

LIVING A GODLY LIFE IN AN UNGODLY WORLD



How can we live godly lives in this ungodly world?

Christians can look confidently toward a future with Christ that will be free of the grief and problems we face in this world.

But what do we do in the meantime? We live in a world that does nothing to encourage our walk with Christ; in fact, many times the world actively opposes anyone who seeks to live a godly life for Christ.

We can stand strong, though. In the Old Testament, the life of King Asa shows us how to face life head-on. His example points to the value of focusing on God, living a lifestyle of worship, and persisting with courage and dependence on Him. We'll also see how his example influenced those around him and the generation that came after. By studying his life, we will see that, even though we will face enemies and challenges, we can live godly lives.



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Living a Godly Life in an Ungodly World

Session 1 **Pursue Godliness** 2 Chronicles 14:1-8

Session 2 **Depend on God** 2 Chronicles 14:9-15

Session 3 **Act with Courage** 2 Chronicles 15:1-9

Session 4 **Worship Continually** 2 Chronicles 15:10-19

Session 5 **Remember God's Faithfulness** 2 Chronicles 16:1-13

Session 6 **Leave a Legacy** 2 Chronicles 17:1-13



DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

How “Living a Godly Life in an Ungodly World” supports the Discipleship Plan (see page 12):

Serve God and Others. Serving God does not happen only in a serene environment. In fact, our service for Him is often best seen when we serve in challenging—even hostile—circumstances. When we obediently follow God no matter what, we serve others by giving them an example to follow.



SESSION 1

PURSUE GODLINESS

▶ ***The Point***

Make God the focus of your life.

▶ ***The Passage***

2 Chronicles 14:1-8

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

Every day we are faced with a multitude of distractions. Apps on our smartphones easily sidetrack us. Social media, text messages, and email after email vie for our attention too. Is it any wonder we might have a problem with keeping our focus on the task at hand?

- ▶ The average worker wastes 759 hours each year due to distractions in the workplace.⁴
- ▶ In 2015, 3,477 people were killed and nearly 400,000 more were injured in vehicle crashes that involved distracted drivers.⁵
- ▶ Ninety-two percent of college students have used their phones to send text messages during class.⁶

Any distraction can be dangerous, but being distracted from what really matters in life can have devastating consequences. In the Book of 2 Chronicles, we meet one man who kept his focus. King Asa made sure nothing distracted him from keeping his focus on God.

▶ ***The Setting***

“Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”⁷ The inspired writers of the Books of Kings and Chronicles no doubt understood this principle and recorded the history of God’s activities with His chosen people. Among the lives and deeds of the kings of Israel and Judah detailed in the Book of 2 Chronicles, the reign of King Asa of Judah and his attempts to maintain godly standards for himself and his people is recorded.

What does the Bible say?

The Asherim (v. 3)—Wooden poles representing the Canaanite fertility goddess Asherah used in worship, often on the high places.

2 Chronicles 14:1-8

¹ **Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. And Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land had rest for ten years.**

² **And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.**

³ **He took away the foreign altars and the high places and broke down the pillars and cut down the Asherim**

⁴ **and commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment.**

⁵ **He also took out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him.**

⁶ **He built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the LORD gave him peace.**

⁷ **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.**

⁸ **And Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and 280,000 men from Benjamin that carried shields and drew bows. All these were mighty men of valor.**

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 81 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “**What are some things you enjoy being distracted by?**” Allow time for each person to respond.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, attach a large sheet of paper to a focal wall and provide markers. As group members arrive, instruct them to write down as many things as they can remember that distract their attention

from the most important things in life. After everyone has had a chance to write and review those responses, **ask:** “When is it the easiest for you to focus on God? When is it the most difficult to focus on God?”

GUIDE: Direct group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” on page 82 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of pursuing godliness by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 7**, the “Living a Godly Life” poster, to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the specific focus of each session.

GUIDE: Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 82 of the PSG: “**Make God the focus of your life.**”

LEADER PACK: Make copies and distribute **Pack Item 8**, the “Kings” handout, to help group members understand the context for Asa’s reign in Judah.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to help us pursue godliness and focus our lives on Him.

