



Jehoshaphat's Six Steps to Victory

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AM & PM Assemblies

Introduction:

One of the most meaningful Bible passages to my own walk with the Lord is **Romans 7:14-25**. I know that many good Christians have argued and discussed all the different aspects of this passage ad nauseam. Some argue that Paul is talking about before he was a Christian, some after. Some believe Paul was using himself as a real example, some merely as a hypothetical example, and some believe he's really talking about someone else. Whenever I hear all the arguments and I look at the passage, all I know is "been there, done that." I know the feeling Paul expresses in that passage. I know the despair of trying to overcome a sin only to fall back into it again and again and again. I know the cry, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" I have made the same cry in many ways and with many words. And I take comfort from this passage that there is an answer. Jesus will deliver me. And I have faith that He will. However, for all the comfort this principle gives me, sometimes I need more. I wonder how Jesus accomplishes that victory. What do I need to do while Jesus does that? Recently, while doing some other study, I was reminded of an amazing Old Testament story that I believe provides the answer to this very question. It is a story of Jehoshaphat's victory over Ammon, Moab, and Edom, or rather of God's victory over them. We find it in **II Chronicles 20:1-30**. In this story, I think we can examine 6 steps we need to take if we want to have victory over our enemy, sin.

Discussion:

I. Step #1: Admit you are powerless.

- A. In **II Chronicles 20:12**, Jehoshaphat cut through all the peripheral issues and landed on the heart of the matter. They were powerless against the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. Jehoshaphat went on to say that they didn't even know what to do in this situation.
- B. I know this is well into our story and you may be wondering why I listed this as the first step. The reason is because we see it in the story when Jehoshaphat admits his powerlessness to God. However, for him to even be seeking God, he had to admit this to himself very early in the story. In fact, I believe we see this personal admission in **II Chronicles 20:3**. Jehoshaphat was afraid because he could not defeat the enemy.
- C. I want you to recognize what Jehoshaphat admitted. He did not admit that he had only a little power. He did not admit that he did not have enough power. He did not admit that he needed a little nudge or even just a lot of help. He admitted that they were powerless. They had no power, no might against their enemy. They could rally every bit of strength they might muster and it amounted to nothing.
- D. We must admit the exact same thing. It is exactly what **Romans 7:14-25** demonstrates to us. We have no power. In the face of sin, we cannot win. We will definitely lose. We are fighting an enemy so strong that every bit of strength we might muster would amount to nothing.
- E. Why not take some time to examine this? Oh, I know there are some sins you have conquered. But what about those you haven't. Spend some time thinking about all you have done to fight that sin. What has it accomplished? Maybe some days of white-knuckling your way in the fight. But eventually you've just gone right back to your sin. You're left wondering why. The problem is because all along the way you think you are powerful in the face of that sin. If you just try harder, you can overcome. But Jehoshaphat recognized it didn't matter how hard he tried, he was powerless. And so are we. We just need to admit it like he did.

II. Step #2: Believe God can give you victory.

- A. Despite what you may be thinking, admitting you are powerless does not mean the story is over. Admitting you are powerless doesn't mean you are hopeless. It doesn't mean you might as well just give up and give yourself over to the enemy. Jehoshaphat did not surrender to Ammon, Moab, and Edom. He didn't send envoys of surrender with the white flag to the enemy. No. He turned to God. He came to believe that while he and Judah were powerless against the enemies, God was not. God was and is powerful. God will be victorious.
- B. In **II Chronicles 20:6**, Jehoshaphat said, "In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you" (ESV). He then recounted the victories God had already given His people. He came to believe that God could and would be victorious.
- C. Do you believe that? Do you believe that God can and will give you victory? **I John 5:4** says faith is the victory. Why? Because faith in God as the victor focuses us in the right path that accomplishing the victory. So long

as we believe that we and our power are the victory or so long as we believe God will not be the victor, we will not have victory. However, building up our faith in God as victor leads to victory.

- D. Think about it. Has not God already won the victory for us? Has He not already conquered sin and death in the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ? We already know how it ends. God is the victor. What we need to do now is build up our faith in Him and His already secured victory. We can believe God will be victorious and trust God to grant us victory. As **Romans 8:31-32** explains, God has already made the ultimate sacrifice so that we might be victorious. We can trust Him to provide everything else we need to be victorious as well.
- E. With all of this in mind, we see Jehoshaphat's exhortation to the people in **II Chronicles 20:20**. He told the people to believe in the Lord and His prophets, really meaning to believe in the message God had given through His prophets, and they would succeed. He did not encourage them to believe in their armor. He did not encourage them to believe in their prowess. He did not encourage them to believe in their weapons. He told them to believe in the Lord God. Faith in the right One is the victory.

