

## A Good King with a Bad Habit

by Bayless Conley

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We're beginning a series about prophets, kings, and queens, and looking at the lessons that we can learn from the people in those categories and their stories. The good and the bad, and the ugly, and the beautiful, and everything that happened with them. We're going to be looking in 2 Chronicles 17. So, you can go ahead and turn there if you have your Bible with you. We're going to start there. We'll go back and forth between 2 Chronicles and 1 and 2 Kings, for the most part. I'd like you to pray with me if you would.

Heavenly Father, we just settle our hearts down right now, and we choose to become still inside and to listen. Precious Holy Spirit, we ask that You would unveil and reveal the Word of God to our hearts because we know the Bible is a closed book without Your aid. We ask You to teach us now. Enlighten these hearts of ours so that we can put into practice the Word of God that we understand.

Lord, we realize that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. So, we expect our faith level to rise today. We thank You for Your Word. I ask You to speak deeply to us as a local church, but Lord, individually to us in our present circumstances and situations. Thank You for bringing the comfort, the counsel, the guidance, the correction, and whatever it is we need in our lives. And we thank You for Your supernatural hand that is here at work today throughout this building, throughout this campus, and in the hearts and lives of every person who's watching and listening. Amen.

Where we're going to jump in is an interesting time in Israel's history. The nation has actually been divided. Ten tribes took off. They severed themselves from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah and established a new capital in the north in Samaria. They're known as Israel. For a 200-year period, they had 19 kings in the north, and not a single one of those kings ever loved God or served God. To a man, every one of them was wicked.

In the south, there's another kingdom made up of the two tribes, Benjamin and Judah, with a capital in Jerusalem. They also had 19 kings over a little bit more protracted time. Because in the north, eventually, the Assyrians conquered them, and they were carried away captive into Assyria. The nation of Judah lasted somewhat longer, but eventually, they were taken into Babylonian captivity. But of the 19 kings in the southern kingdom, eight of them served God. Eight of them loved God.

At this time, the king in the north was infamous. You will have heard his name. It was Ahab. He was married to a woman named Jezebel, and they were abominably wicked. They were both murderers. They were both idolaters. They were both deceitful. They called evil good and good evil. They hated God. In the south, their counterpart at this time was a man named Jehoshaphat. He is the king in Judah, in the south, reigning in Jerusalem. Just a bit of an introduction to what kind of a king he was, 2 Chronicles 17:3-6 NKJV,

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<sup>3</sup> Now the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his father David; he did not seek the Baals, <sup>4</sup> but sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not according to the acts of Israel. <sup>5</sup> Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah gave presents to Jehoshaphat, and he had riches and honor in abundance. <sup>6</sup> And his heart took delight in the ways of the Lord; moreover he removed the high places and wooden images from Judah.

Now, if we were to read on, we would find out that Jehoshaphat loved the Word of God. He also loved justice. He was a good king with a bad habit. We're going to be talking about that. 2 Chronicles 18:1 NKJV,

<sup>1</sup> Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab.

He took Ahab and Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah, and made her the wife of his son, Jehoram. Listen, she was worse than her mother was, if you can imagine that. Eventually, Athaliah is going to murder all of Jehoshaphat's grandchildren. She's going to plunge the nation of Judah into a long season of oppression, tyranny, and idolatry. There's no record that Jehoshaphat prayed about this alliance in any way whatsoever. He had the propensity to make ungodly alliances and then ask God about them after he'd already committed himself. It's something he did pretty much throughout his lifetime. He would connect himself and join himself and pledge himself to the wrong people and then not ask God about it until things were basically too late.

I have a friend who, a number of times, has hired key people to be in very prominent positions in his church. He has done it numerous times without waiting on God or asking the counsel of trusted friends first. Invariably, these guys that he brings into these key roles have split the church and caused untold grief again and again. Not too long ago, he confided in me and a couple of friends, and he said, "I have no discernment when it comes to people."

