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What to Do When Bad News Comes

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Series: Living Legends - Part 3

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What to Do When Bad News Comes

Dear Heavenly Father,

Because Your love for us is so deep and rich and wide and pure that You could not stand to see us die in our sins, You took the most precious thing You had, Your only Son, and sacrificed Him on our behalf that we might have eternal life.

May we never take You for granted. May we never take Him for granted. May we never take our salvation for granted. May there never be a day when we don't awaken in the morning, with tears of joy and gratitude for how great Thou art.

And, Father, when we consider the circumstances in our lives and begin to complain, may we go back and recognize that nothing matters in the light of the eternal salvation that is ours.

We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

The recruiting sergeant did his job quite well. He convinced Billy Samuels that joining the Army would be the thing to do. He convinced him that first of all, this was his way to see the world. Secondly, it would be his way to prepare for a good career field. And, thirdly, it would be his most logical approach to long-range security because he had a limited education. During the course of the day, they told him about the commissary privileges, the housing privileges, and the medical privileges. Before the sergeant was through, Billy saw a world of benefits just waiting to be taken. Good salary. Good insurance. Good retirement. Good chance for advancement. And it was all true.

There was only one problem. Sergeant Matthews, the recruiter, forgot to tell him that being a soldier involved more than benefits. He didn't tell him about basic training. He didn't

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tell him there would be some traveling to some not-so-exotic spots, and that the travel arrangements might not always be made according to his liking. But worst of all, he neglected to explain to Billy that in the event of war, he would be expected to go out on the front lines and, if need be, give his life for his country. You heard me—die. In essence, you see, that's what a soldier does and that's what a soldier is.

They told him all about the benefits. They just forgot to tell him about the responsibilities. And so, once the glamour and the glitter of the recruiting posters and the slick slide show vanished, and he was a bona fide recruit in basic training, reality set in. It wasn't that he would not have enlisted had he known. It's just that he wasn't prepared for the shock that came when the rose-colored glasses were removed. So, he didn't do so well when the bullets started flying and the drill sergeants started bellowing. He wanted to go back and read the fine print again and find out how he got there.

That recruiter was only doing his job. His motives were good. He was anxious to get Billy into the fold, and he figured once he was there, he would have time to adjust. But, you see, that really wasn't a fair thing to do. He should have been told the facts up front.

I hope by now you have grasped the analogy. The Christian life, in essence, is the enlistment of a man or woman into the ranks of the King's army. Once there, he or she will be confronted with a new type of warfare, a kind of warfare that will most likely get more and more intense as life goes on. So, in case you're here and you are young in the faith or even if you're here and considering enlisting, I would like to be totally honest with you. Don't be taken in by the campaign posters or the petty promises of media evangelists who urge you to "make a decision" and enter a world of prosperity and ease where there are no problems.

Beloved, that is not the gospel. It is not what faced the disciples when Jesus returned to heaven. It is not what faced the apostle Paul once he pledged his allegiance to Christ. It is not what faced the early church. It is not what faced the apostle John. It is not what has faced the church of Jesus Christ throughout the annals of history, either. You see, the Christian

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enlists in the army of God when he realizes that sin has corrupted the connection between himself and God, and that a sin-bearer, God's own Son, paid the price to deliver him from the wrath of God. Upon receiving the free gift that God gives him of salvation, that Christ's death and resurrection makes available, the Christian immediately becomes the recipient of an eternal home free from sin, free from pain, and free from sorrow. Those are the benefits!

You might call it an eternal retirement village, God's style. Perfection forever. But, beloved, that comes in heaven. In the meantime, God has to prepare you for heaven, and He wants to use you on earth. So, He gives you His indwelling Spirit as your Comforter; and He gives you His eternal Word as your blueprint and your shield; and then He sends you out into the battlefield of reality to do business with the prince of this world, who despises God, despises Christians, and has made a good living for himself out of massacring them. He spends all day every day, the Scripture says, sauntering to and fro, looking for Christians to devour—to decimate their faith, to destroy their witness, to dissipate their hope. He's a "Christian hater." And, beloved, the more intense you become about serving God, the more intense he becomes about destroying you. Mark it. The Scripture records his objectives so clearly in the book of Genesis, in the book of Job, in the book of Matthew, and throughout the Bible.

So, I think we ought to be honest with ourselves, and even honest with those of you who might be considering enlisting in the army by receiving God's Son. You see, Jesus was honest. Paul was honest. They didn't compromise truth for the sake of numbers. They told it exactly like it was. The Christian life, beloved, is a life of commitment. The Christian life, beloved, is a life of discipline. The Christian life, beloved, is a life of warfare. Real, bloody, warfare. It is fought in the spirit realm, but the battleground upon which it is fought is your marriage, your business, your children, your health, your wealth. Satan has access, whenever God allows it, to those areas of your life, and he will, whenever he can, attack you in one or more of them in an attempt to dishonor God, and to discredit your faith. It's called spiritual warfare. God, on the other hand, will sometimes allow that testing because He wants to teach you dependence

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and help you to grow.

So, it's a war. It's a war for the souls of men. And it's a war for the allegiance of men and women whose souls are already committed to Christ. It's clearly explained in the New Testament, and the Old Testament clearly portrays it, by depicting God's chosen people when they had their physical battles with the nations, roundabout. Those things were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world would come, and we had best pay attention to what they say.

So, now we move into chapter 20 of II Chronicles. I don't know about you, but I move there with a sense of excitement, but also with a sense of fear and trembling, because here, as graphically as anywhere else in Scripture, God portrays for us the reality of the Christian life. He uses a man named Jehoshaphat. He uses a splintered remnant of His people we refer to as Judah, and an unexpected invasion by their neighbors as a backdrop to paint a three-dimensional image of what it's like to have a life of victory in the midst of a life of warfare.

Lord willing, we will divide this study into four lessons. The title of the series will be: Blueprint for Battle. The four lessons from II Chronicles 20 will look like this:

What to Do When Bad News Comes (verses 1-5)

How to Pray When Hope is Gone (verses 6-13)

How to Walk in the Midst of the Conflict (verses 14-23)

How to Rejoice When the Battle's O'er (verses 24-30)

Today, we will embark then, on the first leg of our journey. We will be looking at the first five verses of chapter 20, and we will see the believer when the initial shock of an enemy attack becomes apparent. So, today's study is entitled: What to Do When Bad News Comes. Our outline for this lesson is:

I- An Awesome Reality (verse 1)

II- A Frightening Report (verse 2)

III- A Natural Reaction (verse 3)

IV- A Supernatural Response (verses 3b-5)

I- AN AWESOME REALITY

Our passage in II Chronicles 20 begins like this:

Now it came about after this that the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, together with some of the Meunites [Ammonites], came to make war against Jehoshaphat.

(II Chronicles 20:1 NASB)

“It came about after this...” after what? After Jehoshaphat had just called the whole nation to repentance, had appointed spiritual leaders to oversee the flock, and had given those leaders a blueprint for success. That’s what it followed. Chapter 19 ended with Jehoshaphat giving these words:

...Act resolutely, and the LORD be with the upright.

(II Chronicles 19:11 NASB)

Now in the words of a once-famous American politician, “Let’s make one thing perfectly clear.” An enemy attack is not a sign that you are out of the will of God. It is, more often than not, an indicator that the opposite is true. It usually means you are in the will of God, and Satan can’t stand it; and that, you are mature enough to handle the test, so God allows it. If someone tells you that something bad happened to you because you are not walking with God, ask him about Jesus. Ask him about Paul. Ask him about Abraham. Ask him about John. Ask him about Moses. Ask him about Stephen. Ask him about Joseph. And don’t forget to ask him about Job.

Job was a man after God’s own heart. Remember? And God had poured out the windows of heaven on Job in an act of love. So confident was He of Job’s maturity, that He, Himself, tapped Satan on the shoulder one day and He asked him if he’d ever considered applying a little heat to that guy. Satan, always wanting to comply with such a suggestion as that, fell for the thing, hook, line and sinker. He began accusing Job before God and he dared God to let him at Job long enough to prove that Job was only serving God for what was in it. God agreed. You say, “Why did He do that?” He had a deeper purpose. God knew that once Job had passed through the fires of that test, he would come out as refined gold, pure and beautiful. So, the heat the enemy intended to use to fry Job, God intended to use to give him an understanding of his God that he never would have had before. Satan won the battle. God won the war. And

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the book of Job stands as a monument to the dual purposes of God and Satan when trouble strikes the Christian.

So, it came about after this, that is, after Jehoshaphat and the people had returned to the center of the will of God, and the people were walking in the ways of God, and were in fellowship with God, that the enemy attacked. This attack then, was a symbol of God's approval, not of His wrath.

