

ATTAINING SPIRITUAL COMPLETION: THE LIFE OF ASA PART IV

2 Chronicles 16:1-14

¹ In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign, King Baasha of Israel invaded Judah and fortified Ramah in order to prevent anyone from entering or leaving King Asa's territory in Judah. ² Asa responded by taking the silver and gold from the treasuries of the LORD's Temple and from the royal palace. He sent it to King Ben-hadad of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus, along with this message:

³ "Let us renew the treaty that existed between your father and my father. See, I am sending you a gift of silver and gold. Break your treaty with King Baasha of Israel so that he will leave me alone."

⁴ Ben-hadad agreed to King Asa's request and sent his armies to attack Israel. They conquered the towns of Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, and all the store cities in Naphtali. ⁵ As soon as Baasha of Israel heard what was happening, he abandoned his project of fortifying Ramah. ⁶ Then King Asa called out all the men of Judah to carry away the building stones and timbers that Baasha had been using to fortify Ramah. Asa used these materials to fortify the towns of Geba and Mizpah.

⁷ At that time Hanani the seer came to King Asa and told him, "Because you have put your trust in the king of Aram instead of in the LORD your God, you missed your chance to destroy the army of the king of Aram. ⁸ Don't you remember what happened to the Ethiopians and Libyans and their vast army, with all of their chariots and horsemen? At that time you relied on the LORD, and he handed them all over to you. ⁹ The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. What a fool you have been! From now on, you will be at war." ¹⁰ Asa became so angry with Hanani for saying this that he threw him into prison. At that time, Asa also began to oppress some of his people.

¹¹ The rest of the events of Asa's reign, from beginning to end, are recorded in *The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel*. ¹² In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa developed a serious foot disease. Even when the disease became life threatening, he did not seek the LORD's help but sought help only from his physicians. ¹³ So he died in the forty-first year of his reign. ¹⁴ He was buried in the tomb he had carved out for himself in the City of David. He was laid on a bed perfumed with sweet spices and ointments, and at his funeral the people built a huge fire in his honor.

I used to jog regularly when I was in college to keep in shape. But, as I entered seminary, and now as a pastor, my time jogging has dwindled significantly. Unfortunately, the size of my stomach has not dwindled as quickly as I hoped for. As I got busier writing papers and preparing for messages, I let my habit of exercise slowly slip away. Of course, I tried to reason myself into believing that I will never have a fat stomach. My favorite excuse is that I have a fast metabolism; that should be enough to keep my weight steady.

Well, five years later, as I am typing this message, I see the fat blob I call my stomach protruding out of my now tight pants. I sometimes catch myself asking, "How did all of this happen so quickly?" I thought I was diligent in taking care of my body. It just seemed like my increase in weight came out of nowhere.

The same principle is true when it comes to our spiritual growth in Christ. When we first became believers of Jesus, we were so passionate to follow him. We studied the Bible regularly. We attended fellowship and bible studies consistently. We took notes at church every chance we got. We went on mission trips and got involved with community service. We loved to share the love of Christ with non-believers.

Because of our faithfulness, God blesses us tremendously. We experience his love and peace even more personally. We can sense ourselves growing more mature in Christ. Life was on a spiritual high.

But, what we soon forget is that God demands of us to continue to live a life of faith, even in the best of times in our lives. Unfortunately, the best of times are normally the most dangerous times when it comes to our spiritual walk with the Lord. When things are going well, we tend to become spiritually lazy. We become less focused. We lose our spiritual edge, thinking we are fine when all the while we are slowly falling away from our purpose of completing God's work in our lives. Maybe we become too comfortable, too confident that we are doing well spiritually. And next thing we know, our lives are so bent out of shape and so far from the Lord that the only question we can ask ourselves is: "How did all of this happen so quickly?"

We are now concluding the preaching series on *Attaining Spiritual Completion*. We have been looking at the life of Asa, King of Judah, in 2 Chronicles 14—16. We have learned that at the beginning of his reign, Asa followed the Lord wholeheartedly. He obeyed all of God's commands and made sure his people also followed in the ways of the Lord. Asa directed his people to worship the Lord always and to make offerings to the Creator of the universe. Asa traveled all over the land of Judah, making sure that all false idols, shrines and altars were torn down and destroyed. Asa trusted in the Lord when he went to battle, and the Lord brought victory over the Ethiopians. Asa even deposed his own grandmother from the royal throne because she was not following the Lord! For the first thirty-five years of Asa's reign, peace was upon the land because Asa passionately followed the Lord. In other words, Asa was *attaining spiritual completion*. (2 Chronicles 14—15)

Or was he? A quick reading of 2 Chronicles 14—16 will tempt us to conclude that Asa was in fact bringing to completion the plans God has started in his life. But a verse in chapter 15 brings to light that in fact Asa was not fully accomplishing what God entrusted him to fulfill: *Although the pagan shrines were not completely removed from Israel...* (2 Chronicles 15:17) In the midst of his good works and accomplishments, Asa had stopped being diligent in completely removing all the pagan shrines from the land. There are three principles I would like to point out that we need to understand when we fail to attain spiritual completion. The passage we are to look at is in 2 Chronicles 16.