Was it the same thing with Jehoshaphat? Was it just that he had no discernment? Or was it out of a desire to gain more wealth and more territory? Did he think that he was going to change these people after he had allied himself with them? That somehow he was going to influence them and change them? Or maybe he just wanted to be liked and thought of as being gracious. We don't know, but it was a habit, as I said, that persisted for most of his life. We read on 2 Chronicles 18:2-3 NKJV,

<sup>2</sup> After some years he went down to visit Ahab in Samaria; and Ahab killed sheep and oxen in abundance for him and the people who were with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth Gilead. <sup>3</sup> So Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me against Ramoth Gilead?" And he answered him, "I am as you are, and my people as your people; we will be with you in the war."

Wait a minute, Jehoshaphat, "I am as you are."? No, you're not. Ahab hates God; you love God. Ahab is wicked; you're righteous. Ahab is deceitful, you're honest, and you love justice. Ahab is an idolater, and you serve the one true God. "I am as you are."? What are you saying? "I'm going to go with you in the war."? Then look the very next verse, verse 4,

<sup>4</sup> Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire for the word of the Lord today."

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Shouldn't you have done that first? Shouldn't you have asked God about it before you pledged yourself and committed yourself? You've made the commitment, you're all in, and now you're going to see what God has to say about it? You connect yourself to an ungodly man, and then you pray? Now Ahab calls 400 false prophets in. These are the prophets that would prophesy for him and Jezebel. We've got Ahab sitting on his throne and Jehoshaphat sitting on his throne on the threshing floor, and these 400 guys are carrying on. They're saying, to a man, they said, "Go up to Ramoth Gilead. The Lord has delivered the Syrians into your hand. Go, the Lord says go." Jehoshaphat is uneasy. He says, "Aren't there any more prophets?" Ahab says, "Well, there's one guy, Micaiah, but I hate him because he never prophesies good concerning me."

Jehoshaphat says, "You shouldn't say that. Bring him." The messenger that goes to get Micaiah says, "Listen, all 400 guys, this is what they've said. Make sure you say the same thing." He must have done it in a really sarcastic voice because he starts out and says, "Go, the Lord is going to deliver the Syrians." And Ahab says, "Come on. Just tell me the truth." He says, "All right, you're going to die. You won't be coming back from this battle. I saw Israel scattered like sheep. It's going to be a disaster." They went anyway. Everything Micaiah said came to pass. Jehoshaphat barely escapes with his life. He cries out to God while he's being chased by these charioteers, and God intervenes and saves him, but a bunch of his men were killed. He literally barely escapes with his life. It was an absolute disaster. Then we come to 2 Chronicles 19:1-3 NKJV. It says,

<sup>1</sup> Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you. <sup>3</sup> Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God."

"Should you help the wicked and love those that hate the Lord?" Jezebel and Ahab weren't just neutral. They hated God. They weren't just deceived. They hated God. They hated the Word of God. They hated the things of God. They hated the people of God. They hated the prophets of God. They had set themselves to be completely opposed to God. They were incorrigibly wicked, and the prophet asks, "Should you help those who are literally God's enemies, who hate God?"

Now, Jehoshaphat, unfortunately, when you become an ally of someone who hates God, some of what's on them is going to get off on you. He said, "Hey, the wrath of God is against you because God's wrath is already over these guys. If you're making this kind of alliance, to a degree, you're going to share in some of that. There's good things in you, Jehoshaphat." He, to his credit, goes on serving God and doing good to Judah. He's a good king. We fast forward just a few years, and now Jehoram, one of Ahab's sons, has become king in the north. It was actually a co-regency there for a period of time. Jehoram, Ahab's son, is there, and he's wicked, just like his father and mother. He's an idolater like they were. We pick it up, this time 2 Kings 3:6-7 NKJV.

<sup>6</sup> So King Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel. <sup>7</sup> Then he went and sent to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, saying, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?" And he said, "I will go up; I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."

