

What to do when we don't know what to do

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[0:00] Every now and then in life, you'll have experienced this already, and if you haven't, it'll come to you soon enough. You come to a position where you don't know what to do. You don't have a clue what to do in a particular situation in which you find yourself. Find yourself in a time of trial or decision and you find yourself stuck and humanly speaking, unable to find a way out. We can't find the way through in the current situation. If you find yourself in that place this morning or this evening, in fact, I don't know why I keep saying this morning, this evening, we don't have an evening service, for whatever reason, you don't know what to do. And by that, I don't just mean that some of the more simple things, there's a lot of things in life I don't know what to do about. I'm not very practical. So when the car breaks, I can tell you it is broken. I have no idea how to fix it. Earlier on this year, there was rain coming through the ceiling in one of our front rooms. I could see there was a problem. I have no idea what to do, but I can find someone who does know what to do about it. Talking about the situations, although those are legitimate concerns, the situations where we come to where we are completely stuck. We don't know who to turn to. We have no idea what to do.

If you find yourself in that position this evening, you'll be pleased to know, or hopefully slightly encouraged to know that this has often been the case for God's people. This is not the first time, and God's people are not spared these kinds of situations. This message is in fact called, what to do when you don't know what to do? Because here King Jehoshaphat and the people of Israel are completely stuck in a time of crisis, in a time of peril and fear. And he words it bluntly in his prayer.

It's become one of my favorite prayers in the Bible. Verse 12, the first bit there he says, we don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you. Those words have captured me this past while.

I don't have any idea what to do, but I'm looking to you, the one who can do anything. If this resonates with you in some way this evening, my prayer is that this message is in some way an encouragement for you to seek him and keep your eyes fixed on him, and live well in the meantime, which can be the real challenge. If you are not in this position this evening, my hope and prayer is that this is somehow a help for when that time does inevitably come. May this help us to seek the Lord and keep our eyes fixed on him when we don't know what to do, whatever that particular issue or situation might be. And hopefully in this kind of meaty chapter that you could do a lot with this, I'm not going to be able to go into every single detail in here, but just some encouragement of what to do in those kinds of situations as we look at Jehoshaphat and the people and what they did together.

And first of all, when we don't know what to do, it sounds simple, but seek the Lord in prayer. Seek the Lord. It's the big thing that comes out in those first couple of verses. What happens there, right at the start of the chapter, these groups, these armies banded together and come against the people of Israel. Quite interestingly, off the back of Jehoshaphat leading the people in spiritual reform and coming back to the Lord again. Is it any coincidence that just at that moment, the enemy attacks? And here they come against Jehoshaphat for a battle. Fortunately, someone comes and tells Jehoshaphat, there's a massive army coming your way, just so you know. And when they get this troubling news, verse 3 tells us that Jehoshaphat was afraid. Understandable. If I had these armies marching against me, I would be afraid as well. It's a fearful situation to be in.

[3:52] He was afraid. And what's his response? It's great. Brilliant. Best response you could ever do. Jehoshaphat was afraid, and he set his face to seek the Lord. Just listen in these verses how often that word comes up. He was afraid. He set his face to seek the Lord. Proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord. From all the cities of Judah, they came to seek the Lord. That's his instinctive response. I don't know what your response is when a crisis comes your way. I would love to say every single time something comes up that my instinctive response is just to seek the Lord. But often our responses can look a little bit different. When some bad news comes our way, some relational difficulty, family breakdown, some bad diagnosis, some financial whack comes out of nowhere, or some other issue in your life, you let go from your job, whatever it might be. When that news comes our way, panic often sets in first, doesn't it? Panic. Or trying to control the situation, trying to immediately fix it. Now, that's a legitimate thing to try and do. But we tend to just panic and respond, maybe in unhealthy ways sometimes, to escape it all, to do something, take our minds off. What if every time something like that came up, our instinct is to seek the Lord, to go to Him first, to try and solve it. Not go to Google. Very bad idea. Don't Google stuff ever. You get down all kinds of horrible rabbit holes and think you're, you know, terrible things are going to happen. Actually, just cry out to the Lord in prayer. Let that be your first port of call. How often is prayer the last port of call when we've run out of all our other options? But His immediate thing is to seek the Lord in this situation. It's to intentionally go looking, to find Him, to cry out to Him for wisdom, for help, for strength, for direction, to admit our need for Him in the first place, to seek God.