Now who was it that suddenly turned-on Jumpin' Jehoshaphat and his happy warriors? If you'll look at a map, you'll see that it was a combination of three surrounding nations who formed an alliance. The purpose of this alliance was to destroy God's people and take over their territory. In other words, it was the natural elements that surrounded God's people that formed the tools Satan used to attack them. Notice, too, it was a combination of those elements, not just one. It is also interesting to note, that Scripture seems to support the fact that the onslaughts of Satan usually come in waves, one right after the other. You've noticed that, haven't you?

And doesn't any good offensive? If you're a soldier, if you're fighting a war, you try to catch the enemy off guard, and then you attack when they least expect it. Then, just as they are trying to re-gain their strength to fight back, you hit 'em again, and you hit 'em again, and you hit 'em again. You don't give them time to run for fresh supplies and more ammunition and more troops. This can be substantiated in spiritual warfare. Look at Satan in the garden. Look at Jesus in the wilderness. Satan waited until He was at His weakest point as a human, then bam, bam, bam! Three straight onslaughts without a breather. Another illustration goes back to our previous reference to Job. Here was a satanic offensive allowed by God to test someone whom God really believed in. Have you ever considered Satan's military strategy?

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

Now it happened on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,

that a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were

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plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,
and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew
the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have
escaped to tell you.” (Job 1:12-15 NASB)

When did it happen? A time of celebration. Their guard was down. All that made them happy seemed to be unshakable. Then the doorbell rang. Totally unexpected. Bad news. Real bad news. Job, you just lost one of your greatest assets. All your oxen, all your donkeys, and all the servants who attended them. All—a total wipeout. No way to recover. When this guy, Satan, gets a little bit of freedom, he goes for the throat. Now look at the successive blows.

While he was still speaking, another also came and said,
“The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep
and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have
escaped to tell you.”

While he was still speaking, another also came and said,
“The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on
the camels and took them and slew the servants with the
edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you.”
(Job 1:16,17 NASB)

This man, in less than three minutes lost everything he had; his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his camels, and all his servants but three. Not a good afternoon. You talk about a sudden business reversal. You talk about oil prices falling and taking “good” men into bankruptcy. It’s not a new tactic to test the saints. Here was the John D. Rockefeller of the Mideast. One day his kingdom was the shining star of the business world. It was written up in the Wall Street Journal. The next day he had absolutely nothing and Wall Street fell. Job was left with nothing. You say, “But at least he had his family.”

While he was still speaking, another also came and said,
“Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine
in their oldest brother’s house,

“and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness
and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the
young people and they died; and I alone have escaped to
tell you.” (Job 1:18,19 NASB)

Bad news! This man’s whole fortune was wiped out in a

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matter of minutes, and before he could pick up the phone and dial his kids to tell them, it rings again with the news that all of his children were gathered in one place, a tornado had come, ripped the house to pieces, and every single child, seven sons and four daughters, were killed instantly.

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. (Job 1:20 NASB)

He worshiped. We'll talk more about that later. But at least we can see that Satan's ploys often involve taking those things closest to us and in a series of relentless blows, one right after the other, battering our faith, hoping that it will shatter us, hoping our testimony will be weakened, hoping our confidence in God will be broken.

So, whenever you think your life is being touched by a series of continuous problems, or continual reversals, take heart. It simply means the enemy sees you as valuable enough to attack, and God sees you as mature enough to test. Remember Job. "While he was speaking..." While he was speaking..." "While he was speaking..." The enemy will usually come at you in waves. Recognize it. And when it begins to happen, fall down before a loving God and worship.

II- A FRIGHTENING REPORT

So, keep Job in mind as we return to II Chronicles. Jehoshaphat, obviously, from his response, is expecting no warfare at all. That's not a good mode to be in, incidentally. He is in the throes of a time of great spiritual prosperity and great national rest. The last thing he wants is to go back to battle. The last war he fought was a fiasco. Remember? So, there he is in the palace watching the 6 o'clock news on Channel 7, when the doorbell rings. Maybe it's Isaac and his wife inviting us to dinner, he might have thought. Maybe. Maybe not. He opens the door.

Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, out of Aram [Syria]; and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi)." (II Chronicles 20:2 NASB)

From out of the north, all of the surrounding nations to the east of Judah had banded together, gathered their forces, and

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were gathered at the western shore of the Salt Sea preparing to attack. It was wilderness country, so it would be a war that was virtually impossible to defend against. And the odds were overpowering. But, beloved, remember, that is the only way God could get their attention to reveal His power in a new and fresh way so they could not claim a portion of the glory. So long as they might be able to withstand the onslaught, God would only be glorified to the degree of their inadequacy. But, beloved, when all hope is gone; it's either God or nothing. So, the degree to which Satan is free to test you is often the degree to which you are teachable. That is, the heat in the furnace will be limited by God's eternal thermostat at a place unknown to Satan, a temperature God knows your maturity will allow. He will not test you beyond your ability to bear it. God has promised that.

III- A NATURAL REACTION

Now I don't know what you would have done. I don't want to surmise. I do know what I would have done had I been Jehoshaphat. I've been in situations like this recently, so I know how I respond. My stomach aches, head spins, hands shake and I think there's no way out. After all this, it's over. Utter panic. It's a natural reaction. Now I want you to remember the difference between a reaction and a response. A reaction is the flesh yielding to the emotions in a test. Your child comes in and says something wrong. You lose your temper, fly off the handle, and later regret it. That was a reaction. You were overpowered with the emotion of anger, and you reacted naturally. A response, on the other hand, is a calculated answer to a situation, in accordance with the Spirit's control of your will. You made a choice. It is self-control under God's control. The child comes in and says something you don't like. You pray. You take a deep breath. You think it through. You plan a proper response. It may only take a mini-second, but you plan your response. It may be a spanking. It may be a series of questions to find out what he really meant. But it is a godly, controlled answer, not an emotional, uncontrolled one. That's the difference between a reaction and a response.

Fear is a natural reaction. It's what you do with the fear that will tell the tale. If you yield to it and allow it to control you, you're a goner. But, if you acknowledge the fear and turn

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to the Lord, the fear turns to faith, and Satan takes off like a wounded deer. Verse 3 tells us what Jehoshaphat did when bad news came.

And Jehoshaphat was afraid... (II Chronicles 20:3 NASB)

Does that make you feel better? Don't get so pharisaical. You would have been afraid, too. Here is a respected leader in God's Kingdom; he answers the door and finds out that every enemy he's ever had has gotten together and formed a team. And they are gathering at his borders to annihilate his people. He was afraid. That wasn't sin. What he did next would determine the kind of man he was. You would be able to tell the fiber of his character by what he did when bad news came. Verse 3 tells us.

And Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD; and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

So Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the LORD.

Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD before the new court, and he said... (II Chronicles 20:3-6a NASB)

IV- A SUPERNATURAL RESPONSE

Here's what you do when bad news comes. You acknowledge your fear, and immediately—that's the key—immediately before the enemy has a chance to launch his offensive in your spirit, you turn your attention to seek the Lord. You acknowledge, without batting an eye, "Lord, this one's too big for me." Hallelujah. That's what He's been waiting for. Something you can't handle. Now, He has your undivided attention.

Not only did Jehoshaphat turn immediately to seek the Lord, he didn't try to go it alone the way some of us do. He didn't play the role of savior. He wasn't equipped and he knew it. He turned to the Lord, and then he turned to the people, and he said, "Gang, we're in this together. We've got to seek the Lord together. I want you to fast and pray until further notice." Then he called a nationwide prayer meeting and had every living soul who could make it to Jerusalem put their donkeys in overdrive

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and head for the church house. Corporate prayer power is the missing ingredient in many parts of the body of Christ today. The enemy was attacking, and it was time for God's people to find out what God was about to do.

They came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord. Here's where Jehoshaphat's preparation paid off. Do you remember? He sent teachers into every village to teach the Word of God, so they would know what to do when the enemy attacked. Then, after his somewhat embarrassing trip to the battlefield, he returned and personally went through the whole countryside, and brought them back to the Lord. So, the people were spiritually alert and equipped with the Word. They remembered Jehoshaphat's words: "Let the fear of the LORD be upon you, and be careful what you do..." (II Chronicles 19:7).

So, when the civil defense whistle began to blow, and the bell at the church house began to peal, the folks in Judah knew what to do. It was time to corporately seek the Lord. The church in our day should take note, because God's plan includes corporate worship and prayer in the light of an enemy attack. When even one person in the church is suffering, the whole body should feel the pain. And the whole body, or at least parts of the body, in neighborhoods or study groups or Bible studies, ought to fall to their knees in absolute worship, and fast and pray until they come to an understanding of what God is about to do.

