

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **FURTHER ADVICE ON HOW WE CAN BECOME MORE FAITHFUL**

*If you will fear the Lord and serve him and hearken to his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well;*

*1 Samuel 12:14 (RSV)*

*<sup>4</sup> For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. <sup>5</sup> For Solomon went after Ash'toreth the goddess of the Sido'nians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup> So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.*

*1 Kings 11:4-6 (RSV)*

#### **You need to make a firm decision that being faithful is more important than staying alive**

Probably the ultimate test of our courage is whether we are willing to die rather than abandon our faithfulness. Resolve now, ahead of time, that being faithful and staying true to what you believe is more important even than staying alive. Then you will be set free from what is probably the demons' best leverage point.

Demons use fear to get you to compromise, to give in, and to let God down. They will whisper into your mind that unless you compromise your faith, or drop your standards, you might lose your job, your home, your business, or even your life. The dread of losing such things causes most of us to panic and to disobey God. We have trained ourselves over many years that, when under pressure, the main priority is self-preservation, i.e. to look after number one.

However, you can reverse that pre-programming. Begin now to train yourself to say that staying faithful to God is more important than getting a pay rise or a promotion. Then you will gradually learn how to see your faithfulness as being far more important than keeping your job or your home or business. Once you've reached that level you will be ready to move up to the next stage, which is to resolve that your faithfulness and loyalty to God are more important than staying alive.

You can build up to that level in stages if you don't feel you can make that jump all in one go. You can then make a firm decision, in advance that, if faced with a crisis, you will stay faithful. Making that decision, now, ahead of time, means that you don't need to pause and think if and when the crisis actually arises, which could be suddenly.

Then you won't be taken by surprise or panic or get 'caught in the headlights'. You will react well to the threat when it comes because your mind was already made up beforehand. It is also because you will have learned to be courageous as a *habit*, by responding to earlier and smaller tests of your nerve and resolve. A classic example of a group of people who made this decision not to compromise, even if it meant death, is the group referred to in Revelation chapter 12.

They are the 'Tribulation saints' who are called upon to face the lies and threats of the antichrist during the period known as the Tribulation. They refuse to give in and worship the antichrist, or his image, because they have decided that they would prefer to die rather than do that. In the RSV it says "*for they loved not their lives even unto death.*"

*<sup>9</sup> And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown*

*down with him. <sup>10</sup> And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. <sup>11</sup> And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"*

*Revelation 12:9-12 (RSV)*

They make that choice in a period of intense suffering and persecution which comes about because the Devil knows that the time he has left is very short. The tribulation is only seven years long and the Devil knows that. But so too do the believers who are alive at that time, because the Bible makes that clear. So they wisely choose to give up their lives here and gain eternal life, rather than worship Satan and be lost forever. In their circumstances that is a sensible and logical choice. It is equally so in our circumstances today.

Therefore we must not love our lives so much as to make self-preservation our priority, which is how the world thinks. It is yet another aspect of worldly thinking that we have to reject. Then we too can conquer, as the Tribulation saints will conquer, by not loving our lives, even unto death, or as the NIV translates it, by not loving our lives "*so much as to shrink from death*":

*They triumphed over him  
by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives so much  
as to shrink from death.*

*Revelation 12:11 (NIV)*

In Revelation chapter two, in Jesus' letter to the church at Smyrna, He actually warns them in advance that a time of persecution is going to come to them. He then urges them to "*Be faithful unto death...*" If they will do so, then He promises them the reward of the '*crown of life*':

*Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

*Revelation 2:10 (RSV)*

### **The fear of the LORD helps you to remain faithful**

The Bible regularly tells us to "fear the Lord". It is a major theme and a very important issue. Here is an example. Joshua is speaking to the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land:

*<sup>14</sup>"Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup>And if you be unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

*Joshua 24:14-15 (RSV)*

The phrase "*the fear of the LORD*" is confusing to many people. In particular, its purpose is not clear to them. Basically, the fear of the LORD involves realising who God is and how immense, powerful, and holy He is. It also involves recognising the reality of the fact that He is God and that He judges all people and punishes evil and wrongdoing.