We are not in control, but He is the one who is, so we go to Him. To seek the Lord in prayer ourselves, and to seek the Lord with God's people. I love that He gathers everyone in Judah and says, we need to seek the Lord together. So much of biblical prayer is corporate, isn't it? It's together with God's people, because we are not just saved as individuals, we're saved to a family, to a body, to the church. And we get to call out to God in worship and prayer together.

Sometimes we can try and fix it on our own, but what we need to do is press in to the church and say, please, seek God with me, to bring people into your crisis, into your situation, into that time where you don't know what to do. You say, I need God, and I need His people, and I need you to pray for me. Now try and hide it or deal with it in your own strength. Sometimes churches face situations like this. You may have had a painful season in our church before. Difficult things happen. The church need to come together to seek the Lord together in a moment of crisis. Make seeking God in prayer a priority when you are stuck in this way. If you are stuck this evening, if you are fearful, afraid for some reason. He's always there, and we seek Him, we find Him. He's always near, and we can call out to Him first and foremost. And they pray this incredible prayer, and as they're praying, they're remembering who He is and what He has done in the past for them as His people.

We remember why He's worth seeking. They talk about His power and His ability to do anything. Imagine you're one of these people, and you're terrified, because they're all gathered together, men, women, children. It's quite a powerful scene. They're gathered together, seeking God, crying out to Him in prayer, and the enemy is at the gates. The armies are coming here, and, you know, you can't withstand them. You need to know that the God that you worship, the God that you are crying out, actually has the ability to do something about this. In the same way, you don't want me coming to fix your car. You know, you want somebody who's got the ability to fix it, to come and deal with a problem. We need a God who is more powerful than the enemy that comes to the gates, than the crisis that we face, than the circumstances that we find ourselves in. He said, O Lord, God of our fathers, verse 6 there, as they're gathered together, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you.

Did you not drive out the inhabitants of the land before your people of Israel? He's done this before. He's got the power to do it, and He's actually done it before. The God who sits on His throne in the heavens and rules over the nations, that's our God. That's the God we know. That's the God we worship. And He rules, literally rules over these kingdoms. These kingdoms that are coming at us, they've got nothing on our God. And He's driven them out before. He can do it again.

[8:54] He gave it forever to the descendants of Abraham, your friend. Let that sink in for a moment. The God who rules over the kingdoms, who rules over the world, who rules over the nations, His creation that we see around us, is also the one who is your friend, if you've trusted in Him. Only our God is like this, that we can call Him both Lord, God who's seated on this throne, but He's your friend.

That's why you can sing songs like, what a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, because He's also that. He sees us. He cares for us. He loves us as He did Abraham, as He did the people of Israel, as He does His people today. He hears us and He cares about all of our circumstances in life.

They're calling on His name. They're calling on His promises that He would keep this people. He would always preserve a remnant of this people. He would keep His promises to His people. He would keep His covenant with His people. So they're praying to Him and they're calling on His character and His promises. I say, Lord, have you not said that you will keep us? If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before you, for your name is in this house, and cry out to you in our affliction, and you will hear and save.

He would not see them destroyed completely. He would see them disciplined. He would see them corrected by some of the enemies that came to them. And He told them that. He warned them beforehand.

He said, if you go into the land and you obey and you listen and you, you know, it will go well for you. But if you don't, I will judge you and discipline you as your loving heavenly Father would to turn you back again so that you would seek me again. They're calling on His promises. In fact, they actually said, I wonder if some of them wondered this sometimes. They weren't allowed to invade these people beforehand. I wonder if a few of them were going to go, I wish we had. I wish He'd let us invade them. Then they wouldn't be coming to attack us. But they're remembering God didn't let us invade these people before. So Lord, just, you know, please, you execute judgment on them. And they admit their helplessness. For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us.

