

God's Formula for Success in Times of Crisis

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“Here me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper.” 2 Chronicles 20:20, NKJV.

INTRODUCTION

No matter who we are, we will surely face a crisis sometime in our lives. It could be an individual crisis or a corporate crisis of some kind, but it will come.

Times will come when an unpredictable event or the unforeseen consequences of some event will require us to make decisions quickly, if only to avoid the negative effect or damage brought about by such an event.

All kinds of situations can trigger these crises. The loss of a job, a decline in the national economy, a state of war, an accident, sickness, the sudden death of loved ones, all can lead to a crisis.

Everyone, then, needs skills in coping with crisis. The need is so universal that theologians have even devised a system they call crisis theology.

But crises are not necessarily evil. Much good can come out of a crisis. At AIAS Theological Seminary in the Philippines there are many graduate students from China. One day in class, a teacher asked the Chinese students about the Mandarin word for crisis. The students replied that the Mandarin word for crisis is composed of two characters “Wei Zei,” symbolizing “danger” and “opportunity.”

The Chinese are absolutely correct. Crisis brings dangers, but it also offers opportunities. This probably is one reason why many Chinese are so successful in business, because they see opportunities behind every danger.

This morning we shall discover five biblical principles for crisis management—strategies for turning dangers into opportunities. Let us learn from the experience of one of the great kings of Judah; King Jehoshaphat, recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:1-30.

This narrative is a feel-good story. The ending is great. Having gone through the crisis, King Jehoshaphat emerged victorious (v. 24), richer (v. 25), happier (v. 27); the kingdom

became more prosperous and peaceful (v. 30); above all, God's name was honored and glorified (v. 29). How did these things come about? What strategies, if any, did Jehoshaphat employ to survive the crisis so successfully?

Let us turn to the story and see what we can discover.

“It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jeshoshaphat” (2 Chron. 20:1).

War always brings a crisis. The crisis may be intensely personal, and all the more so if you are the leader of a nation involved in the war.

This was no ordinary war. The enemy was a coalition, “a vast army” (v. 2, NIV) which was now about to surround the capital city Jerusalem. This required immediate action. Strategic decisions had to be made. If you were Jehoshaphat, what would you have done?

The Bible records that King Jehoshaphat's initial reaction was that he “feared” (v. 3). He was afraid.

We don't have much respect for a leader who is a coward. But fear is a normal reaction in times of crisis. Don't feel bad when you experience fear in a crisis. It was Julius Caesar who said that “no one is so brave that he is not disturbed by something unexpected.” Fear can even be positive if this leads us to God.

So with this in mind, we notice that later in this narrative the first command of God's spokesperson, the prophet Jahaziel, to King Jehoshaphat is, “Do not be afraid” (v. 15). It has been said that the counsel “Do not fear” occurs 365 times in the Bible, enough for each day's quota of fearful situations.

We believers are not exempt from fear, but we have a God to whom we can take our fears! This brings us to our first principle in dealing with a crisis:

I. SEEK GOD'S WILL FIRST AND FOREMOST

Here is the first key to the success of Jehoshaphat in this crisis. He “set himself to seek the Lord” (v. 3). This was not a half-hearted seeking. The words “set himself” denote intentionality, resolve, purposefulness, sincerity in seeking God. King Jehoshaphat also commanded the people to fast (v. 3), another indicator of the depth of the crisis and the intensity of this primary response—seeking God.

This first principle or strategy for surviving a crisis was not foreign to Jehoshaphat. Seeking God first and foremost when making decisions was natural to Him. You remember his experience with Ahab, the King of Israel based in Samaria? Let's go back to 2 Chronicles chapter 18 to review the story.

“Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab” (18:1). Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, was married to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. So the two kings are related by the marriage of their children.