If we are genuine Christians then we will not have to face His wrath at the Great White Throne judgment, provided we remain faithful to Him. However, see Chapter 21 in Book One of this series for an analysis of whether a real Christian can ever lose his salvation and end up at the Great White Throne Judgment and then the Lake of Fire.

However, even if the judgment we have to face is the Judgment Seat of Christ, which is for saved believers, we should still fear it. I am not looking forward to that day. I fear it. I am keenly aware that there are many areas of my life which do not come up to the standard that God wants from me.

Although God is patient and is working with me to get me to change, I cannot be complacent or presumptuous or assume that my own sin or unfaithfulness doesn't matter. It does. It will have consequences, especially if I do not take it seriously or repent of it. At the very least, it may involve the loss of rewards that I might otherwise have received. Even worse, it could lead to me being publicly rebuked by Jesus at the Judgment Seat.

I fear that, and very much wish to avoid it. I want Him to praise me and reward me, not to scold me or to tell me what might have been, if only I had obeyed Him. Perhaps the most painful thing of all would be to be told that my unfaithfulness had prevented me and/or others being effective in reaching the lost. I don't want to be told that any men or women went to the Lake of Fire as the indirect consequence of my own disobedience, laziness, selfishness or neglect.

I have not come across many other believers who share that concern, or who are even aware of the concept of the fear of the LORD, let alone gripped by it. It is rare today in the West. However, it is actually something which you should seek for and ask God to produce in you. It is for your own good. Many beneficial things will come from it. A lot of promises are made in the Bible to those who fear the LORD. It is therefore an advantage, not a handicap.

Perhaps the greatest benefit that comes from the fear of the Lord is that it helps us to remain acutely conscious of God at times when we are tempted to sin or to be unfaithful to Him. Our fear of Him can then jolt us back to our senses before it is too late and before we do wrong. Therefore, every day, indeed every moment, we must choose whom we are going to serve. The fear of the LORD will help us to make the right choice:

***<sup>7</sup>The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;  
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.  
Proverbs 1:7 (NASB)***

### **Stay faithful for the long term - until the day you die**

It's hard enough just to begin to be faithful. However, it is much harder to continue. Staying faithful to God, year after year, decade after decade, until the day you die, is very difficult. Few can manage it. The greatest danger is the complacency that can arise after years of having followed the LORD. It is so easy to imagine, having come so far, and having remained faithful until now, that you are immune to temptation.

If you ever assume that, then you will begin to think that you can afford to relax your standards a little and 'cut corners,' or make small compromises. You can't afford to do that. The later stages of a person's life can be the period in which they become most likely to do this, such that they fall into sin and let God down. We must never let that happen to us. The only way to avoid it is to keep relying on God, and to ask for His help in avoiding presumption and in staying vigilant and alert. There is no place for a casual attitude, however well you may have done so far.

## **Examples of biblical characters who were faithful to begin with, but then compromised and became unfaithful later in life**

We have already seen, in earlier chapters, some examples of characters in the Bible who began well but then let God down and became unfaithful later in life. These accounts are in the Bible to bring home to us the danger that we ourselves are in. There is the account of King Uzziah, which we looked at earlier.

He began his reign aged 16 and was faithful for many years but then, due to becoming proud as a result of his fame and success, he became arrogant and disobedient. He usurped the position of the priests and presumed to enter the Temple to offer a sacrifice himself, which he was not authorised to do.

Then there is the sad example of King Saul who began well and with great promise, but who ended up a petulant, self-pitiful, paranoid man. He even consulted a witch rather than seek God's guidance. Saul did all that despite the fact that when he began, he was the best man God could find in all of Israel. He had also operated, for a time, in prophetic gifts.

That ought to sober us. If even he could degenerate so badly, then so can we, if we allow ourselves to drift or to compromise with sin. In addition there is King Solomon. He began very well indeed and had more wisdom than any other man. But even he went astray due to marrying so many wives, many of whom were not Israelites and were worshippers of idols.