[11:10] We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. What a prayer to lead the people in. And this is the king. I try and imagine not being, obviously, you know, we're in a different situation now from the people of Israel, but I try and imagine like a modern politician or a modern king just calling everyone to go and seek the Lord and admit he doesn't have the answers. Not trying to sort of dodge the questions, right? Just, I don't have the answers. We are really in trouble here. We are powerless against this great horde. We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you. To many around Jehoshaphat, to many in our day, this would seem really weak. But do you see how Jehoshaphat's weakness is really his strength? It becomes his strength because it causes him to cry out to the one who is stronger, the one who is able to do anything, the one who can help in any situation. It causes him to seek God. Anything that causes us to seek God more than we did before, even if it's painful, even if it's a trial, even if it's difficult, is in a sense good for us. And please don't take that as being a careless statement about people suffering in any way, but often these things cause us to seek God in a way that we didn't before.

In this time of crisis and need, he says, we don't know what to do. Our eyes are on you because we know you are able to do anything and we know the kind of God that you are. In your time of need, seek the Lord, the Almighty God who is also your friend and your Heavenly Father. If you've trusted in Him, if you've trusted in Christ, remember who He is and what He is able to do.

Secondly, listen to the Word of the Lord. What you have there in verses 13 down to 17 a bit is this situation where they're seeking God and they're crying out to Him, they're praying, Lord, help us.

As it says there with their little ones, their wives and their children. And they have this moment in verse 14 where it says, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jehaziel, the son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Giles, son of Matanite, a Levite by the sons of Asaph in the midst of the assembly.

And he brings this word from God. He says, do not be afraid. Do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the incentives as you will find them at the end of the valley east, the wilderness of Jeril. So he tells them to go down. But you will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed.

[14:01] Tomorrow go out against them and the Lord will be with you. What you have in this passage is a word from God. It's basically a cocktail of Old Testament promises. It's a fantastic word that is brought to them about how God would be present with them. They do not need to be afraid. And one of those phrases is almost exactly the same as when they were at the Red Sea. And they are once again in a stuffed situation. Humanly speaking, they've got no hope. Sometimes, I don't know if any of you, I'm sure many of you were, were brought up in church like me, like I was Sunday school, youth group, all the things. And sometimes these things lose their effect. I let them lose their effect on me. But try and picture the people of Israel at the Red Sea having just been freed from the Egyptians. Superpower. They finally got through. They've seen all the wonders. They've seen all that stuff. And then they get hit with the Red Sea. So a sea in front of them, and they've got a mighty horde behind them. Not too dissimilar from this situation. It's the same problem. But there's, humanly speaking, we can't do anything. We're in real trouble here. And Moses says a similar thing to them. He says this, fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians, you will never see again today. You shall never see again, for the

Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent. This is one of those situations where the action of faith, if you like, is to just believe. There's other times they literally have to go to battle. There's other times they have to do what probably felt like a strange thing, just march around Jericho for a few days until it collapses. These kinds of things. They just had to believe that God was going to do something in that. In this situation, it's like the Red Sea. Just stand and watch the show. Just watch what God is going to do on your behalf. Sometimes there's those situations where he just calls us to watch. This battle is mine. I'm going to deal with it. You just watch, and you just believe what I've told you. It's not, reminds me of actually what it means to really become a Christian. How do I get to God? I don't make my way to, I can't make my way to, I can't make my way to. The only way for me to get to God is to look at what God has done on my behalf through his Son, through Christ. I can't work my way to him. I can't fight my way to him.

Nothing I can do to earn my way to him. But he has already won the battle. He has defeated the powers of sin and darkness. He's defeated the enemy through the cross, through Christ dying on the cross, through Christ rising from the dead again, opening the way to God. And what do we have to do?

Behold. Look at his saving work on our behalf. Trust in him, and trust in him for our salvation, for our forgiveness of sins. He's defeated the enemy. We need to trust in him in this way.

If you're not a Christian here tonight, and I know very few people here this evening, so I'd say this with no agenda whatsoever, but if you're not, look to Jesus to be made right with God.

[17:08] Believe in what he has done for you in his life, and dying for all the wrong you've done, rising again to new life. And we can be right with him. We can be saved by him from the judgment we deserve and have life forever with him.

And there are times in our lives, and you maybe as a seasoned Christian know that feeling where you just, there was nothing you could do. There's no human resources. There's nobody else you could turn to. But God fought that battle on your behalf, whatever it was. He provided what you needed.