LIVING A GODLY LIFE IN AN UNGODLY WORLD

► PURSUE GODLINESS

2 Chronicles 14:1-8

► DEPEND ON GOD

2 Chronicles 14:9-15

► ACT WITH COURAGE

2 Chronicles 15:1-9

► WORSHIP CONTINUALLY

2 Chronicles 15:10-19

► REMEMBER GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

2 Chronicles 16:1-13

► LEAVE A LEGACY

2 Chronicles 17:1-13

KINGS

KINGS OF JUDAH (continued)		KINGS OF THE UNITED MONARCHY	
	REIGN	REIGN	REIGN
1. David	40 years	1. David	40 years
2. Solomon	40 years	2. Solomon	40 years
3. Rehoboam	14 years	3. Rehoboam	14 years
4. Abijah	3 years	4. Abijah	3 years
5. Asa	41 years	5. Asa	41 years
6. Jehoshaphat	25 years	6. Jehoshaphat	25 years
7. Joram	7 years	7. Joram	7 years
8. Ahaziah	1 year	8. Ahaziah	1 year
9. Athaliah	6 years	9. Athaliah	6 years
10. Joash	40 years	10. Joash	40 years
11. Amaziah	29 years	11. Amaziah	29 years
12. Uzziah	52 years	12. Uzziah	52 years
13. Jotham	16 years	13. Jotham	16 years
14. Ahaz	28 years	14. Ahaz	28 years
15. Hezekiah	29 years	15. Hezekiah	29 years
16. Manasseh	55 years	16. Manasseh	55 years
17. Amon	2 years	17. Amon	2 years
18. Josiah	31 years	18. Josiah	31 years
19. Jehoahaz	3 months	19. Jehoahaz	3 months
20. Shallum	1 month	20. Shallum	1 month
21. Sennacherib	1 year	21. Sennacherib	1 year
22. Merodach-Baladan	1 year	22. Merodach-Baladan	1 year
23. Belshazzar	1 year	23. Belshazzar	1 year
24. Nabonidus	1 year	24. Nabonidus	1 year
25. Cyrus	1 year	25. Cyrus	1 year
26. Darius	1 year	26. Darius	1 year
27. Xerxes	1 year	27. Xerxes	1 year
28. Artabanus	1 year	28. Artabanus	1 year
29. Darius II	1 year	29. Darius II	1 year
30. Artabanus II	1 year	30. Artabanus II	1 year
31. Darius III	1 year	31. Darius III	1 year
32. Alexander	1 year	32. Alexander	1 year

TIP: When helpful, use this “Notes” column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

2 Chronicles 14:1-2

¹ Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. And Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land had rest for ten years.

² And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Chronicles 14:1-2 on page 83 of the PSG.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 9**, the “Map of the Divided Kingdom” poster, to explain the geographical context of Asa’s reign.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the authorship of this book of the Bible.

RECAP: Asa had seen how both men responded to the challenges of leading. Both men had dealt with wars and conflicts, and each had failed to keep his focus on God and doing what was right in His sight. As a result, up to this point, the nation had little to no peace in the land, although Abijah did lead the Southern Kingdom of Judah to victory over the Northern Kingdom of Israel who had wandered away from God under the leadership of King Jeroboam.

DISCUSS: **Question #2** on page 83 of the PSG: **“When have you been inspired to follow in someone’s footsteps?”**

RECAP: Asa would lead by example both in his actions before the people and in his relationship with God. He would need to depend on the Lord and in His direction. As he trusted the Lord to guide his actions and thoughts, he would lead the people to also follow the directions given by God.

TRANSITION: We must seek to live lives that honor God. In the next verses, we see that we must also remove any barriers to godly living.



ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How would you describe a life that pleases God?

2 Chronicles 14:1-2 Commentary

[Verse 1] First and Second Chronicles had and still have as one of their purposes to encourage people to live godly lives pleasing to the Lord. While the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles is uncertain, the books are traditionally attributed to Ezra, as are the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra, who lived in the fifth century BC, was the scribe and priest primarily responsible for initiating the reforms in Israel just after God's people returned from the Babylonian exile. Like the authorship of Chronicles, the date of their writing is uncertain as well. If one holds to the tradition of Ezra as their author, then the approximate time of the writing of 1 and 2 Chronicles would be sometime in the fifth century BC. The date of writing can be further narrowed down to some time after the Persian king Artaxerxes had sent Ezra to Jerusalem with a large group of returning exiles in 458 BC.

King Asa was the fifth king to rule in the dynastic line of King David. He was the third king to rule Judah (910–869 BC) after the United Monarchy divided in 931/930 BC into the Northern Kingdom of Israel (also called at times Samaria or Ephraim) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Asa's name means "doctor" or "healing." Although Asa's faith wavered toward the end of his rule, nevertheless, he was the most godly monarch to rule Judah since the time of Solomon.

The account of Asa's reign begins with the death and burial of King Abijah (ruled 913–910 BC) in the city of David (Jerusalem) and the coronation of his son Asa as Abijah's successor. The Chronicler (Ezra) indicated that the country enjoyed a period of peace for the first decade of Asa's rule. This time of peace was a divine reward for Asa's renewal and faithfulness to the God of Israel.

[Verse 2] Ezra set forth a sort of theological evaluation of Asa's rule. He noted that Asa **did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God**. That Asa did good and right "in the eyes of the LORD his God" is a common biblical way of describing God's omnipresence and omniscience in all situations.

Obviously, God does not have or need eyes to see. Nonetheless, this anthropomorphic description affirms the truth that the knowledge of Asa's every action, and those of every person who has ever lived, never escape God's perception. God revealed His will to the Israelites and has revealed it to all humanity primarily through Scripture. Thus, everyone is without excuse and God sees all the good and bad that people do.

Seeking to live a life pleasing to God should be the aim of every believer. Salvation, of course, is entirely a matter of grace through faith in Jesus Christ and not dependent on works of righteousness (Eph. 2:8-9). Christians should desire and seek to do God's will and live holy lives out of love and gratitude for Him and for His glory. Living a holy life may require putting aside those ungodly things we often desire to cling to that hinder our relationship with God.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

2 Chronicles 14:3-5

³ He took away the foreign altars and the high places and broke down the pillars and cut down the Asherim ⁴ and commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment. ⁵ He also took out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Chronicles 14:3-5 on page 84 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to describe some of the pagan practices at the high places.

RECAP: Once Asa became king, he didn't waste any time in taking action to do what needed to be done. His actions centered on getting the people's attention back on God.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 84 of the PSG: "What are some idolatrous symbols popular in our culture?"

RECAP: Asa was determined to point the nation back to God. He used his authority as king to remind the people to seek the God of their ancestors. We don't know if the people objected to the destruction of these idols, but they certainly complied outwardly.

As a result of his actions, the land lived in peace for ten years. Imagine the impact we would have today if we sought God with the same passion and determination Asa had. Our idols may look different, but we too must establish the Lord as the focus of every aspect of our lives.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we learn that we must guard against temptations and spiritual attacks.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are the rewards we receive when we eliminate things that dishonor God?

2 Chronicles 14:3-5 Commentary

[Verse 3] Despite God's command that the Israelites destroy the pagan worship centers of Canaan (Deut. 7:1-5; Judg. 6:25), the Israelites often failed to obey the Lord's command. Religious syncretism took hold as pagan beliefs and worship practices were blended with the worship of Yahweh, the one, true God. Many of the worship practices of the pagan religions of Canaan incorporated actions that for Israel were totally forbidden. Such practices included immoral sexual rites, animal sacrifices, and even human sacrifice!

King Asa removed the **foreign altars** and the high places. The high places referred to elevated sites such as mountain tops or hills where the Canaanites conducted their idolatrous worship rituals. Among the things found at a high place would be an altar, a carved wooden pole representing Asherah, the Canaanite goddess of fertility, and a stone pillar representing a male deity (usually Baal). At high places, incense would be burned, animals (and sometimes children, see Jer. 7:31) would be sacrificed on the altars, and people would eat sacred meals and have relations with male and female cultic prostitutes. While most high places were associated with the worship of the pagan god Baal and the goddess Asherah, there were also high places dedicated to the Moabite god Chemosh and the Ammonite god Molech.

Asa ordered the demolition of the pagan **pillars** (or stones) and the cutting down of the Asherim. Also known as Asherah poles, these were wooden poles carved with emblems and/or symbols honoring the Canaanite goddess Asherah (perhaps like Native American totem poles, although the exact design is unknown since none of the Asherah poles have survived).

[Verse 4] Asa told his subjects in Judah to **"seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment."** Variations of the phrase **seek the LORD** occur nine times throughout 2 Chronicles 14–16. This admonition summarized how the people of Judah were to respond to God.

The term **LORD** indicates the appearance of the Hebrew divine name which is usually transliterated as *Yahweh*. Jewish tradition was (and still remains) that the divine name is too holy to speak aloud. Yahweh was the God of the Israelites' fathers of the past. But the people of Judah seemed to have lost sight of this truth in Asa's day. Rather than worship Yahweh alone, they had allowed and/or participated in the worship of pagan gods and goddesses. By contrast, Asa's enjoining the people to "seek the LORD" was a call for the people to reorient their lives completely to following Yahweh alone. This involved obedience to the Lord's **law** and **commandment**.

[Verse 5] Once again it is stated that the king removed the **high places**, but he also eliminated all the **incense altars** from Judah's cities. Incense was an aromatic mixture of spices burned as part of religious rituals. In this case, the incense was integral to the banned pagan sacrifices. Asa's aggressive campaign against the paganism corrupting his land and his positive spiritual renewal had significant beneficial repercussions for his kingdom. The kingdom **had rest under him**.



15 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

2 Chronicles 14:6-8

⁶ He built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the LORD gave him peace. ⁷ 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. ⁸ And Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and 280,000 men from Benjamin that carried shields and drew bows. All these were mighty men of valor.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Chronicles 14:6-8 on page 85 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 86 of the PSG: "How can we enjoy a season of God-given rest without becoming complacent?"

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 86 of the PSG. Thankfully, God has given us several things to help us stand strong and stay focused: The church and spiritual gifts.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 86 of the PSG: "What are some ways our group can help one another guard against temptation and spiritual attacks?"

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, "Maintaining Focus" on page 87 of the PSG to help them.

From the list of common distractions, choose three that are a particular challenge for you [PSG lists: cell phone, media, television, pets, sports, video games, exercise, food, computer, news, gossip, friends, other]. Then answer the questions.

GUIDE: Refer back to "The Point" for this session: "Make God the focus of your life."

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What relationships do we see between God's blessings and personal responsibility?

2 Chronicles 14:6-8 Commentary

[Verse 6] The most notable consequence of Asa's reformation was that his kingdom of Judah enjoyed a season of **rest**, living in right relationship with their Lord. Furthermore, Asa knew that Judah's continued security depended more on its faithfulness to the Lord God than it did its military preparedness. Yahweh was ultimately Judah's protector. He had fought on their behalf many times before, going all the way back to the Israelites' escape from Egypt.

Asa was nonetheless vigilant. He decided to fortify the cities in Judah. The fact that they were at peace gave the people of Judah ample opportunity to harden their military defenses and train up their troops. During this period, God gave Judah **peace**, meaning the people's minds and hearts were not constantly burdened by fear of attacks from beyond.

True peace is not the absence of physical conflict; it runs deep into a person's or a nation's soul. Many individuals and countries today are not facing war, but they still do not have a sense of well-being. The Hebrew concept of being at peace with God entailed a harmonious relationship with Him through faith and obedience, thereby experiencing His peace.² Ultimately, true peace is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ, where a person experiences forgiveness, peace with God, and new life.

[Verse 7] Asa gave the orders to begin his building project of hardening the cities' defenses. In Asa's time, strategic defenses included high, thick walls that were impervious to stones and arrows fired against them and difficult for enemies to scale. Tall towers were placed along the walls for long-distance reconnaissance and from which to shoot arrows and hurl stones down upon enemies. Doors to the citadels were built to be strong and both doors and windows were reinforced with bars.

Despite all this construction, Asa once again reiterated the key principle behind both their time of peace and protection from their enemies. Judah still possessed the land, not because of all their military emplacements, as important as they were, but because they sought God and He gave them rest. The Lord God was the ultimate reason for the success of their endeavors.

[Verse 8] Ezra reported that Asa had an army of three hundred thousand men from Judah. They were well armed with large, rectangular shields that protected most if not all of their bodies and long, deadly spears. He also had another two hundred eighty thousand light infantry from the tribe of Benjamin. They carried small shields which covered about half of their bodies and were armed with bows and arrows. Although not mentioned in the text, all of Asa's army may have worn helmets, usually made of metal or leather. Asa wisely recognized the need for a strong national defense. Nonetheless, he rightly gave the credit for his land's peace and security to the people's seeking the Lord. No amount of military force would substitute for the genuine peace only God could provide.

1. This is a version of a quote believed to have originated with philosopher George Santayana.

2. E. Ray Clendenen, "Peace," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 1233.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 88 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.



- ▶ **Memorize.** Commit to memory Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Allow the truth of this verse to penetrate your heart and mind; let it be a driving force in your pursuit of godliness.
- ▶ **List.** Identify areas in your own life that have become idols and false gods. Develop a plan to purposely rid yourself of them. Enlist the help of your valiant warriors if necessary.
- ▶ **Recruit.** Enlist a small group of people to serve as your army of valiant warriors who will stand guard with you when attacks come from the enemy.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 88 of the PSG:

Pursuing godliness is not an easy thing to do in today's world. But it is possible when you avoid the distractions and keep your focus on Christ.

PRAY: Conclude by asking God for the strength to discipline our lives to pursue godliness by focusing on Him. Thank Him for making this possible through Christ.



EXTRA!

Free additional ideas for your group are available at
BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra