



SESSION 3

ACT WITH COURAGE

▶ **The Point**

Persistent problems call for courage.

▶ **The Passage**

2 Chronicles 15:1-9

▶ **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.⁸
- ▶ 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.⁹

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.

▶ **The Setting**

King Asa of Judah and his army had defeated Zerah and the invaders from Ethiopia. Like any victor in a major war, the people of Judah probably felt invincible. But their victory was won by the intervention of their God, Yahweh. A real danger the country faced was that the people would forget that fact and relapse into spiritual syncretism. Yahweh, however, sent a messenger to remind the king and people to remain faithful.

What does the Bible say?

2 Chronicles 15:1-9

¹ The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded,

² and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The LORD is with you while 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, and without a teaching priest and without law,

⁴ but when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them.

⁵ In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands.

⁶ They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress.

⁷ But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded."

⁸ As soon as Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah the son of Oded, he took courage and put away the detestable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim, and he repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the vestibule of the house of the LORD.

⁹ And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 97 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “Who comes to mind when you think of persistence?” Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 98 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of acting with courage by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 9**, the “Map of the Divided Kingdom” poster, to explain the geographical context for this study.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 98 of the PSG: “Persistent problems call for courage.”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, prepare to play a clip from the movie *Courageous* to demonstrate the kind of godly courage and conviction believers must exhibit to overcome the problems we face.

Note: A link to the video may be found at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to give us courage for the problems we will certainly face. Thank Him for the confidence we can have in any difficulty because of who we are in Him.

Notes

Series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.





STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

2 Chronicles 15:1-3

¹ The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, ² and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The LORD is with you while 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, and without a teaching priest and without law."

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Chronicles 15:1-3 on page 99 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the importance of prophetic preaching.

RECAP: Asa’s message was clear: He 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.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 99 of the PSG: **“How have you seen God reward persistent work?”**

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Hand out notecards to group members. Ask them to write one issue in their lives where persistence was needed to accomplish something for God. Have them fold the notes so other members don’t know who wrote which note. After collecting the notes, write answers at random on a poster or white board. Invite members to share how God might use one of these testimonies to encourage them in a similar situation they are facing.

TRANSITION: We are to remain courageous in following God.

2 Chronicles 15:1-3 Commentary

[Verses 1-2] Second Chronicles 15 details the middle period of Asa's reign. It starts with the Chronicler (Ezra) reporting that the **Spirit of God** came on **Azariah the son of Oded**. The Scriptures usually introduce a prophet's message by validating its origin as being from God. Sometimes it is stated as in this verse or in many instances it is expressed as "the word of the LORD came to" someone (1 Sam. 15:10; 2 Sam. 7:4; 1 Kings 16:1; Jer. 1:4). Either way the text attests to the authenticity of the speaker as an authorized representative for God.

Ezra identified **Azariah** as having the proper prophetic credentials. His message is a great example of prophetic preaching. It included: (1) a statement of God's conditional presence [2 Chron. 15:2], (2) an illustration from history [vv. 3-6], and (3) an exhortation [v. 7].

Azariah went out to meet King Asa. He began his sermon by demanding the attention of **Asa**, all of **Judah**, and all of **Benjamin** with his words, "**Hear me.**" Azariah reminded them that the Lord would be present with them when they were living faithfully in relationship with Him. Then he said that if the king and the kingdom were faithful in seeking the Lord He would be found by them. The Hebrew can also be translated, "He will let Himself be found by you."¹ In other words, finding God does not really depend on a person's ability. Rather, God takes the initiative to reveal Himself to those who seek Him. A person finds God only because God chooses to be found by those who seek Him.

Azariah also gave a warning. If the people neglected or forsook God, He would have no choice but to forsake them (1 Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 12:5; 24:20). Their response to God's graciousness would make the difference in the outcome of their relationship with Him.

[Verse 3] Like any good communicator, Azariah accentuated his message by using an illustration. Azariah may have been referencing the period of the judges (approx. 1350–1050 BC). He said that for many years the nation did not have the presence of the true God. Azariah also noted the fact that the people lacked any real spiritual leadership. He said they were without a teaching priest and instruction in the law.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

2 Chronicles 15:4-7

4 *“But when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. **5** In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. **6** They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress. **7** But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.”*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Chronicles 15:4-7 on page 99 of the PSG.

RECAP: The people of Judah had carried off much plunder from their battle against the Ethiopians (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.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 100 of the PSG: **“When have you been thankful someone spoke truth to you in a time of trouble?”**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, “Persistent Courage” on page 101 of the PSG to help them.

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.

TRANSITION: Not only are we to remain courageous in following God, but in the next verses we see that our courage in following God can inspire and encourage others.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How would you summarize Azariah’s message to King Asa?



2 Chronicles 15:4-7 Commentary

[Verse 4] When the Israelites of old turned back to God their situation changed drastically. Notice how Azariah referred to God in this verse. He is **the LORD, the God of Israel**. As noted previously, the sacred name of God, *Yahweh*, is usually translated as **LORD** in most English Bibles. *Yahweh* is the unique and powerful name by which God revealed Himself to the Israelites and by which He formed a covenant with them. The term translated as **God** is *Elohim*. It emphasizes the majestic and infinite nature of God, who is Lord over creation and history. Taken together, the words **LORD and God** designate the uniqueness of Yahweh, the God of Israel, as compared to the false pagan gods of other nations. The Israelites of the past had turned from their sin, seeking the one, true God in their distress, and found Him. Similarly, King Asa and his people had rededicated themselves to this one true God.

