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ACT WITH COURAGE



Who comes to mind when you think of persistence?

QUESTION #1

Persistent problems call for courage.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. We've all heard that cliché. But let's admit that it can be pretty discouraging when one failure follows another, and all doors seem to slam before us. Many people surrender to the discouragement and move on to other pursuits, but some keep going, no matter what. Consider:

- ▶ Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team.¹
- ▶ Steven Spielberg was rejected by a film school three times.
- ▶ Walt Disney was fired from a newspaper for having no imagination.
- ▶ Elvis Presley was fired after his first performance and told to go back to driving a truck.²

King Asa gave us an example of courage in the face of challenge. He knew that to succeed, he would have to continue the good work he was doing. He would have to keep at it if the people were to remain focused on God. When challenges persisted, he persisted more.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

2 Chronicles 15:1-7

¹ The Spirit of God came on Azariah son of Oded. ² He went out to meet Asa and said to him, “Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. ³ For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. ⁴ But in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them. ⁵ In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil. ⁶ One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another, because God was troubling them with every kind of distress. ⁷ But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.”

When we complete a major project, it feels good to stop and take a breather. Perhaps that’s what King Asa did after the war in 2 Chronicles 14. In fact, many years may have passed between the war and Azariah’s arrival with a message from God. But then again, Azariah may have gone “out to meet Asa” right as he returned from battle. We just don’t know.

What we do know is what Azariah said, and that message was clear: Asa and the people were to continue to seek after the one true God. Azariah reminded them that the Lord was with them as long as they continued to walk in His ways. Azariah gave them a history lesson, reminding them that for many years Israel was away from the presence of the Lord or any word from Him. He was most likely referring to the time of the judges when lawlessness and faithlessness was a way of life for the Israelites. The people had no one to teach God’s law to them and no priest to uphold the ways of God before them. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out the correlation between the lack of instruction and understanding of God’s Word and lawless behavior. As a result, the people could not find peace—anywhere.

How have you seen God reward persistent work?

QUESTION #2

Azariah's historical account included a call for them not to make the same mistake. They would avoid this grave error if they continued in their quest to find the Lord and live for Him. Asa had made progress, but he and the people still had much work to be done. They needed to remain steadfast in their pursuit of following God.

The people of Judah had carried off much plunder from their battle against the Cushites (14:13-14), but far more reward awaited them in the future. Those rewards were conditional, though. Asa and the people would have to remain courageous, steadfast in their faith, and not give up in their pursuit of the living God. Their faith must be resolute; they had no margin for distractions. If they were going to receive God's rewards, Azariah warned, they would have to keep their focus solely on the Lord.

Many Christians know how hard it can be to remain strong and stand firm in their faith. For example, Linh Dao was only ten years old when her father was arrested for being a pastor in Vietnam. She knew why the authorities had come to their house, so she hid the Bibles in her school backpack. When questioned, Linh referred to the Bibles as books for children.

A year later, she was able to visit her father in prison, but only through a chain-link fence. Finding an opening in the fence, however, she stepped in to hug her father. The authorities didn't stop her, since she was just a little girl. What harm could she do, after all?

The "harm" she did was to smuggle a pen to her father. With that pen, Pastor Dao was able to write passages and sermons on nothing more than cigarette paper. Those bits of paper circulated the prison, leading others to Christ.³ Linh Dao remained strong and acted with courage in the face of potential harm to herself and her family.

Just as Azariah told the king "your work will be rewarded," (v. 7) God graces our work with reward. Our reward may not be immediate. God did not bless Linh Dao with an obvious reward, but she knew the blessing of obedience. Nothing we do for Christ escapes His attention.

When have you been thankful someone spoke truth to you in a time of trouble?

QUESTION #3

PERSISTENT COURAGE

*Draw or sketch something that symbolizes the kind of courage that persists.
You may also write a short poem describing this kind of courage.
Then write a prayer asking God for strength to live with persistent courage.*

My Prayer:

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain!"

