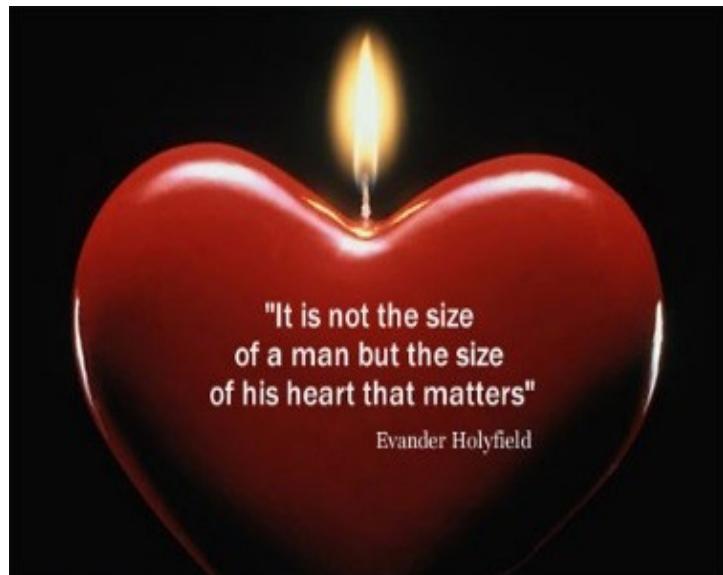


WHOLEHEARTED DEVOTION: LIFE LESSONS FROM KING ASA

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So often we begin our Christian journey with such enthusiasm, such zeal to see others saved, and such a dynamic force for giving our whole hearts to God. It is like an Olympic competitor getting his or her first opportunity to shine as a champion for his family and country. He practices hours upon hours putting his or her body through unbelievable strain to be the best he can be. It is not for just a season where another season might come next year, it is for a one time life event in most cases. Most of the time that "would be champion" has one chance at getting the gold. One chance at being the best in the field as to what he has entered into and yet, he still knows that if he doesn't give it his all every day, he

won't make the grade. Not many of us get that chance. Hopefully, that "would be champion" knows that there are others all over the world doing the same thing... in the event or events he is striving as to being THE BEST. There is a deep-seeded desire in one who is a strong competitor to be the best in the sport he loves. All other desires seem to be on 2nd burner.

The new Christian is like that, he/she gives hours and hours at church, reading the Word of God, looking for a new adventure in seeing the lost come to Jesus, looking to see if there is some way that we can give to missions either in our time or our money. We listen to the pastor, the Sunday school teacher, the missionary and we desire to be like them. We want to be all we can be for our Lord. We live, love, and linger in God's presence giving our wholehearted devotion to God and our Lord Jesus who saved us.

Much like King Asa of Judah, our hearts are exuberant and enthusiastically excited to see what we can do for God when we first become Christians. Trying to make the world a better place, we hold fast to the truth and precepts of God when we are young and vigorous for God's Word.

Asa began his journey with his God well with enthusiasm and a heartfelt desire to see the people of Judah worship the true and only God Jehovah (1 Kings 15:14). He succeeded King Abijah (a man with fourteen wives, 22 sons and 16 daughters). The word of God tells us that

King Asa was a godly man with god fearing intent (2 Chronicles 14:2, "... *Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.*"

Asa was exuberant in tearing down the pagan altars, sacred pillars, and removing the high places. He fortified his cities and developed a shield-bearing army of three hundred thousand men. Asa deposed even his own grandmother who worshiped Asherah, a false goddess. He was man after the heart of God as he started his journey as king.

More importantly than all he did was, "He commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to obey His law and commandments" (2 Chron. 14:4). Even when an Ethiopian ruler threatened Judah with a vast army (v. 9), Asa sought the Lord. "Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O Lord, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you" (v. 11). The result? "There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign" (15:19).

For many years, Asa continued doing well for the Lord. However, something happened in year thirty-five of his reign as king that negatively impacted how Asa finished his life. Baasha, the king of Israel, prevented trade between the two countries as well as others. This was a sure sign of impending invasion by Baasha. **Instead of seeking the Lord's strength and mighty counsel, Asa took the silver and gold**

from the treasures of the temple and bribed a pagan to protect him from Baasha.

The Lord sent Hanani the seer to rebuke Asa. Hanani recounted the works God had performed on Asa's behalf and reprimanded Asa for relying on a human king instead of the strong arm of Almighty

God. Hanani then uttered his famous line, *"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war"* (2 Chron. 16:9).

The Hebrew phrase for the word "**committed**" here is lebab shalem, which literally means "**wholeheartedly devoted.**"

The term appears several times in Kings and Chronicles. When Solomon prayed for the people at the temple dedication, he prayed for the people to have "**wholehearted devotion**" (1 Kings 8:61).

Not much later we see a different picture... one of shifted allegiance:

"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been" (11:4). **Literally his wives bent his heart away from God.**

Asa, possessing a "bent" heart, did not listen to Hanani and did these things:

- He instead imprisoned Hanani.
- He began oppressing his own people.

Eventually Asa contracted a severe foot disease (probably gout or a possibility of severe diabetes). Instead of calling out to God for healing, Asa relied only on physicians. He had lost his faith in a God who desires to help in time of every kind of need.

Asa did not finish his life and ministry on earth well.

Regardless of our status in life, we will leave this earth either as one who finishes our journey, this race, well... or as one who stumbles and falls before we cross the finish line.

We must ask ourselves and seriously contemplate this one thing:

How can we finish well, with wholehearted devotion to God?

What can we learn from Asa?

- **Don't forget God after a victory.**
 - God delivered Asa from the powerful Ethiopian army—which was an astonishing victory.
 - Maybe Asa took some of the credit himself, thinking he somehow had a hand in the victory.

- Perhaps he exchanged his longing for God's fame for a delight in his own.
- Perhaps in his pride, he forgot God.

Whatever contributed to his decision, when it came time to face another powerful foe, Asa forgot God's past deliverance and acted out of fear.

- **Seek God when pain and suffering comes.**

Unlike Asa, King Hezekiah after Asa would seek God in his illness. Stricken with a terminal disease, Hezekiah begged God for reprieve of this dreaded disease. Hezekiah reminded God that he'd had a devoted heart (2 Kings 20:3). The outcome of Hezekiah's calling out to God was that God heard Hezekiah's prayer and in His sovereignty, He chose to heal him, giving him another fifteen years of life.

In contrast to the humbling of King Hezekiah, Asa did not seek God in his disease; instead he turned away from God's strong support.

- **Train diligently and consistently for the long journey in life.**

Oswald Chambers wrote about Asa's warning from Hanani, "God wants you to be entirely His, and this means that you have to watch in order to keep yourself fit. It takes a tremendous amount of time."

Asa started well and stayed diligent on his journey for many years as he walked with God. It wasn't until year thirty-five that he stopped seeking God, instead relying on a man-centered shortcut.

Walking with God is a tedious marathon full of sweat and grit and a rugged determination. Running a marathon means enduring all the way to the finish line.

- **Remember grace.**

The people gave Asa a fitting burial and remembered him as a man with wholehearted devotion.

Note: When we forget God in our successes, when we cease to seek God in our trials, when we fail to train for the long race, there is still grace.

Yet with God's strong support all the way to the end we can have a lebab shalem-a heart completely devoted to Him.

God's eyes are everywhere always, so that he never misses one single opportunity anytime, anywhere to demonstrate his power on behalf of weak people who rely on him and not man. This is why Asa's unbelief showed a lack of will power, lack of determination to seek God's help to the very end, and lack of faith on a God who is always yields to a repentant and humble heart.

This is the God and father of our Lord Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us. This is the God who hears all your prayers. This is the God who created the universe and holds it all together. This is the God whose Spirit is in this room, in this conversation, in this

writing right now. He is teaching through this servant and calling each of you to trust Him and call upon Him for every need you may ever have.

I am going to tell you something of which I hope grabs your heart and helps you to hold on to the very end of our race/our journey:

I lost my father at a very vulnerable age (13), my sister at a young age from cancer, my oldest brother from a heart attack much too early in his life, my mother slipped away with a heart that had just worn out. She was 6 years older than I am now.

I lost my 18 month old nephew. My sister backed out of the driveway and Leahmon Ray, her son, tumbled out the door in path of my sister's vehicle.

In 1976, I had a terrible disease called Typhus. I was dying and the Lord heard my cry from my heart... and my family's cry for another chance for Gerald Cumby.

In 2003, I was diagnosed with Carcinoid Cancer. I had a tumor in the ilium of my small intestine. The doctors removed all my right colon, part of my transverse, and about 12" of my small intestine; as well as my gall bladder and my appendix. They found cancer in 8 of 24 lymph nodes removed. I am checked every year and the Lord has kept me from additional cancer problems.

I lost my daughter just 2 years ago to cancer. I do not understand it... but, my faith in a God who cares remains strong. I am on my last quarter of a mile race, trying to have enough kick to make it to the finish line on time and with enthusiasm. I want to finish strong. I am burning my candle at both ends to get as many things done that will last after I am gone. I have obtained my Master's degree from a local seminary since I retired. I have published two books since retirement. I plan on publishing others. I have placed on the internet a website with over 46 Bible Studies, 88 Devotions, and 12 Training Topics (over 2000 pages) of materials since retirement.

I have mentioned the term "I" have done this 12 different times in the last four paragraphs. If it was "I" who was the center of the topics discussed, I apologize. I just want you to know that I really want the Lord to get the glory for it all. In the end, that is what matters.

The published books, the degrees, the websites are to be honoring my God who has brought me through all my losses, all my downers, all my shortcomings. I can't take any of the accolades and successes with me as I cross the threshold into my Lord's arms. If God does not receive the glory, then what difference do the accomplishments make?

Summary: God is to get the glory for it all as Gerald Cumby heads for the finish line and stretches toward the mark of the high calling of God. I want to finish with a "whole hearted devotion to the God" who I know will never leave me. He is my "All in All."

God Sees Hearts as We See Faces!