Verse 2 tells us that King Jehoshaphat went for a state visit to Ahab in Samaria. He was received well by Ahab, who held a big state banquet for him. During the banquet, however, Ahab succeeded in convincing Jehoshaphat to go to war against the king of Syria over the territory of Ramoth Gilead.

In a moment of weakness Jehoshaphat hastily agreed to join the war. “I am as you are . . . ; we will be with you in the war” (18:3). Realizing later how unstudied and hasty his decision had been, he said to Ahab, “Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?” (18:6). This question shows the real Jehoshaphat. Whenever he had to make big decisions, he would inquire of the Lord.

But against the true prophetic voice of God’s prophet Micaiah, both Ahab and the reluctant King Jehoshaphat engaged the Syrians in battle. The result was a disaster. Ahab was killed, and Jehoshaphat himself narrowly escaped death. But his habit of seeking the will of God first and foremost saved the day for Jehoshaphat. Were it not for this, his unholy alliance with Ahab could have brought him fatal disaster.

“Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem. 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. 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.” 2 Chron. 19:1-3.

Jehoshaphat survived the crisis victoriously because he sought God sincerely. His was a God-first policy. He set his heart on seeking God.

II. FACE THE CRISIS BASED ON GOD’S AGENDA

The second secret or key to Jehoshaphat’s success through crisis can be gleaned from 2 Chron. 20:5: “Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, *in the house of the Lord.*” This response of Jehoshaphat to the crisis is amazing. This strategy is worth emulating. You see, the cause of this crisis was secular—political in nature. It would have been natural for Jehoshaphat to stay in the palace, consult with his military advisers, and strategize against the enemy in the war room. Instead, Jehoshaphat went to the temple! What a crazy idea! Jehoshaphat was not yet in such a desperate situation that he had to come to this “extreme” measure. From the human point of view, he had all the resources he needed to solve the issue.

In chapter 17 of 2 Chronicles, we are told that King Jehoshaphat was powerful (v. 12). Even the traditional enemies paid him tribute (vv. 10, 11). He had a large, powerful army

of 1,160,000 soldiers (2 Chron. 17:12-17). The morale of the people was high because of his social, educational, and judicial reforms. But instead of relying on these resources, he went to the temple and started solving the problem there.

In other words, he faced the crisis with an intention to fulfill God's agenda. He was determined to solve the problem in a manner aligned to God's will. God's will was the North star in his decision-making. God's presence was paramount to Jehoshaphat. "His heart took delight in the ways of the Lord" (17:6). He personally instituted revival campaigns that encouraged the people to follow God's agenda. For example, he instructed the judges whom he appointed to lead the people: "Thus you shall act in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and with a loyal heart" (See 2 Chron. 19:4-6, 9).

The commitment to face the crisis with the intention of following God's agenda was the second secret of Jehoshaphat's success. This will bring success to us as well. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." Prov. 3:5, 6.

Ellen White wrote:

"God was the strength of Judah in this crisis, and He is the strength of His people today. We are not to trust in princes, or to set men in the place of God. We are to remember that human beings are fallible and erring, and that He who has all power is our strong tower of defense. In every emergency we are to feel that the battle is His. His resources are limitless, and apparent impossibilities will make the victory all the greater." *Prophets and Kings*, p. 202.

III. PRAY SINCERE PRAYERS OF SURRENDER AND COMMITMENT

The third secret of Jehoshaphat is simple: prayer. We cannot overemphasize prayer. Prayer is absolutely necessary during times when we have to make crucial decisions. But the prayer of Jehoshaphat is no ordinary prayer. Let us read the prayer in 2 Chron. 20:6-12.

(6) "O Lord God of our Fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You? (7) Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? (8) And they dwell in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name, saying, (9) 'If disaster comes upon us—sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine—we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save.' (10) And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir—whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them— (11) here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit. (12) O our God, will You not judge them? **For we**

have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.”

