

Down,



but not out:

Jehoshaphat comes full circle

By James D. Hernando



You don't have to live long to meet or hear of one. They are painfully plentiful. I'm referring to prominent spiritual leaders who have fallen from the pinnacle of prestige and influence to the depths of despair and disrepute. In their wake they leave young Christians staggered in their faith, the mature shaking their heads in disbelief, and unbelievers scornful.

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But a story that often eludes us is what happens to those who have fallen. How many actually recover and return to productive ministry? How many shrink away into obscurity, guilt, pain and insecurity, forsaking all hope of ever being used again by God? I have met a few former ministers who fall into the latter category. It is for them I tell this fascinating Old Testament account of Jehoshaphat's full circle.

Jehoshaphat — A king with a commendable heart

In 2 Chronicles 17 through 19 we encounter King Jehoshaphat, Judah's fourth king after Solomon's kingdom was divided. The chronicler is quick to tell us whether kings were either good or bad as measured by their obedience to the law of God. Often, we are also told of their spiritual influence and effect on the nation.

Not surprising, then, we read that "the Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father David's earlier days and did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father [Asa], followed His commandments, and did not act as Israel did" (17:3,4, NASB).

This commendation is followed by a statement that God established Jehoshaphat's kingdom and blessed him with riches and honor (v. 5). The chronicler then issues a supreme compliment when he writes that Jehoshaphat "took great pride in the ways of the Lord and again removed the high places and the Asherim from Judah" (v. 6).

It seems that the good king had so internalized the law of God that to obey became his passion and pride. The account goes on to tell how Jehoshaphat sent officials (scribes perhaps) throughout Judah teaching "the book of the law of the Lord" (v. 9). Among the good

kings of Judah, one is hard pressed to find any with a more commendable heart or praiseworthy beginning.

The spiritual decline of a great king

Jehoshaphat's obedience and passion for God brought security for His kingdom. We read that "the dread of the Lord was on all the kingdoms of the lands which were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat" (v. 10). Further, God blessed Jehoshaphat's kingdom with wealth, honor and an enormous standing army with few rivals (vv. 12-19).

But the opening verse of the next chapter (18:1) contains an incredible statement: "Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor; and he allied himself by marriage with Ahab." What? That's right! Jehoshaphat made an alliance with Ahab, the wicked Baal worshipper whose wife, Jezebel, tried to kill all the prophets of God (1 Kings 18:13).

Why would a righteous king do such a thing? Perhaps he thought such an alliance would bring even more power, prestige and security for his kingdom. However, in reading the rest of the chapter, you find out that the alliance turned into disaster.

After a battle took Ahab's life and almost cost Jehoshaphat his own, Jehoshaphat is confronted by the prophet Jehu who rebukes him with these words, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord and so bring wrath on yourself from the Lord?" (19:2).

Unbelievably, between 2 Chronicles 17:6 and 19:2, Jehoshaphat had experienced the disintegration of his spiritual life. Whereas he once took pride in following the ways of the Lord, now he loved and aligned himself with God's adversaries.

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**God is the
God of the
second chance,
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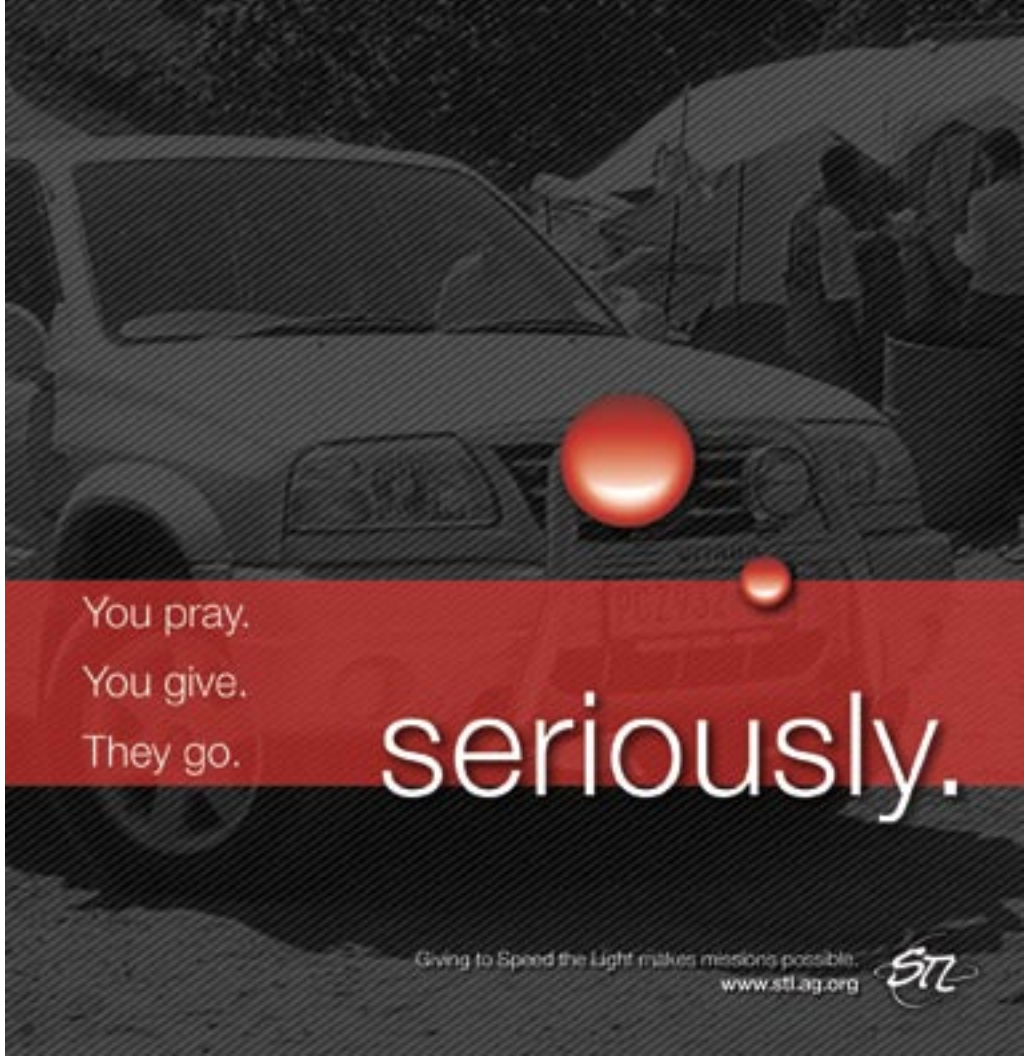


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Down, but not out



The great restoration

It is difficult to understand how one who had such a heart for God could fall so low. However, the prophet Jehu after issuing his rebuke went on to tell Jehoshaphat that God still saw good in him. After all, he had worked hard to rid Judah of idolatry and he had “set [his] heart to seek God” (19:3).

What follows in 2 Chronicles 19:4-11 is a summary of the last years of Jehoshaphat’s reign. Remarkably, it looks very much like what he did at the beginning of his reign (17:1-9). Read his counsel to the judges in the land (vv. 6-11) and you hear a king whose heart is again set ablaze with the righteousness of God and zeal to obey it.

God of the second chance

The story of Jehoshaphat underscores the fact that God continually

seeks those whose hearts draw near to Him; He is looking for those whose delight is in the law of the Lord. His blessings follow obedience — obedience borne not out of ritual but out of a relationship of faith.

However, the story also demonstrates that even the most ardent follower of God is not immune from backsliding. What is odd is that the road to spiritual decline is often paved with power, pride and success. The words of Proverbs 4:23 leap out and caution us, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (NIV). Above all, God desires to have your heart; it is the one thing that He does not and cannot own. It must be freely given by His true followers.

Finally, God knows the hearts of all, even that of a backslidden

king — one who had made alliances with God’s worst enemies. Despite Jehoshaphat’s spiritual decline, God saw in the hidden recesses of Jehoshaphat’s heart the smoldering embers of a desire to seek and serve Him.

God is the God of the second chance, and He works with us despite our imperfection, sin and rebellion. His goal is to restore us, to bring us back into fellowship with Him. His goal is that our lives and ministry might again be fruitful, as fruitful as when the fire of consecration first burned and we began to serve Him. ■

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"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

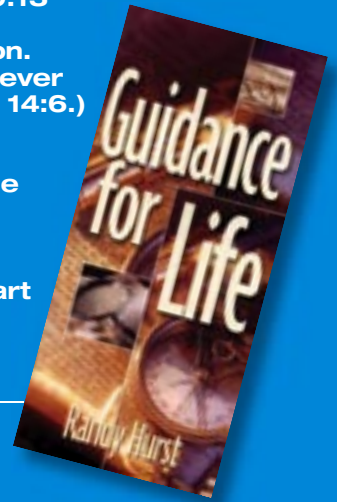
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

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