaphat was not a 'conventional King'. He trusted God for deliverance.

As all the people in Judah gathered in this huge courtyard in Jerusalem, over this sea of nervous humanity, they could hear the clear voice of their King praying. This was how Jehoshaphat prayed. There are four parts to Jehoshaphat's prayer.

1. Acknowledgement

"O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you."

(Verse 5-6)

First, Jehoshaphat acknowledged who God is. He affirmed that God is the all-powerful God (omnipotent God). There is no problem that God cannot deal with. When you realise you have such a big God, your problem looks small. So often, we rush into our prayer and tell God about problems. When we do that, we focus on our problem and miss the all-powerful God we are talking to. We become fixated on the 'problem' but not the 'solution'. Therefore, we should start our prayer by acknowledging God for who he is.

2. Affirmation

"If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgement or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your name and will cry out to you in our distress and you will hear us and save us."

(verse 9)

Second, Jehoshaphat affirmed his belief that when he prayed, God would hear him. And trust that God would deliver him. We can be assured that each time we pray, God will hear us. However, we must trust God for the outcome because God knows what is best for us. This is the part we have the most difficulty Trusting God's sovereign will for us.

3. Petition (Prayer Request)

"But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance".

"O 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..."

(verses 11-12)

Third, Jehoshaphat clearly stated his problem to God. This is something we are very good at. Telling God what is our problem. Normally, our prayer starts with this and ends here. Jehoshaphat and his people were in a state of crisis, facing a clear and present danger. Why make such a long prayer?

What Jehoshaphat was doing here is that he reminded God that these enemies who are about to attack Judah, are the very same people whom God had spared when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promise Land.

He is reminding God how these enemies are repaying God for his kindness and mercy shown to them. God does not mind us asking 'hard questions'. God can take it. So go ahead and tell God what is your problem. Be honest with God. Be honest with yourself. Jehoshaphat was humble enough to confess to God that he was helpless against the enemies. He needed God's help. Sometimes we are too proud to ask God for help.

4. Anticipation

"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you." (verse 12)

Fourth, Jehoshaphat was helpless but he was not hopeless. Verse 12 is the most powerful part of Jehoshaphat's prayer. This is both a confession and an affirmation of his faith in God. Having made his powerful prayer to God, he was basically telling God, "I am watching you". That is anticipation. Many of us pray without anticipation. When we pray, expect God to act (maybe not immediately). Or to accept that God may not act because our prayer request is not consistent with God's will.

God's Answer to Jehoshaphat's Prayer

Moved by Jehoshaphat's prayer, God's answer to his prayer was amazing. First, God told Jehoshaphat not to be afraid because it is not his battle, but God's. God will do the fighting for him. (2 Chron 20:15,17) Isn't that comforting? Secondly, God told Jehoshaphat to "stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you..." (2 Chron 20:17). True to God's promise, when Jehoshaphat marched to the battlefield, they saw the enemies, out of panic and confusion, self-destroy themselves. Jehoshaphat did not even need to lift a finger.

Three lessons we can learn from God's answer to Jehoshaphat. First, when we have prayed to God, do not be afraid. Surrender your fear to him. Secondly, having prayed, stand firm. Do not waver. Having surrendered your problem to God, believe God will act. Lastly, let God do the work of deliverance. We do not need to fight all our battles. Some battles are best left to God because he is the God of the Impossible and he knows what is best for us.

So the next time you pray, remember to pray like Jehoshaphat. It will change the way you pray. It will change your relationship with God.