And this was no "prayer-and-share" kind of assembly where everybody prayed a sermonette, and assumed God was impressed. God's man prayed for the whole congregation, and the whole congregation stayed on its knees and worshiped. In our next lesson, we'll look at how Jehoshaphat prayed, and we'll try to see a pattern for how to pray when hope is gone.

But for now, our objective is to see what our initial response ought to be when the phone rings, and it's bad news. Or the doorbell rings, and it's bad news. Or the mail comes, and it's bad news. Or the kids come home from school, and it's bad news. Or the boss calls, and it's bad news. Or the doctor calls, and it's bad news. Or the banker calls, and it's bad news. What do you do? Well, according to Jehoshaphat, here are some things you do.

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1- The first thing we do is fall on our face before God. Before you call a soul, before you think a thought, before you say a word. Fall to your knees and worship.

2- Then we allow the rest of the body of Christ to pray with us and for us. Don't be the Lone Stranger. That cheats the rest of the church out of seeing God work and cheats God of glory that is His.

3- If need be, fast, and continue to pray until you have some kind of insight from God into what it is He is trying to do in your life. Don't clamor for Him to remove the problem. Quietly ask Him to explain the problem. You see, His reasons are higher than ours. His ways are majestic. He has a plan.

4- Remember the ways of Satan and the ways of God. Remember Job. There may be another jolt coming. It usually comes in waves. This may only be invasion #1. But, beloved, you are about to know God as you have never known Him before. He is equipping you to be a soldier, and He's preparing you for an eternity where knowing Him is all you'll care about.

5- Finally, memorize Job 1:20-22. It tells what a man after God's own heart does when bad news comes. It reads like this:

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head,
and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD
has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

(Job 1:20-22 NASB)

He did not blame God. The Scripture records, that though his whole world was gone in one fell swoop—all he had dissolved—he was virtually left alone, but he did not blame God. Instead, what he did was fall on his face and pray. He said, "Lord, I had nothing when I was born. Why shouldn't I leave that way?" He understood that God owns all, and so, he was able to see that he shouldn't blame God when life gets tough. And, beloved, neither should we.

Let's pray.

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Our Father and our God, we don't like subjects like this. We don't like to teach them. We don't like to hear them. But we live in a real world with a real enemy. He's walking to and fro seeking whom he may devour. He is constantly accusing us in Your presence, waiting for an opportunity to let the sky fall, thinking he will destroy our faith. Yet, all the while, you know the fiber that's there through your Holy Spirit, wants to take us, and by breaking us, make of us something special. So, you give him some freedom. You let him have his way to a degree.

Oftentimes, Father, we just complain and murmur and wonder. May we crawl up into You with Jehosophat and simply fall down and worship. And, like Job, may we consciously be aware that the Lord gives and the Lord takes. Blessed be the name of the Lord. And may we not sin by blaming You.

To Jesus, be praise and honor and glory, forever.

Amen.

An Assignment on Coping With Spiritual Warfare

1- Take a concordance and look up the words, battle, war, warfare, etc., and begin a list of the times in the Old Testament where national conflicts were described, as well as the New Testament comments on spiritual warfare, and put the verses together so you can see the pattern of how Israel's wars were portraits in the physical realm of our battles with Satan in the spirit realm.

2- Read and re-read the first chapter of Job. Try to answer the following questions:

- a- How did God feel about Job? (verse 1)
- b- Where was Satan when God questioned him? (verse 6)
- c- What had he been doing? (verse 7)
- d- Who initiated the conversation about Job? (verse 8)
- e- What was Satan's accusation against Job? (verses 9-11)
- f- What was God's response to Satan's accusation? (verse 12)
- g- Could Satan have tested Job without God's permission?

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3- Write a short, modern story, using Job 1:13-22 as your story line. Use modern people, and modern trials, but illustrating the same principles.

4- Memorize Job 1:20-22. Make it your initial prayer the moment bad news comes.

5- In preparation for the next lesson, read and memorize Jehoshaphat's prayer in II Chronicles 20, verses 6-13.

6- Look for the common denominators in Job's prayer and Jehoshaphat's.

7- Begin a prayer list of those you know in your church and in God's greater family who are enduring spiritual warfare. Stand before the Throne of Grace daily on their behalf until the battle's o'er.

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