What a prayer! This is a prayer of surrender—not to the enemy, but to God. King Jehoshaphat had power (he led an army of 1,160,000 soldiers). But He did not rely on his power or his wisdom. He relied completely on the Lord. Many a time it is in this aspect that we fail. When we come to the Lord in prayer, we come with “proposals,” expecting God to approve them. Not King Jehoshaphat—he trusted God completely. “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6).

I think God was very pleased with Jehoshaphat’s prayer. I can almost hear Him say, “Now I can take over; I can now carry out my plans; I can now fully fight the battle for Jehoshaphat.”

So we have seen Jehoshaphat’s first three principles for dealing with a crisis: 1. Seek God’s will first and foremost. 2. Face the crisis based on God’s agenda. 3. Pray sincere prayers of surrender and commitment. But in this narrative, these three principles are not yet the “tipping point” that turned the crisis into victory. It is the next principle, the fourth principle, that transforms the danger into an opportunity. The fourth principle, then, is

IV. OBEY THE WILL OF GOD EXPRESSED THROUGH THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

To see this in action, let us read verses 14-17.

(14) Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly. (15) And he said, “Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the Lord to you: ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s. (16) Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. (17) You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!’ Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you.”

This is the apex of the crisis. To King Jehoshaphat, this is the point of no return. What will he do with the expressed will of God through the prophetic voice of Jahaziel? I suppose many among King Jehoshaphat’s advisors tried to discount the authenticity of the messenger of the Lord. I can hear them saying, “You don’t have to listen to Jahaziel. Who is he, anyway? He does not have the credentials of a prophet like Moses or David. He has not done miracles. He doesn’t have much education. He also had quarrels with his wife sometimes.” By pointing to the prophet’s humanity, such people try to discredit the message. But God spoke through Jahaziel. This is the one thing that matters. The ultimate qualification of a prophet is God’s choice.

King Jehoshaphat may well have struggled as he made his decision. Should he listen to this prophetic voice? Finally, I can imagine him saying, “God said it, and I believe it. That’s enough for me. Let us follow the voice of God.”

That decision to follow God’s will expressed through the gift of prophecy led King Jehoshaphat to obey, even if the message might have seemed unreasonable, illogical, and irrational. Why? What was God’s specific command in response to the crisis? Read it again: “Go down against them” (v. 16). That’s normal. That’s expected. But the next commands, “Do not fight,” and “Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord” (v. 17), are beyond normal. From a human standpoint, this borders on the irrational.

If you or I had been one of the king’s military generals, we would likely have questioned the logic of such a strategy. Humanly speaking, it would be better to wait for the enemy to come closer to Jerusalem, where we could defend it, behind the walls. Logistically, it would have been perfect. Their war provisions were stored there. Their wives and children were securely sheltered there. But if the defenders go out of the city, they will be vulnerable to the attacks of the invading army. Besides, why face the enemy if you don’t intend to fight? Preposterous!

But the king decided to follow the specific command of the Lord. I imagine it was not a popular decision. But if you are with God, you will always be in the real majority. I can almost hear the king say, “Let us follow the Lord, even if we don’t fully understand.” This was the decision that turned the danger into an opportunity. Faith triumphed over fear. This is precisely the reason why King Jehoshaphat spoke this famous verse: **“Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper” (2 Chron. 20:20).**

Many times, God will challenge us to make decisions based on faith so that He can perform miracles in our lives. The prophet Elisha told Naaman the leper to dip seven times in the Jordan, and when he obeyed, he was healed (2 Kings 5:1-19). Gideon and his 300 were miraculously victorious because, although at first he was skeptical, he believed and obeyed God. Joshua led the Israelites in a series of processions around Jericho city in faith, with the result that the walls of the great city came tumbling down. Obedient faith leads to miraculous victories.