Then there is Gehazi, the assistant to the prophet Elisha. He served Elisha for years but then fell into sin and unfaithfulness when he was tempted by the desire for money. He lied to Naaman the Syrian and extracted a financial gift from him, pretending that Elisha had asked for it. As a result of that deception God struck Gehazi down with leprosy.

There is also King Rehoboam, the son of King Solomon. Consider the advantages he had in having a father like that. Yet, we are told that when Rehoboam became established as King he abandoned the law of the LORD and ended up doing evil:

*When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him.*

*2 Chronicles 12:1 (ESV)*

*And he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the LORD*

*2 Chronicles 12:14 (ESV)*

**Consider also the life of King Asa of Judah. He began well but in his later years he did not maintain the faithfulness with which he began.**

One reads of very many bad kings of Judah, and even more so in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. But it is perhaps even sadder to read of kings who began well but who did not keep it up. They failed or let themselves down in the end. One such is King Asa. He began well and was full of zeal for God and did what was right. In particular he took action to stamp out idolatrous worship of false gods and to encourage the people of Judah to serve the one true God:

*<sup>1</sup>So Abi'jah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David; and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land had rest for ten years. <sup>2</sup>And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God. <sup>3</sup>He took away the foreign altars and the high places, and broke down the pillars and hewed down the Ashe'rim, <sup>4</sup>and commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment. <sup>5</sup>He also took out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him. <sup>6</sup>He built*

*fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the LORD gave him peace. <sup>7</sup>And he said to Judah, "Let us build these cities, and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars; the land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God; we have sought him, and he has given us peace on every side." So they built and prospered.*

*2 Chronicles 14:1-7 (RSV)*

King Asa also put his trust in God when it came to military matters. Therefore, with God's help, he was able to defeat armies far larger than his own:

*<sup>8</sup>And Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah, armed with bucklers and spears, and two hundred and eighty thousand men from Benjamin, that carried shields and drew bows; all these were mighty men of valor. <sup>9</sup>Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mare'shah. <sup>10</sup>And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the valley of Zeph'athah at Mare'shah. <sup>11</sup>And Asa cried to the LORD his God, "O LORD, there is none like thee to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on thee, and in thy name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." <sup>12</sup>So the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.*

*2 Chronicles 14:8-12 (RSV)*

Asa had been inspired by a prophet called Azariah and had embarked on a programme of stamping out idolatry. This was so successful that many of the faithful Jews who were living in the Northern Kingdom of Israel came south to live in Judah:

*" <sup>8</sup>When Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azari'ah the son of Oded, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the hill country of E'phraim, and he repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the vestibule of the house of the LORD. <sup>9</sup>And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from E'phraim, Manas'seh, and Simeon who were sojourning with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.*

*2 Chronicles 15:8-9 (RSV)*

Asa was so full of faith and zeal that he even confronted his own mother, Maacah, and removed her from her position as Queen Mother, because she got herself involved in idolatry:

*Even Ma'acah, his mother, King Asa removed from being queen mother because she had made an abominable image for Ashe'rah. Asa cut down her image, crushed it, and burned it at the brook Kidron.*

*2 Chronicles 15:16 (RSV)*

Nevertheless, despite the great victory he had had over the Ethiopians, who had had an army more than twice the size of his, King Asa let himself down later in his reign. He formed an alliance with the King of Syria and relied on him to help him deal with the threat being made to the Kingdom of Judah from the King of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

What Asa should have done was to rely on God, as he had done early in his reign in the war against Ethiopia. Instead he put his trust in men and formed an ungodly and unnecessary alliance, which God did not want him to make:

*<sup>1</sup>In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Ba'asha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. <sup>2</sup> Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the LORD and the king's house, and sent them to Ben-ha'dad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, <sup>3</sup>"Let there be a league between me and you, as between my father and your father; behold, I am sending to you silver and gold; go, break your league with Ba'asha king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me." <sup>4</sup>And Ben-ha'dad*

*hearkened to King Asa, and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered I'jon, Dan, A'bel-ma'im, and all the store-cities of Naph'tali. <sup>5</sup>And when Ba'asha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah, and let his work cease. <sup>6</sup>Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Ba'asha had been building, and with them he built Geba and Mizpah.*