—1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

2 Chronicles 15:8-9

⁸ When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded the prophet, he took courage. He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim. He repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the portico of the LORD's temple. ⁹ Then he assembled all Judah and Benjamin and the people from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon who had settled among them, for large numbers had come over to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.

King Asa didn't need courage to face another war; he needed courage and persistence to finish the reforms he had started before they had defeated the Cushites (2 Chron. 14:2-5). It is amazing to see what Azariah's words did in the heart of the king. Azariah's words from the Lord were straightforward, reminding Asa and the people that God had been with them in the past and He would continue to be with them if they sought Him with everything they had.

Azariah's words sparked a new fire in Asa to move forward in his quest to bring his people back to God. This reform had two aspects.

- ▶ **Remove what's wrong.** With a renewed passion, Asa got rid of all the idols that were an abomination to the Lord. He sought to be thorough, not just removing idols from the nation he ruled, but from the cities he had captured as well.

Years earlier Asa had started out well, but now he needed to finish what he started. It's not clear why Asa did not fully carry out this reform earlier, but it is reasonable to assume he faced opposition. He may have been the king, but kings can still face resistance from their own subjects. No doubt many of the people were fond of their idol worship and rituals. Here we see Asa removing idols again; Asa needed to be persistent in doing right, because the people were persistent in following their sinful human nature.

Where do followers of Jesus have opportunities to demonstrate courage in our culture?

QUESTION #4

- ▶ **Restore what's right.** It's not enough to remove the negative and harmful things from our lives; we must replace them with that which pleases Christ. Asa not only removed the idols and the altars the people used to worship those idols, he also renovated the altar of the Lord at the temple in Jerusalem. With renovations at the temple complete, King Asa put the altar to use.

Asa's courage didn't just benefit him or those in the Southern Kingdom. Others from the Northern Kingdom benefited as well. Because it was so obvious that God was with King Asa, "large numbers had come over to him from Israel." What a witness to God to have people coming to be with you because they heard God is with you. Here are some things that can help you in following God with persistent courage.

- ▶ Don't do it alone. Before you even get out of bed in the morning, ask God to walk with you every step of the day. Lean on His lordship and the presence of His Holy Spirit in your life.
- ▶ Determine ahead of time that, no matter what problem or difficult situation you may face that day, you will not be deterred from focusing on your relationship with God.
- ▶ Take time to read God's Word. Spending time with God in His Word will bring encouragement and strength, and will continue to feed your passion for Him.
- ▶ Look and listen for others that God might use throughout the day to give you a word of encouragement.
- ▶ Don't forget to thank those whom God has used to encourage and challenge you. Your words of gratitude could be the encouragement they need in that moment.



***How does our
group encourage
faithfulness in others
around us?***

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

If we are to overcome persistent challenges, we must display persistent courage. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Pray.** Ask God to show you what things have become distractions in your life and are keeping you from seeking Him with a deeper passion. Confess those things and resolve to seek God with your whole life.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Commit 2 Chronicles 15:7 to memory. “But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.” Let that verse come to mind when problems persist.
- ▶ **Encourage.** Be an “Azariah” in someone’s life. Step in with a word of challenge or encouragement. As they face their problems, walk alongside them and remind them of the presence of Christ in their lives.



Rather than becoming discouraged with problems that persist, we can ask for strength from God to face our challenges with courage. King Asa serves as a great example for how to do just that.

My thoughts

¹ “Michael Jordan Didn’t Make Varsity—At First,” *Newsweek*, October 17, 2015, <https://www.newsweek.com/missing-cut-382954>.

² “14 People Who Failed Before Becoming Famous,” *Business Insider*, February 21, 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.in/14-People-Who-Failed-Before-Becoming-Famous/Beyonc-lost-on-Star-Search-in-1993-/slideshow/30772919.cms>.

³ D.C. Talk, *Jesus Freaks: Martyrs: Stories of Those Who Stood for Jesus: The Ultimate Jesus Freaks* (Bethany House, 1999).