He saw you through that trial, whatever it was. But whatever the case, we are to, as these people do, listen to the Word of God. We, this is quite a unique situation here with this prophet bringing the Word, I would say. But we have the Word of God every day that we can delve into. In the midst of our challenges, and our crisis, and our trials, it's in front of us there. What does God have to say about my situation? What does God want me to do in the midst of this situation? And come and, with His people, explore His Word together. The enemy in your time of trial, and crisis, and fear would have you detach from the church, would have you isolate yourself from God's people, and from His Word, and from all those means of grace that we use, and that we know. But that's the time when we need to press in even more, because we need God, and we need His people, and we need to be listening to Him, and His Word as we read it, as we hear it preached, as we study it with other people.

God is using those moments to teach us, and shape us, and mold us to be more like Christ. It's an opportunity to press in, not to retreat, but to go in further, press in more. Press on to know the Lord, as the Word says, when we don't know what to do. Listen and wait for Him.

The next day, more than that, they seek the Lord, they listen for Him and His Word, and they continue to praise and worship. In our times where we don't know what to do, when we are panicking, when we are struggling, when we are depressed, and we're anxious, and we try to find the way forward, we keep praising, we keep worshipping anyway.

[19:27] After they hear this Word that the Lord has brought to them, what's their immediate response? They praise, they worship. Verse 18 says, As soon as they heard this Word, Jehoshaphat bowed his head with a face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshiping the Lord. And the Levites, Kohathites, Korites, stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice. I love that extra detail, just for us there. We're not just praising Him, we're going to praise Him loudly, because of what He has told us.

In from His Word. And they continue to do so. They rose early in the morning, and they go out. And they prepare a sort of worshiping army to go forward.

Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, believe in the Lord, and you'll be established. Believe as prophets, you'll succeed. When He had taken counsel of the people, He appointed people to sing. Like going out to a battle, He's appointed people to sing and praise Him, and holy attire. And this is their battle cry, as they go out. Give thanks to the Lord, for His steadfast love endures forever. Because they've experienced this. They've experienced this in the past. They've seen His steadfast love demonstrated to them in the past, and they're, they're going, He's going to do it again. He's going to do it again.

And what's amazing about this, is the battle has not yet been won. The battle has not yet been won. It's not happened yet. They've been told it's going to happen. But it's not actually happened yet. And they're already praising and worshiping Him, because He said He's going to do it.

So we're going to do it. And this is so often the walk of the Christian life, is it not? We hold on to the promises of God that in some ways have not yet been fulfilled. We can rejoice, because He's made these promises to us, that we are going to be with Him forever, that He's going to be present with us wherever we go, and whatever we do. And that there, that all things are working together for our good, for His glory, and that He might make us more into the image of Christ. It's not over, but they're praising already. It's why we as God's people can continually rejoice. Do you ever get puzzled by those phrases where it says, rejoice in the Lord always? Again, I say rejoice. Like, in my mind, I sometimes want to say, well, I'll rejoice in the Lord sometimes, you know. When things are going well with me, and when things are going as I planned them, and when things are going how I hope they're going to go. But it definitely says always. You can check. It says, give thanks in all circumstances.

[21:50] It's all these things. We can do that, because even though around us, things feel chaotic and out of control and hard. And we know that God is keeping His Word and keeping His promises, and that the future is incredibly bright for His people. Keep praising and keep worshiping Him anyway, because we are in Christ. And in one sense, we cannot be defeated ultimately, because Christ has defeated the enemy and has taken away our sin.

When we praise and worship Him in the midst of it all, I confess that too often in my mind, I think I'll be able to praise and worship once this is over, once this problem is solved, then I'll be good, then I'll be okay. He says, no, praise Him in all circumstances and worship Him, believing Him, trusting His Word, marching heavenward, thinking the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. So give thanks to Him now. His love never ceases toward His people.

And they continue to praise as they see the victory, as in the midst of all this confusion and self-destruction going on amongst their enemies, and as they continue to take the spoil and all those things following on from verse 24, to the point where they, on the fourth day, they assembled in the valley of Berakah, which means blessing, for there they blessed the Lord as they saw the victory that had come their way. And as they do this, as they continually praise other peoples around them hear, and they too begin to fear the Lord, because they see that the Lord had fought for His people, not because they were the strongest, not because they were the best, far from it. They were in a crisis and in a difficulty, and they saw the Lord fight for them, as was so often the case for His people.