Now Azariah reiterated his words from verse 2. In times of distress, when their ancestors turned from their rebellion and indifference to God, and sought Him, He was found by them (or “He let them find Him,” NASB). Azariah probably had in mind the cyclical nature of the time of the judges involving the repeating pattern of rebellion, affliction, repentance, and deliverance (Judg. 2:11-21).²

[Verse 5] Azariah reminded his listeners of the chaotic living conditions of the old days. The people had no peace. Peace is more than just the absence of conflict, it is an enduring sense of well-being. The people’s lives in those days were unsettled and fear abounded. It was not safe to go about one’s daily activities or travel about (Judg. 5:6). The nation was in turmoil as lawlessness and disorder reigned supreme. The residents of the various lands were in constant conflict. It was not a pretty picture and Azariah did not want King Asa, Judah, and Benjamin to fall back into those circumstances.

[Verse 6] The prophet also reminded the people how nation **crushed** nation and city **crushed** city. The Hebrew term translated *crushed* has the meaning of “to beat down” or “to break into pieces.” Azariah then declared it was God Himself who had allowed these calamities to plague the Israelites. Their rebellion had left them without His divine order and protection. God allowed these calamities so that His people might turn back to Him.

Azariah’s historical survey was a valuable tool for instructing his listeners about their current situation. Asa and his people had been victorious because of their earlier spiritual revival. But they could not simply rest on their laurels and go back to their old ways. Much was still left to be done.

[Verse 7] Azariah laid down the law, but he did not end his sermon on a negative note. He gave King Asa and the people the promise of a reward. He told them to be strong and not to give up. Azariah’s words could also be translated, “Don’t let your hands drop!” It brings to mind someone who is carrying a heavy load but is so discouraged he simply drops his arms, dumps his burden, and sits down in despair. Azariah encouraged Asa and the people to be strong and full of courage, to keep going forward, for if they were faithful a reward was waiting for them from the Lord.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

2 Chronicles 15:8-9

⁸ As soon as Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah the son of Oded, he took courage and put away the detestable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim, and he repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the vestibule of the house of the LORD. ⁹ And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Chronicles 15:8-9 on page 102 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to give more background on how the idols were removed and the altar renovated.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 102 of the PSG: **“Where do followers of Jesus have opportunities to demonstrate courage in our culture?”**

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 102-103 of the PSG. 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.
- ▶ **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.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 103 of the PSG: **“How does our group encourage faithfulness in others around us?”**

GUIDE: Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“Persistent problems call for courage.”**

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
When has the Word of God given you the courage you needed to overcome a challenging situation?

Dotted lines for taking notes.

2 Chronicles 15:8-9 Commentary

[Verse 8] One person's courage in following God can inspire and encourage those around him or her. Azariah's sermon made an impact on King Asa. He was immediately motivated to continue the reforms he had begun in earlier years. He undertook a second purging of the idols of false gods from his kingdom. He removed all the abominable idols that still contaminated the nation. With his actions, Asa also put a stop to the immoral sexual activities that accompanied those pagan cults.

Asa removed the idols from Judah, Benjamin, and the cities in the hill country of Ephraim. The Book of 1 Kings notes that apparently there were periods of intermittent conflict between King Asa of Judah and King Baasha of Israel throughout their reigns. At some previous time, Asa had captured these cities (1 Kings 15:16,32). At home in Jerusalem, Asa began a renovation project on the temple. It started with repairs to the **altar** in front of the **vestibule** where the priests regularly made burnt offerings. This would have been the entrance room attached to the main building (the holy place) of the temple. The text does not state exactly what renovations were needed. Nothing was said about the altar being damaged or destroyed. It may be that illegitimate sacrifices had been made on the altar. Therefore, whether through misuse or neglect, it most likely needed refurbishing physically and purifying spiritually before a rededication ceremony was held.

[Verse 9] Asa now called everyone together for a special ceremony. Naturally he gathered the people of **Judah** and **Benjamin** of the Southern Kingdom. The remarkable thing was that he also included inhabitants from the tribal lands of **Ephraim**, **Manasseh**, and **Simeon**. These were people who had immigrated into the Southern Kingdom from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Ephraim, the tribe who were the descendants of one of the sons of Joseph who was adopted by Jacob, was one of the ten Israelite tribes located in the Northern Kingdom. Manasseh was also a son of Joseph adopted by Jacob. His descendants also were a tribe of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Simeon was another tribe named for one of Jacob's sons by his wife Leah.

The text indicated that large numbers of people from those tribes had come from the Northern Kingdom and settled in Judah and/or Benjamin. The reason for their defection was that they could see that Yahweh was with Asa and they wanted to be where Yahweh was present. At the time, Baasha was the king in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (908–886 BC). He had taken the throne by assassinating his predecessor Nadab (1 Kings 15:27-28). He then murdered the entire house of Jeroboam (v. 29). Apparently, because of the revival occurring during the reign of King Asa of Judah, many Israelites had fled Baasha's reign to go south to Judah where they believed they would be in God's presence and under His protection. Asa counted them among his loyal subjects and added them to the tribes he called for assembly. Baasha would later go to war with King Asa and Judah (2 Chron. 16).

1. J. A. Thompson, 1, 2 Chronicles, vol. 9, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 269.

2. *Ibid.*, 270.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 104 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **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 you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall 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.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 104 of the PSG:

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.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking God for being with us through our struggles. Ask Him to remind us of past victories to give us courage in facing future challenges.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the [Groups Ministry blog](#).

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry