

Playing Life Against a Stacked Deck

II Chronicles 20:1-30

Intro: Webster defines a stacked deck as "to arrange secretly for cheating or to arrange or fix so as to make a particular result likely.

Sometimes in life we may secretly feel that the deck is stacked against us as we face at times incredible odds in the things we have to deal with. What do you do when it seems like no matter what you do, you are in real trouble and you need help?

Lets think about it for a while today. **Remember**, most people don't mind obstacles as long as they don't get in their way. But sometimes they do get in our way and that is what we want to deal with today.

The background of the story here in II Chronicles 20:1-30 is that there were three enemies of the nation of Israel. They decided to all get together and gang up on the little nation of Israel. Out of this story we can get some principles on, how to face incredible odds, or in our language, what appears to be facing a stacked deck.

Israel's situation must have felt sort of like this comparison in our own time. You lose your job, the toilet backs up, the beans boil over, and somebody comes to the door and knocks and your hair's still in curlers or else you're walking around in your boxer shorts - You know, everything seems to go wrong at once.

What is our natural reaction when things gang up against us? If you are like most of us regular folks, your natural reaction would be fear. It was for the folks back there.

V 2 " Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army from Edom is marching against you from beyond the Dead Sea. They are already at Hazazon-tamar." (This was another name for En-gedi.)

So there was alarm and there is nothing wrong with that. The question is what do we do with it? Do we get discouraged and give up without even making an effort? Are we intimidated or, are we really motivated by incredible odds? Remember, courage is not the absence of fear but the mastery of it and the best way to take care of that fear, is to put our faith in the Fearless Christ.

Lets notice in this passage 7 things they did and maybe they will offer you some ideas for encouragement the next time you're feeling like the deck is stacked against you.

A. TUNE INTO GOD

V 3 *Jehoshaphat was alarmed by this news and sought the LORD for guidance. He also gave orders that everyone throughout Judah should observe a fast.*

The very first thing we need to do when we face a major problem is get still and tune into God. Then we need to ask Him things like "God, what's Your perspective on this problem? How do You see it? What's Your point of view? How do You look at the situation?"

B. PRAY

Although we often don't do it in this order we should remember that prayer ought to be our first choice when we face incredible odds or a stacked deck, not our last resort.

In verses 5-12, Jehoshaphat prayed three things. They are the same three things we need to pray when we're facing a mountain of trials or feeling like yes, the deck is stacked against us.

V 6 "Are You not...?" *"Are You not the God who's in heaven? You rule over the kingdoms of the nation. Power and might are in Your hand."*

The **first** thing we need to do when we are praying for relief from what appears to be a stacked deck, is to remind ourselves of who God is. *"Are You not the God in heaven and didn't You make this whole place? And If You made it, then You can certainly solve my problems today."* Luke 18:27 reminds us with these words *"What is impossible from a human perspective is possible with God."*

Secondly, Remind yourself what God has done in the past. V 7 he says Did you not..." *"Oh, God, did You not drive out the inhabitants of this land before the people of Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham Your friend?"* He said, "God, remember all those things You've done in the past." **Thought:** When you're facing a tough time, one of the ways to build your faith is to remember all the things God's done for you.

Thirdly, V 12 He says, God, I want You to do it again. Now, ask God to help you again. *O our God, won't you stop them? We are powerless against this mighty army that is about to attack us."* Won't you do it again? How about it God, I would like an instant replay. God, I know who You are and I know what You've done. Now, God, do it one more time.

C. ADMIT YOUR NEED

V 12 b *We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help."*

Help comes when people finally say, "God, I flat out need your help! I don't have the power to face this. I just can't make it on my own."

Maybe you've felt like this poem.

The world had a hopeful beginning
But man spoiled it all by sinning.
Now we that trust the story
Will end to God's glory
But right now the other side's winning.

If the deck seems stacked and you feel like the other side is winning, don't forget to admit your need.

D. FOCUS ON GOD, NOT YOUR PROBLEMS

V 12c *"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You."*

As Corrie Ten Boom once said, "If you look at the world you'll be distressed -- a lot of bad things happening in the world. If you look within you'll be depressed -- I see my own faults and failings and shortcomings. If you look at Christ you'll be at rest."

Notice God's response V 15 *"Listen, King Jehoshaphat, and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem. This is what the Lord says to you. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. The battle is not yours, but God's."*

Thought: You could look at it like this. When you feel the deck is stacked against you, let God play the next hand for you.

E. GET SOME SUPPORT

Notice V 13 *"All the men of Judah with their wives and their children and their little ones stood before the Lord."*

God never meant for us to face all our problems on our own. Yes, we have him but he wants other human involvement also. Notice that the wives and children were there as well.

We're to build one another up and encourage one another other. We're to lift one another up, pray for one another, love one another, and support one another. That's the principle of Heb. 10:24,25 *Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of*

love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near. Thought: When we do what we can do, God takes over and does the rest.

F. RELAX IN FAITH

He says, "You're not going to have to fight in this battle. Just stand firm in your positions and watch God do it. In other words, relax in faith.

See V 17 But you will not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the Lord's victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out there tomorrow, for the LORD is with you!"

Rick Warren adds some insight about waiting on God to do the work. He says of himself, One of the most relaxing days of my life was the day I resigned as General Manager of the universe. I realized that the world did not fall apart when I resigned.

You see, God simply says, Relax, and watch me play this hand for you and we will see if the deck is really stacked against you, or if you just think it is.

There's two words in V 17 that help us. They are "stand firm" or stand still' , "*Stand firm or stand still, and see the deliverance the Lord will give you.*" This is a mental attitude. It's an attitude of quiet confidence.

It's the attitude that we are to have while we are waiting for God to handle that situation we are facing . It is an attitude of quiet confidence.

Looking at it from another angle it could be said like this when God gets takes over. **Thought:** The caterpillar calls it the end of the world, God calls it a butterfly. When we face what we think is a stacked deck, don't forget, God has final the trump card that will win the hand for you.

When we are standing firm we can do it on the basis of two things we find in V 20 "*Listen to Me Judah and people of Jerusalem. Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld. Have faith in His prophets and you will be successful.*"

First, