

Conversation Starter *For the week of March 16-22, 2008*

This week's theme: Prayer and Praise

Reading: 2 Chronicles 20:1-26

In the above Old Testament passage, we find Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, facing a very serious military threat. The reading states that some men came to him to tell him that a vast army from the country of Edom had gathered and they were already at En Gedi – a small place located on the western shore of the Dead Sea about halfway between the northern and southern ends of the Sea. King Jehoshaphat knew this situation was an urgent one because En Gedi was actually in their country. All those from Edom had to do was travel another 10-15 miles to begin taking over Judah's populated areas and capture it's people. So what was the first thing Jehoshaphat did? Did he command that his whole army go out to defeat this other army? Did he blame God for these unfortunate turn of events? Did he blame his officials for allowing those from Edom to get this close? The words of scripture indicate "no". Yes, Jehoshaphat was alarmed, but this reaction moved him to prayer: *Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD. (2 Chronicles 20:3b)*

But then Jehoshaphat went further and declared a time of fasting for the whole country as another way to get closer to God. Then only after he knew that God wanted him to send out his army he did so. Now here's the interesting thing about the placement of people in Jehoshaphat's army, he didn't send out the strongest ones first ... he didn't send out the tallest ones first ... he didn't send out the fast ones or the ones with the largest weapons, but he placed at the front of the army people who would praise God for His splendor and holiness ... he placed at the front those who would praise God for His deliverance and victory over the army from Edom including these words of praise: *Give thanks to the LORD, for His love endures forever. (2 Chronicles 20:21b)* And Jehoshaphat Himself praised God in this way: *O LORD, God of our fathers... You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in Your hand, and no one can withstand You.... we will stand in Your presence before this temple that bears Your Name and will cry out to You in our distress, and You will hear us and save us." (See 2 Chronicles 20:6-12)* Jehoshaphat realized that both prayer and praise were needed during this urgent time. Jehoshaphat knew that both prayer and praise to God were required to remove this huge obstacle to his country's safety. This prayer and praise strategy proved to be highly effective because as a result of their prayer and praise, God established obstacles that led to the defeat of the army from Edom. So, then, people of God devote yourselves to regular times of prayer and praise not as a last resort, but right up front.

1. When God answers one or more of your prayer requests with a "yes", how do you respond? How should you respond?
2. When God answers one or more of your prayer requests with "wait", how do you feel? Why do you feel this way?
3. When God answers one or more of your prayer requests with "no", then what should you do?
4. In what ways has God worked in your life as a direct result of your prayers or someone else's prayers?
5. What is praising God?
6. Why does God want us to praise Him?
7. How do you praise God in your personal devotions?
8. What are some ways we can praise God during our worship services at church?

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