Jehoshaphat, "I am as you are."? No, you're not. This guy's like his parents. He's wicked. He doesn't serve God. He doesn't love God. You're not like him. But Jehoshaphat just jumps right

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in. “Yes, I’m going. I’m pledging to be there.” He makes this alliance, and the king of Edom also joins them. There’s these three kings: the king of Israel in the north, the king of Judah in the south, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom. The next thing we read, this is Jehoshaphat asking. 2 Kings 3:8-10 NKJV,

<sup>8</sup> Then he said, “Which way shall we go up?” And he (That is Jehoram, the king of Israel) answered, “By way of the Wilderness of Edom.” <sup>9</sup> So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and they marched on that roundabout route seven days; and there was no water for the army, nor for the animals that followed them. <sup>10</sup> And the king of Israel said, “Alas! For the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab.”

Isn’t that typical? All right, you went up. God didn’t send you. You just went. You’re the one that chose the roundabout route. There was a route where there was water, but he said, “Okay, this is the way we’re going to go.” They go the roundabout route. There’s no water for seven days, and then he blames it on God. He says, “Well, the Lord has delivered us.” Isn’t that just like people? They make choices in their life that have consequences, and then they blame it on God. “I don’t know why the Lord’s letting this happen?” No, it’s just because you’re stupid. That’s what’s happening here. “Well, the Lord didn’t—” No, the Lord didn’t do that. This is your own doing. These are your own choices. Then we come to verse 11.

<sup>11</sup> But Jehoshaphat said, “Is there no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?” So one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, “Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah.”

Isn’t this a little late, Jehoshaphat? Shouldn’t you have inquired the Word of the Lord before you ever joined yourself to this wicked guy? Shouldn’t you have asked God about it before you ever made the commitment to the alliance? Shouldn’t you have asked God about things before you got in trouble? Now you’re about to die, all the animals are about to die, and you’re about to lose your entire army. Now you’re going to pray as a last-ditch effort? Well, thank God, that’s better than not praying at all. But Jehoshaphat, you should have done this first. Verses 12-13,

<sup>12</sup> And Jehoshaphat said, “The word of the Lord is with him.” So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him. <sup>13</sup> Then Elisha said to the king of Israel, “What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother.” But the king of Israel said to him, “No, for the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab.”

He’s still blaming it on God. He’s still completely fatalistic. We come to verse 14.

<sup>14</sup> And Elisha said, “As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you, nor see you.”

We’re going to come back to that. From this point, Elisha calls for a musician. The musician begins to play. The hand of the Lord comes on Elisha, and he prophesies. He tells them what to do. It was crazy. He said, “Dig ditches. I know there’s no rain, there’s no water, but God says, ‘Dig ditches,’ and He’s going to bring water supernaturally.” Absolutely ridiculous. Friend, sometimes you have to do the ridiculous if you’re going to experience the miraculous. You need to obey God, whether it makes sense or whether it doesn’t.

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So they did it. They dug ditches out there, and God supernaturally brought water. All of the animal's thirst is quenched. All of the soldiers are refreshed and renewed. In the morning, the sun's coming up, and that red sky is there. The king of Moab and his army are looking across the battlefield, and they see the red sun of the morning shining on the water, and they think, "It's blood! Those three kings and their armies have all turned on each other, and they've killed one another. Let's go get the spoils!" He brings his army into the jaws of an absolute trap, and the Moabites are slaughtered.

Now, the thing is, though, Jehoshaphat's alliance with an evil man almost cost him his life and almost cost him the lives of all of his men. If he had lost the army, it would have endangered the entire nation. This choice he's making is not just affecting him. It would affect all the men in the army and all of their wives, who now no longer have husbands. Now, there's no one to protect their cities and their holdings, and it affects everyone. My friend, all of our choices have consequences. No one lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. You try and do something in a corner; it never just affects you. There's always a rippling effect. It always affects other people. Thank God for His mercy.

