

Faith and Encouragement

“Amen,” said Lucius in unison with his church brothers. He felt better for having asked to meet with his church leader, Elder Price, who had also asked the prison ministry leader, Brother Curtis, to sit in.

Lucius had been scared that he was about to be fired. He had been working full time as a mechanic at Larry’s Automotive for 18 months.

Lucius had been out of prison for four years but had not been able to get full time employment until Larry’s Automotive. His jail record had slammed many doors in his face. Lucius had been good with cars before he had been locked up for six years, four months, and thirteen days.

Brother Curtis had suggested that Lucius take auto mechanic classes. It had taken a while, but Lucius had achieved his goal of becoming a certified automotive technician. Now he was about to be fired for allegedly stealing things from the shop. But why would he throw everything he had worked for away by stealing money and tools?

“Surveillance cameras?” Lucius repeated Elder Price’s question. “Larry’s is a small shop, but we do great work and have lots of loyal customers. There are cameras on the outside but not inside.”

Larry was meeting individually with auto techs. Lucius’s meeting was tomorrow, Monday morning.

“Don’t be afraid, my brother, God has gone before you,” said Elder Price. “He has already been fighting your battle.”

“Thanks,” said Lucius. “I believe it. I will text you both with the good news.”

- 1.** *Why do we have fears about tomorrow?*
- 2.** *What are some negative consequences to living in fear of tomorrow?*
- 3.** *How can our relationship with God through Jesus Christ help us overcome fear?*

Tomorrow, Go!

2 Chronicles 20:13-17, KJV

13 And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

14 Then 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, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation;

15 And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

16 To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.

17 Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.

2 Chronicles 20:13-17, NIV

¹³All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD. ¹⁴Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly. ¹⁵He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. ¹⁶Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. ¹⁷You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.'"

When King Jehoshaphat of Judah received news that a "vast army" (2 Chron. 20:2) of Moabites and Ammonites from the other side of the Dead Sea and Edom was

coming to make war against Judah, his immediate response was to seek the Lord. Instead of putting his faith in earthly alliances, as he had done before with the evil King Ahab of Israel (see 18:1), Jehoshaphat led the people to put their faith in the Lord.

While everyone was assembled before the temple, the king led the people in a prayer for God's help. Jehoshaphat's prayer recognized that the Lord is the God of all creation who rules over all kingdoms of the earth; that He is the one who drove out the enemies of Israel and gave them the promised land; and, finally, that God's people are weak and powerless against the great multitude coming to war against them. Therefore, Jehoshaphat and the people entrusted their future to God (see 20:9).

All the people of Judah stood before the Lord, including the men with their wives and children. The writer states that "all the men of Judah . . . stood there before the LORD" (vs. 13). The great number present before the Lord in His dwelling place, the temple, indicates that the entire nation was seeking the Lord's face. As the entire nation stood before the Lord, He graciously responded through the mouth of Jahaziel, "a Levite and descendant of Asaph" (vs. 14). The Lord's response was that He would take care of the battle. It was not theirs to fight: "'the battle is not yours, but God's'" (vs. 15).

The people of Judah would show their faith in God by doing three things. First, they would march out to face the enemy and take positions opposite them. That would show their determination and faith, regardless of what happened. Second, they were to "stand firm" in those positions (vs. 17). If they did, they would see the Lord deliver them. And third, they were to show no signs of fear or discouragement, remembering instead the most important thing about the upcoming battle: "'the LORD will be with you.'"

4. *What alarming news did King Jehoshaphat receive, and what was his response?*

5. *What did King Jehoshaphat do when all the people*

were gathered in Jerusalem?

6. *What was God's response to Judah's faith in Him?*

7. *What three things did God direct the people to do that would show their faith?*

Early in the Morning They Left

2 Chronicles 20:18-20, KJV

18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

19 And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

20 And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

2 Chronicles 20:18-20, NIV

¹⁸Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD.¹⁹Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

²⁰Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."

When the people first gathered before the temple of God, they didn't know how God would respond. Nevertheless, the people of Judah knew that their only hope was found in God alone. So, the reader can imagine how pleasantly surprised Judah was when God responded favorably. As soon as the people heard the voice of the Lord, their faith was shown in two further responses: worship and obedience.