Pray that our lives as Christians and churches have such an effect, not that necessarily see this, but the way we live our lives and the way we praise Him in the midst of trials and crisis and difficulties, the way we go about our day-to-day, that people just look at us and they don't really see us, but they see someone at work in us. They see a mighty God and a powerful God, and there's something that just draws them towards us. There's something about these people, there's someone at work in them, as we praise Him in all kinds of circumstances. Praise and worship Him anyway.

And finally, just a shorter point right at the end of this large chapter. When you don't know what to do, continue to obey the Lord, and also obey Him after the victory, if I can put it that way, after the solution has been found, even after you have been delivered in that way. The people obeyed the Lord in what He commanded them to do. After we see this in the verses following about Jehoshaphat's reign, that he largely obeyed the Lord. I don't know if you've read through Kings and Chronicles much, but you can almost get caught in a depressive cycle when you read about these kings.

[25:11] And it's the kings, and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and he didn't take away the Asherah poles and all the idols and all the altars. And then he died, and then his son took over, and he also did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. And then occasionally this one king just kind of pops up, and you go, oh, great. He'd sort of, to a certain degree, obeyed the Lord. Jehoshaphat is one of these kings where you could say, as we read here, like his father Asa, he did not turn aside from the law, verse 32, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord, and so on. And in many ways, he obeyed, and the people too, but we also read of some disobedience. Verse 33, the high places, however, were not taken away. The people had not yet set their hearts upon the God of their fathers.

And Jehoshaphat, verse 35 to 7, did what he'd done before, where he partnered with a wicked king in a way he should not have done. And he's actually prophesied against in that part, and said, because you've joined with Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy what you have made. And the ships were wrecked, and were not able to go to Tarshish. It feels like a sort of record scratch on the reign of Jehoshaphat, like that can't be how it ends, can it? But what we're reminded is that Jehoshaphat, godly as he was, is like us. Jehoshaphat is a king who is a sinner, and he got it wrong as well, and reminds us that there's only one true king. There's only one truly good, righteous king who always did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and that was Jesus. And he is the one who perfectly obeyed in our place, and he is the one who, as we've thought about, died and rose on our behalf.

But what he does remind us to do is to seek to obey him in all kinds of our ways. It can be easy, once the victory is over, to become complacent, as we saw with the people of Israel, to slip back into sinful habits and distancing ourselves from the Lord. Sometimes it's in a time of convenience, in a time of comfort, can be the time when we slip back, can be the most dangerous position to be in, spiritually speaking. And it's important that we keep our eyes fixed on King Jesus, and seek to follow him, to know him, to press on to know him, to fix our eyes on him, the author, perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despised the shame, and he is now seated in his kingdom at the right hand of the Father. We are not saved by our obedience, but we seek to obey because of what Christ has done for us.

So in those situations when you don't know what to do, and if you're there this evening, seek him in prayer with his people, remembering who he is and what he has done in the past.

Seek him with the Lord's people together. Continue to praise and worship him before, during, and after any of these kinds of situations you find yourself in, and follow and obey him all your days. And start young. It's great to see people younger than me in this church here this evening. Fantastic. As young as you can, start following the Lord, and make it your goal to walk in his ways and obey him. You will never regret that walking in his ways. It's not just for the older people or the folks that are beginning to lose their hair like myself, but for as young as you are, put your trust in Christ and follow him now. When you don't know what to do, and in all areas of our lives, let us look to him and say, our eyes are on you. Shall we pray together before we sing? Let's pray.

[28 : 48] Father, we thank you for your word. Thank you that you have given it to us, Lord. And I just pray that as we have thought upon what to do when we have no idea what to do, I ask that each of us would help to keep our eyes fixed on Christ, fixed on him, to daily be seeking you individually, together, in all the situations that we might face. I pray that you keep us on track for you. And for anyone, I pray in that situation this evening, may they know your love and comfort and peace and help, and know that you are very near. You are near to the brokenhearted and crushed in spirit, and you will deliver us from every affliction in one way or another. May each of us know your nearness this evening and keep our eyes fixed on you when we don't know what to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Close our service together.