1. When we fail to achieve spiritual completion, **we begin to slip away from God.**

The sign that Asa began slipping away from attaining spiritual completion is in 2 Chronicles 15:17:

Although the pagan shrines were not completely removed from Israel...

Maybe Asa became too comfortable with his spiritual walk. Maybe Asa was too confident in all his accomplishments. Maybe Asa's pride got the best of him. Whatever the reasons, Asa stops being attentive in destroying all of the false idols that litter the land of Judah. This was Asa's first step in slowly falling away from accomplishing God's purpose in his life. This sign of deception will naturally lead to an act of deception. In 2 Chronicles 15:18 it says:

[Asa] brought into the Temple of God the silver and gold and the utensils that he and his father had dedicated. (2 Chronicles 15:18)

But, when Asa tries to bribe King Ben-hadad in 2 Chronicles 16:2, guess what Asa uses for the bribe:

Asa responded by taking the silver and gold from the treasuries of the LORD's Temple and from the royal palace. He sent it to King Ben-hadad of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus... (2 Chronicles 16:2)

You see what happens when you take that first step in disobedience? It will only lead you to disobey God more and more. Not only did Asa fail to tear down the false idols, he uses the silver and gold dedicated to the Temple of God as a bribe to receive King Ben-hadad's support in a war against the king of Israel. This will lead Asa further away from God as he also fails to trust in God for victory over his enemies:

"Let us renew the treaty that existed between your father and my father. See, I am sending you a gift of silver and gold. Break your treaty with King Baasha of Israel so that he will leave me alone." (2 Chronicles 16:3)

Nowhere in the story does King Asa consult the Lord about his situation. Instead, he makes his own treaty with King Ben-hadad, thus slowly slipping further and further away from accomplishing God's purpose in his life.

The second principle to learn here is:

2. Failure to attain spiritual completion prevents us from **seizing opportunities of blessings.**

You would think that everybody would be happy that Asa's treaty with King Ben-hadad worked and that Judah was spared from trouble. But, God was not happy:

At that time Hanani the seer came to King Asa and told him, "Because you have put your trust in the king of Aram instead of in the LORD your God, you missed your chance to destroy the army of the king of Aram. (2 Chronicles 16:7)

Notice what takes place when we fail to follow God's way when it comes to accomplishing spiritual completion:

- ☛ We end up fighting for the wrong causes in life. (v. 7)
- ☛ We forget all that God has done for us in the past. (v. 8)
- ☛ We fail to receive God's strength because of our lack of commitment to him. (v. 9)
- ☛ Our failure will result in God's peace withdrawing from us. (v. 9)
- ☛ Our failure will lead us to live destructively instead of righteously. (v. 10)

This leads us to the third principle:

3. Failure to attain spiritual completion **only creates an empty legacy.**

The story of Asa ends with him not seeking the Lord for his foot disease. (2 Chronicles 16:11-14) Asa's life and legacy end in meaninglessness and insignificance. For the first thirty-five years of his reign, Asa was the spiritual hero; everything that he did was for the Lord; that is the sole reason why God blessed him, his people, and his land. But, beginning in his thirty-sixth year and lasting to his forty-first year, in just a five year period, everything that Asa worked hard for in attaining spiritual completion went down the drain, all because he became irresponsible in what he was supposed to be in charge of.

Just like my fat stomach today, we too fall into spiritual laziness and irresponsibility when it comes to fulfilling God's plans. It is very easy for us to follow God when times are bad because we have nobody else to turn to. But, when times are good, we must continue to attain spiritual completion. In God's eyes, every moment we have in our lives, whether in good times or bad times, must be used to further his purpose. That is what is meant by *completion*. When we choose to follow God all the way and achieve spiritual completion, then we have done our job. But, if we begin to entertain laziness, comfortability, confidence, and pride in our lives, we will begin to slip away from completing God's work, leaving us, like King Asa, a broken person, failing to achieve what God wanted us to conquer.

Attaining spiritual completion is an important concept for us, as believers, to understand. It gives us purpose and direction, identity and focus, in life. Choose to complete and experience first-hand the generous love and blessings of God upon your life. Completion is a necessary ingredient when it comes to spiritual maturity.

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