First, their worship is demonstrated in the fact that "Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground"

(vs. 18). All of Judah followed Jehoshaphat's worshipful prostration as they also fell down in worship. All of Judah was in such awe and wonder that God would deliver them from such a dire and hopeless situation. Further, two clans of the Levites from Kohath and Korah led the people in praise and sang "with a very loud voice" (vs. 19).

Second, Judah was obedient to do exactly what God had commanded them to do. Consider how desperate the people of Judah were when they heard a great army was coming against them. Judah knew that they had no chance to fight a battle against this army in their own power. Their only hope was to put their faith in God. After God promised to fight their battle, Judah's faith led them to obedience, for the next day they obeyed God's command to go and "early in the morning they left" (vs. 20).

In earthly terms, Judah was on a death march that morning, heading toward a great army that was much more powerful than their own. Yet, Judah had faith in God, inspired by King Jehoshaphat, who cried out, "Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful" (vs. 20). It was the people's faith in God that ultimately allowed them to triumph over their enemies.

In the battle itself, Judah took no part. All they did was sing praises to the Lord (vs. 21). God defeated the army by turning the Moabites and Ammonites on themselves and causing them to destroy one another (vs. 23). When the army of Judah arrived to fight, they found "only dead bodies lying on the ground" (vs. 24).

God did everything. Judah didn't even have to lift a sword.

8. *What were Judah's two responses after God promised to fight their battle for them?*

9. *How does Judah's response to God's promise display faith in God?*

10. *What did Judah have to do to defeat their enemies?*

11. *How did God defeat Judah's enemies?*

Death at 68

Everyone celebrated Stephanie's 68th birthday—except Stephanie. Fear stopped her from enjoying her birthday because she was obsessed with dying, certain she would die in her 68th year of life. Her mother and sister-in-law died at 68. Her thoughts about her pending death consumed her.

Stephanie lived in fear her whole 68th year. She thought she may die in an accident, and so she refused to go places with her children and grandchildren. She indulged in her favorite foods in case this would be her last chance to eat them. She even wrote her obituary and planned her funeral.

Stephanie's 69th birthday arrived, and she still feared her death was near. But this time, her daughter, Jasmine, noticed her lack of peace on her birthday. As she asked her mom about her feelings, Jasmine discovered her fear of death. Her daughter didn't invalidate her fears but asked her to get her Bible.

Jasmine lovingly had her mother read Matthew 6:25-34 and discussed with her how much God cared for her. Then, Jasmine asked her mom to read God's instruction about tomorrow in verse 34. Stephanie read, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Jasmine reminded her mom how much God loves her and wants her to give Him her anxieties and fears. Stephanie asked God to help her not fear death and learn to enjoy each day with gratitude.

Gradually, Stephanie had less and less fear of dying and was able to enjoy her next seven birthdays with her family and friends. She lived one day at a time, knowing God was there every step of the way.

12. *Why is fear of death a reality for many people, even Christians?*

13. *What other verses do you know that can encourage yourself and others who fear death?*

14. *What would be your response to someone's fear of death?*

Trust, Not Fear

Fear of chronic illness, lack of financial resources, academic failure, accidents, and many more negative circumstances can keep us from trusting God for tomorrow. It is easier to fear the unknown than to trust God's character and faithfulness in all circumstances. But as David said in Psalm 56:3-4, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. . . . What can mere mortals do to me?"

► *Write in your own words a declaration before God that you will trust Him in all circumstances. For example, "Jehovah Jireh (God my provider), when I lose my job or my home is destroyed through natural disaster, I will trust that You will provide for my daily needs. I will not be afraid of lacking anything that I need."*

KEY VERSE

As they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

—2 Chronicles 20:20b, KJV

As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."

—2 Chronicles 20:20b, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of January 22 through January 28

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Ezekiel 11:17-21—A New Spirit and Heart.
- Tues.** John 9:17-25—A Transforming Testimony.
- Wed.** Leviticus 20:22-26—Be Holy, for God Is Holy.
- Thurs.** Psalm 51:1-15—A Prayer for Transformation.
- Fri.** Ezekiel 37:1-14—God Breathes New Life.
- Sat.** 1 John 3:14-24—From Death to Life.
- Sun.** Romans 12:3-8—God Gives Different Gifts.