*2 Chronicles 16:1-6 (RSV)*

As a result of this disobedience and lack of trust, God sent another prophet, Hanani, to rebuke King Asa. However, Asa's heart had grown proud over the years as a result of all the peace and success he had enjoyed. Therefore, by this stage, he was much less receptive to hear God's voice than he had been when he was younger. Even when he became ill he did not seek God's help, but put his trust solely in doctors to heal him. Evidently, he was no longer as close to God as he had once been:

*<sup>7</sup>At that time Hana'ni the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him, "Because you relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. <sup>8</sup>Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with exceedingly many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, he gave them into your hand. <sup>9</sup>For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars." <sup>10</sup>Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in the stocks, in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties upon some of the people at the same time. <sup>11</sup>The acts of Asa, from first to last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. <sup>12</sup>In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe; yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians. <sup>13</sup>And Asa slept with his fathers, dying in the forty-first year of his reign. <sup>14</sup>They buried him in the tomb which he had hewn out for himself in the city of David. They laid him on a bier which had been filled with various kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great fire in his honor.*

*2 Chronicles 16:7-14 (RSV)*

**Before we criticise King Asa, we need to ask whether we are any more faithful than he was**

It is easy to be critical of King Asa, but actually the tests of his faith that he faced in the later years of his long reign were very difficult. It is surprisingly hard to remain faithful for long periods of time and to keep on being willing to trust God. It can mean taking risks, even when you have become wealthy and successful and you have grown used to the trappings of power and of being in office. At that stage, when we have more to lose, many of us are less willing to take risks.

I can speak with some experience of how difficult a test that is. I set up a law firm from a standing start when I was in my thirties. At the outset I had no staff, no files, no equipment, no anything. All I had was a burning desire to set up a business which God could use for His purposes. I also wanted to expand the ministry of financial giving, in which I had already been engaged since I was 19.

In the early years of the new firm I faced many different tests and battles which severely stretched my faith. I found it hard. Yet, I found the later years, when the firm was succeeding and prospering, an even more difficult test. In the early years I had no alternative but to trust God, because the firm was small and had no money or strength. But in the end I faced the more difficult test, like King Asa faced, of how to remain faithful, and how to keep on taking risks for God, when I had an abundance of money and when I had a lot of staff working for me.

I will have to find out at the Judgment Seat of Christ how well, or badly, I did. However, what I can say for sure, is that it is much harder to remain faithful to God, to put your trust in Him, and take risks for Him, when you have got power, money and position than it is when you have none of those things.

People might imagine that it must be easy to live the Christian life if you have got power and possessions, but it isn't. Those things actually become a source of temptation in themselves. In one sense they are undoubtedly a blessing from God and a reward for past faithfulness. However, they do also present a real challenge and make it harder, in some ways, to carry on being faithful.

That is one reason why it is wise to ask God not to give you more power, money or influence than you are capable of handling faithfully. You should specifically ask God, in your prayers, not to allow your possessions, power, income, profits, wealth, role or position to become too large for you, such that they might turn your head. Few people ever pray in that way but I really think they ought to. I have done so many times and I believe God has answered my requests.

I could have made even greater profits than I did and made the business even larger, but I don't think it would have been good. To the best of my knowledge, I believe I stayed faithful to the end. I was helped in that test by the fact that God limited my profits and my success to levels that my faithfulness could withstand. I am glad He did.

### **The faithfulness and unfaithfulness of King Jehu**

Next we can look at the life of King Jehu of Israel (i.e. the Northern Kingdom). He had the chance to become the one and only good King that the Northern Kingdom ever had. He began well and showed remarkable zeal and enthusiasm to obey God. He wiped out the evil family of King Ahab and also the wicked practice of Baal worship.

In all of that he did well and achieved God's purposes for his life. However, he later allowed himself to become unfaithful. Let's follow him through the stages of his life, starting from the day he was anointed to become King:

*<sup>1</sup>Then Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him, "Tie up your garments, and take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead.<sup>2</sup> And when you arrive, look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. And go in and have him rise from among his fellows, and lead him to an inner chamber.<sup>3</sup> Then take the flask of oil and pour it on his head and say, 'Thus says the LORD, I anoint you king over Israel.' Then open the door and flee; do not linger."<sup>4</sup> So the young man, the servant of the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. <sup>5</sup> And when he came, behold, the commanders of the army were in council. And he said, "I have a word for you, O commander." And Jehu said, "To which of us all?" And he said, "To you, O commander."*

*<sup>6</sup>So he arose and went into the house. And the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. <sup>7</sup>And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD.<sup>8</sup> For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. <sup>9</sup>And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah.<sup>10</sup> And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her." Then he opened the door and fled.<sup>11</sup> When Jehu came out to the servants of his master, they said to him, "Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you?" And he said to them, "You know the fellow and his talk."<sup>12</sup> And they said, "That is not true; tell us now." And he said, "Thus and so he spoke to me, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, I anoint you king over Israel.'" <sup>13</sup>Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, "Jehu is king."*

*2 Kings 9:1-13 (ESV)*

Jehu knew that it was God's will for him to remove King Joram (the son of King Ahab) and his wicked mother, Jezebel and also to destroy all King Ahab's descendents so that their line could not be

resumed. In fact, God had said earlier that this is what would happen. So, he began by removing King Joram:

*<sup>21</sup> Joram said, "Make ready." And they made ready his chariot. Then Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah set out, each in his chariot, and went to meet Jehu, and met him at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite. <sup>22</sup>And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" He answered, "What peace can there be, so long as the whorings and the sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many?" <sup>23</sup> Then Joram reined about and fled, saying to Ahaziah, "Treachery, O Ahaziah!"*

*<sup>24</sup> And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart, and he sank in his chariot. <sup>25</sup>Jehu said to Bidkar his aide, "Take him up and throw him on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. For remember, when you and I rode side by side behind Ahab his father, how the LORD made this pronouncement against him: <sup>26</sup> 'As surely as I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons--declares the LORD--I will repay you on this plot of ground.' Now therefore take him up and throw him on the plot of ground, in accordance with the word of the LORD."*

*2 Kings 9: 21-26 (ESV)*

Then Jehu went and dealt with the despicable Queen Jezebel, the pagan, Baal-worshiping wife of Ahab and mother of King Joram:

*<sup>30</sup>When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it. And she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window. <sup>31</sup> And as Jehu entered the gate, she said, "Is it peace, you Zimri, murderer of your master?" <sup>32</sup> And he lifted up his face to the window and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked out at him. <sup>33</sup>He said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down. And some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled on her. <sup>34</sup> Then he went in and ate and drank. And he said, "See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter." <sup>35</sup> But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. <sup>36</sup> When they came back and told him, he said, "This is the word of the LORD, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel, <sup>37</sup> and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel.'"*

*2 Kings 9:30-37 (ESV)*

Jehu then proceeded to wipe out all the descendants of King Ahab. He did so on God's instructions, to destroy that family line and prevent them ever regaining the throne:

*So Jehu struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his great men and his close friends and his priests, until he left him none remaining*

*2 Kings 10:11 (ESV)*

*<sup>15</sup>And when he departed from there, he met Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him. And he greeted him and said to him, "Is your heart true to my heart as mine is to yours?" And Jehonadab answered, "It is." Jehu said, "If it is, give me your hand." So he gave him his hand. And Jehu took him up with him into the chariot. <sup>16</sup> And he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD." So he had him ride in his chariot. <sup>17</sup>And when he came to Samaria, he struck down all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, till he had wiped them out, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke to Elijah.*

*2 Kings 10:15-17 (ESV)*

After that, Jehu took on all the prophets of Baal and wiped them all out, removing all the leaders of Baal worship from Israel:

*<sup>18</sup> Then Jehu assembled all the people and said to them, "Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu will serve him much. <sup>19</sup> Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Baal, all his worshipers and all his*



*priests. Let none be missing, for I have a great sacrifice to offer to Baal. Whoever is missing shall not live." But Jehu did it with cunning in order to destroy the worshipers of Baal. <sup>20</sup> And Jehu ordered, "Sanctify a solemn assembly for Baal." So they proclaimed it. <sup>21</sup> And Jehu sent throughout all Israel, and all the worshipers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left who did not come. And they entered the house of Baal, and the house of Baal was filled from one end to the other. <sup>22</sup> He said to him who was in charge of the wardrobe, "Bring out the vestments for all the worshipers of Baal." So he brought out the vestments for them. <sup>23</sup> Then Jehu went into the house of Baal with Jehonadab the son of Rechab, and he said to the worshipers of Baal, "Search, and see that there is no servant of the LORD here among you, but only the worshipers of Baal." <sup>24</sup> Then they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had stationed eighty men outside and said, "The man who allows any of those whom I give into your hands to escape shall forfeit his life." <sup>25</sup> So as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, Jehu said to the guard and to the officers, "Go in and strike them down; let not a man escape." So when they put them to the sword, the guard and the officers cast them out and went into the inner room of the house of Baal, <sup>26</sup> and they brought out the pillar that was in the house of Baal and burned it. <sup>27</sup> And they demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day. <sup>28</sup> Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel.*

*2 Kings 10:18-28 (ESV)*

However, despite all of that initial zeal and dynamic action for the Lord, King Jehu later degenerated and became unfaithful. Like so many others, he started well, but did not finish well:

*<sup>29</sup> But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin--that is, the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan. <sup>30</sup> And the LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." <sup>31</sup> But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin.*

*2 Kings 10:29-31 (ESV)*

**Some people become unfaithful after they lose their mentor's influence. They can't keep up their faithfulness on their own**

One of the reasons why faithful, obedient, God-fearing people sometimes become unfaithful, and let God down in later life, is that they began with the influence and guidance of a godly mentor, but then could not keep up that faithfulness on their own, without that mentor's help. An example of this is King Joash of Judah. He came to the throne when he was only a child and benefitted greatly from the godly influence of Jehoiada, a faithful priest who advised and taught the young king:

*<sup>1</sup> Jo'ash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem; his mother's name was Zib'iah of Beer-sheba. <sup>2</sup> And Jo'ash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the days of Jehoi'ada the priest.*

*2 Chronicles 24:1-2 (RSV)*

So, King Joash did what was right for very many years, i.e while Jehoiada was still alive and able to guide him. But then things changed when Jehoiada died:

*<sup>15</sup> But Jehoi'ada grew old and full of days, and died; he was a hundred and thirty years old at his death. <sup>16</sup> And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, and toward God and his house.*

*2 Chronicles 24:15-16 (RSV)*

*<sup>17</sup> Now after the death of Jehoi'ada the princes of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king hearkened to them. <sup>18</sup> And they forsook the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers,*

*and served the Ashe'rim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their guilt. <sup>19</sup> Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD; these testified against them, but they would not give heed.*

*2 Chronicles 24:17-19 (RSV)*

After Jehoiada died, King Joash unwisely allowed himself to be advised and influenced by unworthy people who were not of the same calibre as Jehoiada. Therefore King Joash went astray, and so did many of the people of Judah. It reached such a point that Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, tried to intervene to confront King Joash and to get him to see how God saw the situation. However, King Joash did not listen to him. In fact he had him killed, despite all that Zechariah's father had done for him for so many years:

*<sup>20</sup>Then the Spirit of God took possession of Zechari'ah the son of Jehoi'ada the priest; and he stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.'" <sup>21</sup> But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD. <sup>22</sup> Thus Jo'ash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoi'ada, Zechari'ah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, "May the LORD see and avenge!"*

*2 Chronicles 24:20-22 (RSV)*

As a result of the unfaithfulness of King Joash, and also in response to Zechariah's prayer, God moved to judge Joash by sending the Syrian army to attack him:

*<sup>23</sup>At the end of the year the army of the Syrians came up against Jo'ash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. <sup>24</sup> Though the army of the Syrians had come with few men, the LORD delivered into their hand a very great army, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Jo'ash. <sup>25</sup> When they had departed from him, leaving him severely wounded, his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoi'ada the priest, and slew him on his bed. So he died; and they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings.*