III. Step #3: Seek the Lord in every way possible.

- A. When Jehoshaphat recognized his own powerlessness and came to believe that God was the power that could win the victory, the text says, "Then Jehoshaphat...set his face to seek the Lord..." (**II Chronicles 20:3**, ESV). Not only did Jehoshaphat seek the Lord, Judah assembled to seek the Lord.
- B. When we grasp our own powerlessness and God's power, we suddenly become aware that the very most important thing to do today is to connect to God. We may need to get to work today, we may need to develop a relationship with someone today, we may have some other responsibilities today, but our survival in the face of the enemy demands that above all else, we seek the Lord.
- C. How did Jehoshaphat and Judah seek the Lord? They fasted (**vs. 3**). They gathered at the temple to worship (**vs. 5**). They prayed (**vs. 6**). What can we do to seek the Lord? The same kinds of things. We need to do whatever we can to make conscience contact with our God.
- D. You know the list of things we can do. We mention them in all kinds of sermons and all kinds of contexts. We can spend time in God's Word (**Psalms 1:1-2; 119:9-16**). We can pray (**I Thessalonians 5:16-18**). We can fast (**Matthew 6:16-18**). We can assemble with the saints (**Hebrews 10:25**). We can spend time with the saints outside of the assemblies (**Acts 2:46-47**).
- E. The key, however, is not in these actions themselves. After all, how many times have we told ourselves if we just read our Bibles more or prayed more or went to church more we could overcome some sin and failed? The key is our motivation. Allow me to illustrate with attending the church's assemblies. We often get into arguments about how many of the congregation's assemblies we have to attend. That argument demonstrates the wrong motivation. Too many of us look at the question of the assemblies wondering how many assembly attendances per week we have to give to God for Him to give us heaven in return. Do we have to go once? Twice? Three times? That's the wrong attitude. We think that somehow we can impress God with our attendance. But we can't. Remember, we are powerless. Our assembly attendance does nothing for us if we think it is somehow supposed to impress God into rewarding us. The purpose of the assemblies is not to show God how powerful we are at "going to church." Rather, it is about seeking God. We know we are powerless and our strength will only lead us to death, but God has life. We need to connect to Him. If we don't, we'll die.
- F. If you're like me, one of the problems you have is when you mess something up, you want to fix it before you let anyone know. You're okay with admitting a screw-up as long as you've corrected it. How many Christians are willing to admit what they struggled with years ago? Too often, I want to do the same with God. I want to fix things. I want to defeat the enemy. I want to prove myself strong. Then I'm willing to come to God and let Him know how bad I messed things up earlier. Because I hope all the work I've done since I messed things up will make him more willing to accept and reward me. But it doesn't work like that with God. I can't fix what I've messed up. We don't come to God showing him all our Bible study, prayer time, assembly time, fasting, and whatever else we've done to connect to see if He is impressed by all we've done. We seek God through these avenues because He is the one that can fix us, who is powerful, who gives victory.

IV. Step #4: Do whatever God says.

- A. Whenever I preach or write about our powerlessness and God's gracious victory, it never fails that someone will become uncomfortable. "I'm afraid," I've been told, "that if people hear what you have to say about being powerless, they may believe they don't have to do anything." I understand that fear. I have had that fear. However, I've come to understand that it is unwarranted. The fact is when someone truly admits their own powerlessness, comes to believe in God's power, and seeks the Lord, they will not think they just sit down and do nothing. In fact, they'll pursue quite the opposite course.