There's something here that I feel so strongly that I need to talk to you about. It's back to verse 14. Elisha said, "Surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you." What we need to consider is the influence of one godly person. The influence that one godly person can have. Jehoshaphat was flawed, certainly, but he did love the Lord. These other two kings and their armies were delivered because Jehoshaphat was there. They became the recipients of God's favor because of the presence of a godly man. Do not underestimate the influence and impact that one godly man or one godly woman can have.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas are in prison in the city of Philippi. At midnight, as they're chained in the innermost prison, they began to pray and worship. They're singing praises, and suddenly, there was a great earthquake, and the Scripture says all of the prison doors were opened, and everyone's chains fell off. It didn't just impact Paul. It didn't just impact Paul and Silas. Everyone in the prison, their doors flew open. Everyone in the prison, their chains were loosed.

The influence of one godly man. Acts 27, they're in a great storm. Two hundred seventy-six people on a ship. All hope that they would be saved was given up. They all knew they were going to die. But an angel appeared to Paul in the night and said, "Paul, be of good courage. God has granted you all those who sail with you." They ought to be mighty glad that Paul was on that boat. Two hundred seventy-six people were saved from certain death because one godly man was in their midst. Oh my!

There was a street preacher in the '70s that I really admired because of the simplicity of his message. He just talked about Jesus. Because of his courage, he went into some of the most dangerous places in the world. He traveled internationally and went to some rough spots here in our own country and would just proclaim the message of God's love and have amazing results. There was a particular Hollywood actor who was fairly well known that got saved. This was the late '70s. That actor sort of joined himself at the hip with this street preacher. They could be seen together all over. Occasionally, they would interview this actor.

I remember watching one interview, and the guy said, "Look, aren't you afraid for your life?" He said, "When I got saved, God told me to join myself to this man to support him. Whenever I'm at his side, it doesn't matter where I am. I feel like I'm in the safest place that I could be on planet Earth." I never forgot that. He understood something of this principle. Think about Joseph. He's

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sold on the auction block in Egypt. A man named Potiphar buys him and brings him into his home. Genesis 39:5 NKJV says,

<sup>5</sup> So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field.

Because of Joseph. His business was blessed because Joseph was there. His household was blessed because Joseph was there. His cattle and his flocks were blessed because Joseph was there. His servants were blessed because Joseph was there for the sake of Joseph. The influence of one godly man brought the blessing of God on the house. What was on Joseph got off on Potiphar and got off on his whole household. I believe that the places I have worked as a Christian have been blessed because I've been there. Now, first, because I've always endeavored to have a good work ethic. I show up early, and I'm the last one to leave. The first one to get there and the last one to leave. I always kept a good attitude toward my employers. Beyond that, I believe because of the one I love, and the one I serve that, the blessing of God was upon them.

I remember I went and applied for a job as a cook in a restaurant many years ago. The guy was reticent, and I said, "Listen, if you hire me, I'll be the best employee you've ever had." He laughed in my face. I said, "No, I will be." He said, "Look, all right, I'll give you a try." He says, "I'm reluctant, but I'll give you a try." I worked there for quite a while, and eventually, I put in my notice. I was going to move back to California, and the guy who hired me, the manager of the restaurant, said, "Bayless, can I talk to you?" Calls me in his office.

He said, you know "When you stood in my office all those many months back, and you said you'd be the best employee, I thought you were an idiot." He said, "I've been in the restaurant business a long time. I've managed a lot of restaurants, significant restaurants." He said "You've been the best employee that I've ever had." He went on to say that he was not a Christian; this guy was not a believer, in essence, he said, "I feel like this place has been blessed because you've been here." Friend, that's because what's on our life can get off on the lives of others.