*2 Chronicles 24:23-25 (RSV)*

What Joash should have done, following the death of Jehoiada, was to recognise that he was now entering into a new test, i.e. for God to see how well he could do without his mentor. He should therefore have responded to his new circumstances by:

- a) immersing himself in the Bible, so as to obtain guidance from there for himself
- b) carefully selecting other godly people to advise him in place of Jehoiada, instead of being passive and leaving it for advisors to come to him randomly.

### **One of the hardest things to cope with is success. Few people's faithfulness can survive that**

We all know that failure and difficulty are a challenge. However, as we have seen above, in terms of maintaining our faithfulness, success is a much harder test. When a person fails, or suffers, the obvious thing to do is to turn to God for help. But how many of us turn to God when we have been *succeeding* in our job or ministry? If anything, the need for God's help is even greater then, though very few people realise that.

Success, wealth, power, fame, prestige and academic achievement present us with some very strong temptations to pride, self-sufficiency and arrogance. If we yield to such temptations, even once, then we are in grave danger of doing so again and again, until it becomes our undoing. A proud, self-

sufficient person is very unlikely to remain faithful to Jesus, or to succeed in the tests that Jesus sets for us.

*I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not listen.....*

*Jeremiah 22:21 (a)(RSV)*

So, if you are fortunate enough to achieve success in any field then see it as your cue to humble yourself, to stay close to God and to pray for His help. Ask Him to provide people and circumstances that will help you to stay humble. Also ask Him to help you to humble yourself and to avoid relying on yourself or trusting in your own ability. Then you will hopefully avoid doing what King Uzziah did, as we saw above. He began well, but success and power went to his head and caused him to stop being faithful:

*But when he was strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.*

*2 Chronicles 26:16 (RSV)*

### **You can never afford to become complacent or to cut corners as you get older**

On a similar theme, there is a temptation, as you get older, to become casual and to assume that you have now learned how to handle pressures and temptations. You may then begin to loosen your standards and to think that it is safe for you to cut corners slightly, or to compromise a little on ethical issues relating to money, sex, work, relationships, or your use of power. It is precisely when you think you cannot, or will not, fall that you are in greatest danger of falling.

A person who is aware of their weakness, and concerned that they may fall, will take care to avoid tempting situations. But a person who has begun to trust themselves is in great danger. Therefore never trust yourself. Never consider yourself to be above temptation, or immune to falling into any kind of sin, especially the ones that you feel drawn to, or about which you have ever felt tempted to compromise. Those are the very areas where you particularly need to redouble your vigilance, and keep yourself on a short lead. As Malachi puts it, we need to guard ourselves:

*So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.*

*Malachi 2:16(b) (ESV)*

### **Resolve to become more radical, not less, as you get older. Balance is good, but moderation may not be.**

It is usually assumed that young people are radical but that as we get older we mellow, moderate ourselves and become more pragmatic, rather than more principled or idealistic. But why should that have to be so? If anything, as we grow older, we ought to aim to become more radical, not less. We should set higher targets for ourselves and aim for greater levels of personal faithfulness.

The more we get to know Jesus, the more we ought to seek to please Him and to honour Him in ways we never even realised existed, or which we never noticed when we were younger. So, following our conversion, when we are only a new believer, Jesus' main objectives for us might be, for example, to give up sexual sin, excessive drinking or drugs.

However, as we get older and gain self-control in those areas, Jesus will turn His eye towards other areas of sin in our lives which might appear less important, but are still crucial if we wish to continue to make progress as a disciple. These areas might include sins such as pride, gossip, over-eating, cowardice, laziness, selfishness and so on.

We need to get all of our thinking, and all our actions, in line with Jesus, and to gain the mastery over every new area of sin that He shines the ‘spotlight’ on. Instead of considering such things less important, or less urgent, areas in which to obey Him, we should become more radical and less satisfied with ourselves as we grow older.