- B. Notice what happened with Jehoshaphat. God spoke through Jahaziel. He told Jehoshaphat and the Jews to not be afraid, but instead to go out against the enemy on the next day. God told them where to go. And He told them what to do while they were there. He told them not to fight. Instead, He told them to simply stand firm and hold their position (**II Chronicles 20:13-17**).
 - C. What did Jehoshaphat and Judah do? Did they say, "Wait a minute, we're powerless, God is powerful. We don't have to do anything. We'll just sit here in our houses. God will take care of it." No. They did exactly what God told them to. Think for a moment about how hard it was to do that. Can you imagine walking out to face an enemy that you know can destroy you and simply do nothing? There were no speeches about how small armies can do mighty things with the right motivation and weapons. There were no attempts to give aid to God and nudge His plan along. There was only surrender to God and His will.
 - D. If we want victory over our enemy, we do not sit on our backsides saying God will do everything. Rather, because we know He is the power, we do whatever He tells us. Even if we can't understand how it will bring victory. Interestingly, this is the step we spend most of our time preaching about. We spend most of our time talking about what God has told us to do. And we need to spend time here. Sadly, though, because we have spent so much time here we have often neglected how what God expects of us really fits within the victory we so desperately desire. Because we spend so much time here, many of us have tacitly come to believe our victory is about our work. And that belief makes our work absolutely useless because all of our work in that situation is really about us having faith in ourselves. We've already learned in this lesson that we are powerless. When we do what God tells us to because we want to show Him how powerful we are, we'll always fail. Instead, we do what God says because we are surrendering our life to Him. He is the power; we are not. So we just do what He says. We go where He sends. We teach what He speaks. Why? Because God's way works. We've read about other battles in which God gave different instructions. For instance, Joshua was to march around Jericho 13 times in 7 days, then shout and blow the ram's horns, watch the walls fall, and then go up and take the city (**Joshua 6**). Gideon was to whittle his army down to 300 and then have them carry trumpets and jars with fire in them. At the right moment, they were to blow the trumpets and break the jars (**Judges 7**). Whatever God says, just do it. He is the power; we aren't.
 - E. You know, if I had been Jehoshaphat and all of my people were standing before the enemy, I would have been tempted to have them bring along their swords and shields. I would have been tempted to think that I needed to show at least a little of my own strength. How many times have I thought I could do better than God's instructions? How many times have I thought I had come far enough and could handle the next skirmish without seeking God? But Jehoshaphat didn't. He simply did what God said as he continued to seek God through worship, prayer, and song.
- V. Step #5: Watch God win the victory.
- A. There is not much to say in this step other than watch God win the victory. In **II Chronicles 20:17**, God told the Judeans to sit tight, hold their position, and just watch God bring the victory. Then in **II Chronicles 20:22-23**, that is exactly what they did. They watched God give the victory.
 - B. We need to do the same. We need to understand that as we seek God and surrender to Him, He will provide victory. Our battle is not like Jehoshaphat's. It is not two armies standing on the battle ground fighting a war that may be over in hours. Sometimes our victory takes more time. Sometimes less. Sometimes God's promises come true in our lives quickly, sometimes slowly. But in either event, as we seek Him and surrender to Him, they will come true. We can watch God win the victory.
- VI. Step #6: Acknowledge and bless God for the victory.
- A. In **II Chronicles 20:26**, the Judeans gathered at what came to be called the Valley of Beracah. The word "beracah" means blessing. Because there they blessed the Lord. Then they traveled back to Jerusalem to the house of the Lord, the temple. What is this about? This is about giving thanks to God for the victory He had accomplished. They had known their own powerlessness. They knew God's power. Though they did the praying, fasting, and worshipping to seek God and though they did the obeying, they knew that God had done for them what they could not do for themselves. Therefore they blessed and acknowledged God.
 - B. When we have gained a victory, we need to recognize that God was doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. When we turned from temptation, we need to recognize the power of God exerted in that. I know I have all too often made a terrible mistake. I have thought that when I won a victory, I got to bring that victory to God like a medal that I could hand to Him as a gift from me. "Look at me God, I was tempted to lust, but I looked away. Look at me God I was tempted to lie, but I told the truth. Look at me God, I was tempted

to blow up in an angry outburst, but instead I was patient." I have thought these were little trophies that I could store up and bring to God as my gifts to Him. But that is just not true.

- C. Could Jehoshaphat come to God saying, "Look at us God, we beat the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites for You. Aren't you proud of us?" No. Instead, he came thanking God for the victory. When you have won a victory, it is not your gift to God. It is God's gift to you. Quit thinking you need to win the victories and then bring them to God so He can thank you for your service. Instead, come to God asking for Him to win the victories and then thank Him when He does. When you sought God, done what He said, and won the victory, remember that it was God who won that victory, not you. Recognize that God is doing for you what you cannot do for yourself. As the proverbialist said, "In all your ways acknowledge him..." (**Proverbs 3:6**, ESV).

Conclusion:

Let me assure you that this plan really does work. It is fail proof because God is fail proof. Satan wants us to doubt that God will bring us the victory. He wants us to believe that we need to step out and go our own way, prove ourselves powerful, take pride in ourselves. He wants us to think it is awful to depend on someone else, to admit we are powerless. But we are powerless, whether we will admit it or not. God is the only one powerful enough to gain the victory, whether we come to believe it or not. Seek the Lord. Just do what He says. Then watch Him do for you what you can't do for yourself. Watch Him win the victory.