There are certain things on my life that I recognize. One of them, I've got this grace on me that I can sleep. My heart goes out to people who don't sleep well. I'm sure there are people here listening to me, out on the plaza, in here just listening; you don't sleep well. I've had two friends. One was an acquaintance, the other a close friend. Neither one of them slept more than two or three hours a night. The acquaintance only made it to his early 30s. His health broke down because he couldn't sleep. It was just his mind. He died at like age 33. My other friend actually pastored a church. Same thing. He slept two hours, maybe three. He made it to, I think, age 50, maybe it was 51. He died because his health broke down. God didn't make any of us to burn the candle at both ends. The only candle you should burn at both ends is the candle of kindness. These guys just couldn't sleep.

I've got this thing. I sleep. Everyone in my home sleeps well. There's this sort of canopy of blessing over the Conley house. I've got another friend, and he doesn't sleep well. He's not one of these two or three-hour guys, but if he gets five hours, that's a great night's sleep for him. Generally, he doesn't quite get that much, and he wakes up, and his brain is just going, and he can't get back to sleep. We talked about it and stuff before. He stayed with me a few times. I remember the first time he stayed. I said, "You're going to sleep well in my house."

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He said, "Really?" I said, "Oh yes, just watch and see." I said, "There's something over my house. You'll sleep while you're here." I get up in the morning. I go, "It's 9:00 a.m. He's still in bed." I go, "How'd you sleep?" He said, "Great." He calls it the Rip Van Winkle anointing. Even Jesus, when He sent out the 12 and then when He sent out the 72 by 2, He told them both. He said, "Whatever house you come to, greet it. If they're welcoming, if they welcome you, let your peace rest upon it." Adam Clarke, a great Greek scholar, said that the word for peace literally is something that affects spirit, soul, and body. It is tangible.

What's on you gets off on them. What's in your life will get off on them. If they don't welcome you, your peace will come back to you. You'll get a young man that'll come work for a church as an assistant pastor or maybe a youth guy, and there's just a lot of traction and stuff is happening, and there's growth, and they're excited, but sometimes they get young man's disease. Meaning, "I got to go start something of my own. I need to make my own mark." They'll leave.

It's one thing if God's sending you out, you go with the blessing of the house, but there's a lot of people that weren't sent. They just went. They go, not realizing that, to a degree, they've been operating under a borrowed anointing. The grace that's on that house and on the leaders there and the anointing that's on them, they share in that, and much of the traction and the blessing and that X factor that's happening is because of what's on there. When they leave and go on their own, what is borrowed must be returned. You don't take it with you. They get out, and they don't have that traction, and there's not the growth and things, and they don't understand what happened.

Again, it's wonderful when someone's season is up somewhere, and they go out, and God is sending them, and they go with the blessing of the house. That's wonderful. But I tell you, I've seen time and time and time again that people don't realize that they're operating in something that's borrowed. They're under that canopy of grace that's on the house, and much of the anointing that they're working with is a borrowed thing, and it has to be returned. Think about Jonathan, Saul's son, the son of King Saul. He and David meet, and there's an immediate bond formed between them. They make a covenant to stand together, and Jonathan realizes that David is going to be king.

Saul, Jonathan's father, is jealous. Several times, he tries to kill David, and David tells Jonathan and Jonathan won't believe it. He says, "No, not my dad. No. You must be wrong. You must be mistaken. He wouldn't do that." Eventually, Jonathan realizes that his father is jealous and is trying to kill David. David becomes a fugitive. Saul is chasing him around the countryside. We pick it up in 1 Samuel 23:15-18 NKJV.

<sup>15</sup> So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest. <sup>16</sup> Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God. <sup>17</sup> And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that." <sup>18</sup> So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord.

Other translations say they renewed their pledge before the Lord.

<sup>18</sup> And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house.

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Meaning he went back to the house of Saul. Saul becomes worse and worse in the meantime. More vengeful, more paranoid, and more proud. He even begins to consort with the occult and gets a witch to try and call up the dead for him. I think about this event. Jonathan, what would have happened if you would have stayed with David and allied yourself with him? You knew he was going to be king. You've declared, "I'm going to be by your side," but you go back to your father's house. Shortly after this, Jonathan shares the fate of his father, Saul. They're both killed on Mount Gilboa by the Philistines. He didn't share in the grace and the destiny that was on David. He shared in what was on his father because of the choice that he made.

What if he would have stayed with David? Saul would have been killed. When David ascended the throne, there was much trouble from the household of Saul. Jonathan could have quelled all that. The transition would have been much better. You read the story. He ended up with his son, Mephibosheth, being lame in his feet because of an accident that occurred. If you read the context in the story, it never would have happened, never would have happened if Jonathan had made the right alliance rather than going back to the house of his father. All right, back to Jehoshaphat. His alliance with Ahab's son almost cost him his life, almost as it happened earlier when he joined Ahab himself. Now, certainly, Jehoshaphat has learned his lesson by now. We're going to read about King Ahaziah. He's another one of Ahab's sons who becomes king in the north. 2 Chronicles 20:35-37 NKJV,

<sup>35</sup> After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who acted very wickedly. <sup>36</sup> And he allied himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish, and they made the ships in Ezion Geber. <sup>37</sup> But Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the Lord has destroyed your works." Then the ships were wrecked, so that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

Like I said, who you ally yourself with, you're going to share in some of what's on them. It happened to Jehoshaphat. I say better that his ships were destroyed than his soul was destroyed. Better his ships being wrecked than his soul being wrecked. I look at this as an act of God's mercy. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:33 AMPC,

<sup>33</sup> Do not be so deceived and misled! Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character.

That's where Jehoshaphat was headed. Proverbs 13:20 NKJV,

<sup>20</sup> He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.

Jehoshaphat was not going to circumvent that. That is the road he was traveling on. It was the mercy of God that didn't happen. This same story is recorded in 1 Kings 22, but there's something added that we need to look at. 1 Kings 22:48-49 NKJV,

<sup>48</sup> Jehoshaphat made merchant ships to go to Ophir for gold; but they never sailed, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion Geber. <sup>49</sup> Then Ahaziah the son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "Let my servants go with your servants in the ships." But Jehoshaphat would not.

Now, Ahaziah wasn't asking to go on the ships that were wrecked. They couldn't sail. It's apparent that Jehoshaphat built a second fleet. Now, Ahaziah, wicked Ahaziah, comes and

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says, "Hey, let my servants go with you." Jehoshaphat says, "No, I've learned my lesson. I'm through connecting myself and pledging myself to men who hate God. No." Jehoshaphat finally learned his lesson. Can we give Jehoshaphat a hand? Yay, Jehoshaphat! You finally learned. All right, what have we talked about? What have we learned? Number one: don't make your plans and then seek God. Ask Him first. Number two: don't form alliances with the ungodly and expect God's blessings to be upon it. Number three: Whatever your weakness is, that bad habit that gets you in trouble, that seems to rob you of God's richer blessings, learn your lesson and break it off as Jehoshaphat did. You don't have to take as long as he did to work it out and to make that decision.

Jehoshaphat had his flaws; all of us do. We understand we have a propensity towards certain things that trip us up, certain things that the Lord is not pleased with. You know yourself in that regard pretty well, I suspect. Whatever your weakness is, whatever that habit is that gets you in trouble and seems to rob you of those greater blessings from your life, break it off now. Make the decision now. I'm done with it. Enough with it. Jehoshaphat did, and you can too. Then, number four: determine to be the one that carries enough blessing and presence of God that it impacts and blesses others. As I said, Jehoshaphat had his flaws, as we all do, but he genuinely loved the Lord. We see in him what a wonderful influence a single godly man or a godly woman can have. Speaking of that influence, I was thinking about the story of Abraham in Genesis 18.

God says, "I'm not going to hide from Abraham the thing I'm planning to do. The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah has come up before Me." He tells Abraham, "I'm going to destroy these places." Abraham says, "Lord, You wouldn't destroy the righteous with the wicked, would You? What if there are 50 righteous people there? Will You spare the cities if there's just 50 righteous people found in them?" God says, "Sure, I'll do that." Abraham says, "What if there are only 40? Would You spare them for 40 righteous people?" God says, "Sure." Abraham says, "Look, don't get mad, but 30. What if there's only 30? Will You spare everyone else if there's just 30?" God says, "Yes, absolutely."

Abraham says, "All right, I've taken it on me to speak to the Lord. I'm going to venture a little further. What if there's only 20, God? Would You spare these cities for 20 people?" God says, "Yes, I would." Abraham says, "Okay, one final step here. What if there are only ten righteous people? Would You spare everyone if there were only ten righteous and everyone else was wicked?" God said, "Absolutely." Abraham stopped there.

Now, if you think about it, we don't know how large Sodom and Gomorrah were, but let's just be hyper, hyper-conservative. Let's say that the combined population of both cities was only 2,000. God is saying, "If one-half of 1% of them are seeking Me and doing what's right, I'll spare everyone else." You think about the influence that a very few can have. Now, I don't know if you've ever wondered why Abraham stopped at 10. Why didn't he keep going to one? Actually, his nephew Lot was living in Sodom. If you read the story, Lot's married. He has a wife. There's Lot and his wife, and it talks about his married daughters, plural, and sons-in-law, talks about his sons, plural, and he has two unmarried daughters, 10.

Abraham thought, "Well, certainly Lot has at least reached his own family." Don't underestimate the power of you just reaching your own little family. That's your first mission field, that's your first church, sir. That's your first mission field, your first church, ma'am. You bring them up in the way of the Lord. You can have a great influence on the city in which you live just by reaching your own family. We read the story. Lot's sons-in-law laughed in his face. They didn't want to leave Sodom. They didn't want to leave their wicked lifestyles. They stayed behind. The married

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daughters stayed behind. The sons didn't come along. They loved their lifestyle there in Sodom too much. His wife, they're on their way out; she turns back longingly. She wants the lifestyle. She wants the wicked things that are going on in Sodom. She turned into a pillar of salt. His two unmarried daughters come out with him.

The first thing that happens, the first thing that you read is they get their dad drunk so they can have sex with him. And they both have sex with their father while he's in a drunken stupor. Not the most godly young ladies you've ever heard of. Lot hadn't reached any of his family members. Abraham thought, "Okay, this thing's done. I've got it in the bag. I know Lot's reached his family," but he didn't. When God said He would spare them, that doesn't mean that they're not going to individually need to repent and make things right with Him. It just meant He was going to give them more time. He was going to lengthen their opportunity to turn from their sin. God is very gracious. I'm glad I lived long enough to get saved.

I look back over my life and all the near-death experiences I had, a lot of them just due to my own ridiculous stupidity and because of the alliances that I had made in my life. A lot of the people that I used to run with are no longer on Planet Earth. A lot of them have been dead for a long time because of the lifestyle they were living. Some of them were in prison. A few of them got saved, like me. It's only by the grace of God that I lived long enough to get saved.

For some of you, God's grace has been working in your life. It may be due to the prayers of some family member, someone that just saw you and prayed for you. I meet strangers all the time and talk to them about Jesus. But sometimes, I just see people, and I pray for them. I've never spoken to them, don't know who they are, don't know where they're going, don't know where they're coming from, but I just pray for them. Pray that God would have mercy. Pray that their eyes would be enlightened. Pray that they come to know Jesus.

I was very surprised to find out. I never knew this till after I got saved. My dad had never told me, and I was the first one saved in my family, but apparently, a few generations back, on both sides of the family, mom's side and dad's side, there were circuit-riding Methodist preachers in my family. A whole bunch of preachers. I just imagine one of them, 150 years ago, kneeling down under a walnut tree and praying for his children and his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren and his great-great-grandchildren and his great-great-great-grandchildren and said, "God, save them. Protect them. Let them come into the kingdom. Open their eyes." I just have this sense that I'm here because of the prayers that one of my forefathers prayed. Right now, God has given you space to repent and a chance to change.