In the early 1900s, the Seventh-day Adventist movement was threatened from within by powerful and popular leaders who began to teach that God was a kind of impersonal force in everything and everyone, and that every human being was a “living temple” where He dwelt. This took away the personal nature of God and undermined our sanctuary doctrine. The faithful leaders did not know what to do, but in 1903 God gave Ellen White a vision of a ship headed straight for a dangerous iceberg. The crew heard an authoritative voice say, “Meet it!” They steered straight into the iceberg at full power, struck it with a terrible force, and the iceberg broke up. The ship was damaged, but not beyond repair, and it moved on through. Recognizing the application to the church, Ellen White immediately wrote to the faithful leaders, encouraging them to take a firm stand

and meet the false teachings firmly. They obeyed the prophetic counsel, and the church was saved.

Obedient faith turns a crisis into an adventure. The Bible tells us of Jehoshaphat, “And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, and they went out before the army and were saying: ‘Praise to the Lord, for His mercy endures forever’” (2 Chron. 20:21).

See what faith can do! A choir leads an advancing army into battle—a battle that they do not even fight! Only those who have faith can devise such a strategy.

Obedient faith results in complete victory. The Lord did it all for the faithful. Not a single Israelite sword left its scabbard, not a single arrow flew from the camp of Israel, not a single drop of Israelite blood was shed; the Lord of hosts did it all for them. (See v. 24.)

“Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were DEFEATED” (v. 22).

The Bible tells us how this happened: “For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another” (v. 23).

On occasion, as in this case, obedient faith results in abundant material blessings. The Bible says that when the people went to gather the spoils of war, there was “more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering the spoil because there was so much” (v. 25). A whole army collecting valuables for *three days*, and they could not carry it all. Incredible! What a miracle!

Obedient faith results in a contented, joyous life. “Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go back to Jerusalem *with joy*, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies” (v. 27).

Obedient faith results in peace and rest. “And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side” (v. 30, NIV).

For the remainder of Jehoshaphat’s 25-year reign as king, no one made war against him.

Finally, obedient faith brings glory and honor to God. “The fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel” (v. 29).

What a successful evangelistic campaign it was! This is the essence of all mission—that God’s name is honored and glorified.

Crisis indeed has become success. Danger has been turned to opportunity.

This brings us to our last principle for crisis management:

V. RETURN THE GLORY, HONOR, AND PRAISE TO GOD

Many times we emerge successful from one crisis but are overcome by the next. Why is it that some of our victories are not sustained?

Although in the latter part of King Jehoshaphat's life he experienced business failure (again because of an unholy alliance, this time with the evil King Ahaziah, the successor of Ahab [see 2 Chron. 20:35-37]), overall his life was a success. The Bible says, "He walked in the way of his father Asa, and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chron. 20:32). The last secret for Jehoshaphat's success in a crisis is this: He returned the glory, honor, and praise to God after each victory.

"Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go back to Jerusalem with joy. . . . So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord" (vv. 27, 28).

Crisis should not only end in success, it should end in worship.

It might have been normal for Jehoshaphat to celebrate the victory at the palace. But where did he go instead? To the temple! Celebration it was indeed, but it was not done on the dance floors, in the wine shops, or on the parade grounds after the procession in the main streets of the city. It was a celebration of worship in the temple. This made the success a sweet-smelling savor for the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Let's review Jehoshaphat's secrets in overcoming the crisis. They constitute God's formula for success in our crises.

1. Seek God's will first and foremost.
2. Face the crisis based on God's agenda.
3. Pray sincere prayers of surrender and commitment.
4. Obey the will of God expressed through the gift of prophecy.
5. Return the glory, honor, and praise to God.

The Lord of Hosts fights our life's battles. But He needs us to seek His will sincerely, rely on Him completely, obey His word absolutely, and attribute to Him the glory and praise continually, so that He may grant us success. Will you follow Jehoshaphat in these principles, that God may lead and guide and bless you also? Jehoshaphat's challenge to his people is a challenge for us, too:

“Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in His prophets and you will be successful.” 2 Chron. 20:20, NIV. Amen.