

Series: ID: Follow the Leader

October 11, 2015

Title: The Test of Success

[Slide 1]

Text: 2 Chronicles 14-15

A Great Start

Tests!

Which test would you rather face? The test of failure or the test of success?

King Asa, Solomon's great-grandson, was the 5th king in the line of David. He reigned over a shrunken kingdom: 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel had rebelled against Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and formed their own northern kingdom.

King Asa's story is a story that begins with splendor and success. And it is only *after* he has succeeded beyond his wildest dreams that he faces the *test of success*.

Off to a great start!

[Slide 2]

The story of King Asa in 2 Chronicles begins with the highest of commendations:

2 Chronicles 14:2 NIV

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

The writer goes on to explain that Asa:

[Slide 3]

- Purged the land of the pagan practices that had crept in over the years,
- Commanded his people to seek the LORD and follow His commands,
- Cleaned up the worship practices in the outlying towns and villages,
- And built up the fortified cities to make the land safe and secure.

It was a good time to be king – and subject. The king focused on making the kingdom succeed. His program was simple and to the point:

[Slide 4]

2 Chronicles 14:7 NIV

"Let us build up these towns," he said to Judah, "and put walls around them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God; we sought him and he has given us rest on every side." So they built and prospered.

Asa could have wasted those early years by neglecting the defense of his realm. Things were peaceful, after all. Why bother to build up fortifications and a standing army? But he kept his eye on the ball and was ready when trouble came.

A great victory:

And trouble did eventually come in the form of an invasion from neighboring Egypt. Asa sought God's help and protection, praying:

[Slide 5]

2 Chronicles 14:11 NIV

"LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. LORD, you are our God; do not let mere mortals prevail against you."

God gave Asa and his army a great victory that day, and they returned to Jerusalem with a vast amount of plunder. Asa, who had shown maturity and wisdom in handling 10 years of peace, now demonstrated that he was willing and able to defend his realm, if God were fighting for him.

The Test of Success

Why is success so hard to deal with?

But a bigger test awaited King Asa. It would not be the test of war, but the test of success.

To understand just how hard the test of success can be, think about the young men you see running on the field every Saturday autumn afternoon. There they are, suited up to play for a major university. A year or two ago they were in Mrs. Jones' English class, trying to finish high school. Now they're on a full football scholarship, playing on national television. And for some of them this is just the beginning of a life of fame. When the season ends, they will wait for a call from an NFL team and be rocketed into wealth and prestige like they have never known. Welcome to the test of success!

The average NFL player makes between \$1.9 and \$5.15 million dollars per year. Some make vastly more than that. And yet within 5 years of retirement some 70% of NFL and NBA former players are dead broke – bankrupt!

Where does all that money go? It goes to things like:

- Taxes – no surprise there,
- Lifestyle competition,
- Priority on ease and comfort,
- The perception that there will always be another check coming,
- Friends and family,
- And bad investments.

Athletes who were disciplined and focused in the climb to the top, fail the test of success once they've made it.

Asa's supreme test:

King Asa was no different. It was one thing to be a young king out to prove that he was wise and disciplined and who could fight for his country. It would be quite another thing to handle the fame and fortune that came with a stunning victory.

Back in the day he may have had to keep to a tight budget. Now there was money to burn. Back in the day his people may have wondered whether or not he was up to the task of defending his realm. Would he prove to be a coward when his back was against the wall? Would he sell them out to save his own skin? Or would he fight with faith and courage?

Now the answer was in. King Asa was the real deal. He had made his mark, and everyone took notice. He could write his own ticket. No one would dare defy him.

King Asa was face to face with the test of success.

God speaks:

It is precisely at this point in Asa's life that God speaks to him. The message comes from a prophet named Azariah, and has three parts. It goes like this:

Part One: Seek the LORD!

[Slide 6]

2 Chronicles 15:1-2 NIV

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."

Azariah is reminding King Asa that he needs to focus on God *more than ever before*. The temptation in times of success and prosperity will be to think that we don't need God as much as we did when we were facing danger or ruin. Not so! Such is the test of success.

Part Two: Remember the lessons of the past!

[Slide 7]

2 Chronicles 15:3-6 NIV

"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."

Azariah reminds King Asa of just how quickly things go downhill when God is gone. Moral order disappears. Chaos and violence take over. Eventually people are afraid to step outdoors. Look at where we are in our society today! The gurus of our culture have dismissed God from the scene, along

with any sense of consistent and godly morality. And what do we have? Chaos, cities where you can get shot walking your dog, entire nations crumbling before our eyes on the evening news.

Part Three: Hang in there!

[Slide 8]

2 Chronicles 15:7 NIV

"But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded."

Finally: God's marching orders. Don't stop seeking Me. Don't stop doing the things you did to get where you are today. Hang in there, and your work will be rewarded.

The Test of Success:

King Asa could have said, "What do you mean, 'Your work will be rewarded'?" I won the war. I brought home the treasure. I've got it made. I have my reward. And if he went down that path, he would fail the test of success.

Why? Because he would have failed to grasp that yesterday's success presents you with tomorrow's challenges. The test of success asks the question: Will you take things to the next level? Or will you slack off and lose everything you fought so hard to accomplish?

Taking Things to the Next Level

King Asa's reform:

King Asa rose to the challenge posed by Azariah. Not content to rest on his laurels, he went back to the work of being a leader who never stopped turning things around for the better.

- He removed the idols from not only his realm, but the newly captured territories to the north.
- He repaired the altar to the LORD in the Temple so that God could be worshiped properly.
- He gathered the whole nation to renew their covenant with the LORD, donating a vast amount of the spoils of war as sacrifices to God.

- He even deposed the wicked Queen Mother, who had insisted on continuing to worship the pagan goddess Asherah in defiance of Asa's reforms.

The writer of Chronicles sums up King Asa by saying:

[Slide 9]

2 Chronicles 15:17b-18 NIV

Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life. He brought into the temple of God the silver and gold and the articles that he and his father had dedicated.

That's how you pass the Test of Success!

King Asa's impact:

You can tell a great leader by seeing the impact that he or she has on the people they lead. Do they get the message? Do they follow their leader?

King Asa's subjects chose to follow their leader. We read:

[Slide 10]

2 Chronicles 15:12 NIV

They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and soul.

2 Chronicles 15:14-15 NIV

They took an oath to the LORD with loud acclamation, with shouting and with trumpets and horns. All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholeheartedly. They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the LORD gave them rest on every side.

As goes the leader, so go the people. Both king and people passed the Test of Success.

Taking it to the next level:

A turnaround leader is a leader who learns to pass the Test of Success. A turnaround leader is committed to taking things to the next level. No sitting on the accomplishments or victories of the past. Turnaround leaders know

that yesterday's success sets the stage for something even more challenging and filled with potential.

[Slide 11]

In what ways are you facing the Test of Success? In what ways are you tempted to put things on cruise control and just coast along? In what ways are you tempted to say, "Been there, done that"?

- Marriage?
- Walk with God?
- Job performance?
- Ministry?

God is speaking to you and me as He did to King Asa. This is the time to dig deeper than we ever have before. This is the time to commit ourselves to taking things to the next level. If not, the things that we've accomplished will unravel right before our eyes.

This is the time to commit ourselves to be strong and not give up. This is the time to be leaders who pass the Test of Success.