The thing is, you come just like you are. Isn't that wonderful? I don't have to clean up and get everything in order and then, "Okay, I'm right, and I can come." If I could do that without Him, I wouldn't need Him. You come right now, just as you are. He changes you and then empowers you to live for Him. It's an amazing deal, if you would. I want to give you the opportunity to pray out on the plaza, in the auditorium here, or anybody watching, wherever you might be. You might even be watching sometime in the future, and this is in a language that I'm actually not speaking. It's being dubbed into some other tongue, but God is touching your heart. I want to give you a chance to pray. The Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." It's not about ritual and not about ceremony. It's about having a walking, talking, living, breathing relationship with your Creator.

To the backsliders in the house—I was teasing my daughter-in-law the other week. She was born and raised in Chiapas, Mexico. She's one of my daughters-in-law. I was calling her a backslider. She said, "What's that?" She speaks English really well, but there are some words

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she doesn't know yet. I said, "I don't know." I said, we got Spencer because my son speaks Spanish, "What's the Spanish word for back slider?" He didn't know either. I said, "Well, your heart is far away from God." She said, "Bayless!" She got mad at me. We have this kidding thing we go on about. She's not a back slider, by the way.

If you're watching this, Carla, at any time, I was just kidding. Okay? Yes. If you are, you know it. The truth is, if you're not going forward, you are sliding back. There is a current in the world, an anti-God current. The ideals, the philosophies, and the ways of thinking of the world, if you're not going forward in God, it's inevitable you will be caught in the current of the world. It will change your thinking, your ideas, and your ideals. The things that you start to believe will be contrary to God because that's the way the world works. That's a back slider. You're not going forward. You're going back. There's no such thing as being static with God. You never stay in one place. If you're not going this way, you're going that way.

If you're a backslider, if you're a prodigal, I want to include you in the prayer. I was thinking, of the prodigal son when he was in that far country. The Bible said he joined himself to a citizen of that far off country. He made an alliance. He ended up in the pig pen. Some of you have made some alliances. Spiritually speaking, you're with the pigs, and you know it. It's only when that prodigal son said, "Man, I need to change my alliance. I need to change who I'm connected to. I'm going back to my father's house." He came back filthy, smelling like pigs.

The father didn't say, "Look, you get cleaned up. Then we'll do something." The father went and hugged his neck when he stunk of pigs. Hugged him and loved him in his filth. He didn't deserve that, but that's what he got. A robe was put on his back, a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, and they celebrated. He said, "My son that was dead is alive again." If you've joined yourself to a citizen of a foreign country, so to speak, of a far country, if you're away from God, Prodigal, it's time to come home. The Father is waiting. Come just as you are. You may stink like the pig pen, but you need to come.

Why don't you bow your heads and close your eyes, if you would, just for a minute? Only if you want to, of course. I think sometimes it helps us to sort of close ourselves in with God when we close our eyes. But again, that's completely up to you. I want to pray a prayer with you. In here, outside on the plaza, if you're ready to commit your life to Jesus Christ. Again, it's not about ritual or ceremony. It's not about adhering to some endless list of dos and don'ts. It's about relationship. It's about being washed clean of your sin and coming into a real, dynamic, recognizable relationship with your Creator. Jesus said, "The one that comes to Me, I will not cast out. I won't turn away." I'm going to give you some words to pray. That's all I can do. If you'll tie your heart around the words and in sincerity speak them to God, He'll hear you. Maybe put a hand on your heart. Let's pray out loud. Say,

Oh God, I come to You. Thank You for showing me mercy. Thank You for not forgetting me. Thank You for letting me hear this message today. Thank You for giving me the time to repent. I do repent. I turn away from sin. I turn to You. I know I cannot change myself. I'm trusting You to do that. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe He died on the cross to take away all my sins. I believe He was raised from the dead. Jesus, I embrace You now as my Lord and my Savior. Come into my life. Change me, Jesus. From this moment forward, I'm Yours, and I will follow You. Amen.