We never ‘arrive’ and therefore we never have any basis for being self-satisfied. So you should be just as determined to cut out gossip or pride as a new convert should be to cut out pornography, lying, drunkenness etc. There is no area of sin which is too small for you to care about and to tackle. Neither is there any sin which you can safely indulge in or compromise over. Every sin is toxic and will damage you and your future.

**Do not put limits on your faithfulness, such that you only obey God up to a certain point. Go all the way.**

A feature which is found in the vast majority of people, even among the best, is that they tend to have limits, beyond which their faithfulness does not go, or does not continue. In other words, even the best of us tend only to be faithful up to a certain point, but no further. We see this feature quite often among the better kings of Judah. The Bible speaks of them as having done what was right and as being faithful.

However, it then points out what they did *not* do, i.e. the things which they did not have the courage or the determination to achieve. An example of this is found in the lives of King Jehoash of Judah and his son, Amaziah and grandson, Azariah. In general, these three kings did what was right, but there were certain things which they did not have enough courage, or strength of will, to do:

*In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. <sup>2</sup> And Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all his days, because Jehoiada the priest instructed him. <sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away; the people continued to sacrifice and make offerings on the high places.*

*2 Kings 12:1-3 (ESV)*

*In the second year of Joash the son of Joahaz, king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, began to reign. <sup>2</sup> He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddin of Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet not like David his father. He did in all things as Joash his father had done. <sup>4</sup> But the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.*

*2 Kings 14:1-4 (ESV)*

*In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, king of Judah, began to reign. <sup>2</sup> He was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. <sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away. The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.*

*2 Kings 15:1-4 (ESV)*

Kings Jehoash, Amaziah and Azariah, like most of the Kings of Judah, stopped short of demolishing the ‘high places’ where some of the people used to go to offer false and idolatrous sacrifices. Perhaps they feared the reaction of the people if they went that far, just as modern day politicians will only go so far. They stop short of doing anything which would arouse substantial public outcry or opposition.

We do the same ourselves and set up boundaries, beyond which we will not go, because we think it would be too hard, dangerous, costly or difficult. Sometimes we may even do that unconsciously,

without ever saying out loud, even to ourselves, that we are holding back or what it is that we are afraid of.

One of the main reasons why a person sets limits on the extent of their own faithfulness and obedience is that they are not wholehearted. That means that they are generally loyal and willing, but only up to a point. It is usually up to the point where faithfulness begins to cost too much, or is likely to cause more difficulty than they want to face.

The problem with being on God's side, but only up to a certain pre-determined limit, is that there will eventually come a point at which your willingness to obey will be used up. You will then betray God, and even switch sides. That is inevitable if you set any limits beforehand on how much you are willing to endure or how far you are willing to go.

Any such limit, wherever you choose to place it, will inevitably lead to you being brought up to and beyond that point. The demons in your life will make sure of that. So, if you say to yourself: "*I will endure for up to six months, but that's all*", then you can be sure that a demon will arrange things so that your ordeal lasts longer than six months.

Or, if you were to say: "*I will be honest and do what's right at work, as long as I don't have to lose my job*", then you can be sure that the demons will engineer some situation that requires you to choose between being faithful to God or losing your job.

Therefore the only safe and sensible policy is total faithfulness, where you are wholehearted and *set no limits at all*. Just resolve to do whatever God asks you to do, no matter what. Then ask Him for the grace to be obedient. That is the only approach that will work. A person who is not wholehearted will inevitably come unstuck and go wrong.

Why not begin to examine yourself in this area and to ask yourself whether, how and where you are doing this and what the boundaries are to your own faithfulness? Ask God to expose these limits or boundaries to you and to help you to break through them and go beyond them.

Imagine the changes that would occur in your life if you were to do this and to become, like King David, a person who is "*a man wholly after God's heart*". The consequences could be very significant, in terms of what God could then achieve through your life, but also how well you would do at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The famous nineteenth century evangelist and Bible teacher, D. L Moody, put it very well when he said:

*"The world has yet to see what God can do with, and for, and through, and in, and by a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him. I will do my utmost to be that man".*