

Talks – Persevere – myfishbites.com

This is about persevering (keeping on going!) and encouragement. The main Bible bit is from 2 Chronicles 15, verses 1 to 9.

The Spirit of God came on Azariah son of Oded. 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. For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. But in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them. In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil. One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another, because God was troubling them with every kind of distress. But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.'

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.

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.

BACKGROUND

Israel had split apart after Solomon's death. Rehoboam (Solomon's son) was next in line to be King but he very unwisely listened to some young and power-crazy officials who recommended he raised taxes very high and spoke nastily against the people. Because of this the people of Israel rejected Rehoboam as their King and appointed Jeroboam as their King. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the House of David (Rehoboam). Over the next few years, Israel would fall apart but Judah remained stronger longer because more of its kings followed and obeyed God.

SUMMARY OF WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THIS BIBLE PASSAGE

1. Spirit of God was working in people's lives.
2. If you obey God you'll find God, if you don't you won't.
3. The people had rejected God (their choice) and so they were in trouble.
4. God encouraged Asa to be strong and not give up.
5. Asa listened, heard from God and obeyed God.
6. People were happy they'd found God and he gave them peace.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THIS BIBLE PASSAGE – IN DEPTH

You can go and use the stories from one of our Assembly 'Keep On' – or google the stories of Robert The Bruce, Thomas Edison or Abraham Lincoln. All of them show good examples of perseverance.

You know, we often feel tired, down or discouraged. Many people suffer from low self-esteem – that means feeling bad about themselves. The great thing about the Bible is it has loads of encouraging things to say to you. Some things may be hard but it never ceases to amaze me how God is always working in all things for our good (Romans 8.28)

1. The Spirit of God was working in the life of Azariah (verse 1). If you're a Christian you have the Holy Spirit in you. But is the Holy Spirit at work in your life? It's not about you saying, 'Holy Spirit I want more of you' it's about you saying, 'I give more of my life to you Holy Spirit. I want you to fill every part of my being.' Are there areas of your life that you need to give over or submit to the Holy Spirit?
2. If you love Jesus you will obey him (verse 2). Read John 14.23-24. Jesus is not going to be able or willing to bless your life unless you obey him. If you think God's far from you, check your lifestyle, your priorities, your prayer and Bible life, get right with God.
3. The people had rejected God (verses 3 and 4) but when they were in trouble they called out to God and he heard them. The apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 1.12-16 esp. verse 16 that he was the worst of all sinners and yet God showed him great mercy or kindness to show that we can almost never be too far from God's kindness. If you've messed up or done something you think God could never forgive then think again – if God's on your case then he's never gonna let you go! Look at Peter who in Matthew 26.69-75 denied 3 times that he knew Jesus. Yet by Acts 2 he's preaching and 3000 get saved. He's one of the key apostles of the early church!
4. God encouraged Asa to be strong and not to give up (verse 7). This is real similar to a verse in the New Testament – Galatians 6.9 which says don't get tired of doing good – if you don't give up you'll find a great reward at the right time. Another great Bible verse is Psalm 1.3 which talks about being planted by a river and having roots that go down deep and who produces great fruit in the right season. The Bible is encouraging you to lift your eyes off the worries of life and up to God in heaven. Start living by what Jesus and the Word of God say about you – a life of faith inspired by God
5. Asa listened to what God said through Azariah and obeyed what God had said (verses 8 and on). If you know there's something God has asked you to do and you haven't done it yet, sort it out! Are you listening to God – it may be a small quiet voice, from the Bible, it may be through circumstances or through other Christians. Listen and obey
6. People were happy in their new found relationship with God and God blessed them with 35 years peace. Being a Christian ain't a recipe for an easy life but God does promise to always be with you and never leave you. If you follow God and obey him even in the hard times, God notices, he knows and one day he will reward you with a reward that you can't even begin to dream about!

7. When we hear God words – through the Bible and sometimes through what God speaks directly, God gives us courage to dream, to dream bigger and see God use us in even bigger ways. Azariah took courage (showing that sometimes we don't just 'get' courage, we have to 'reach' and get it) and did more for God than before. So being filled with God always leads to action and to change.

Are you ready to be an agent of change for good today? Ask God to fill you with his Holy Spirit in a new way!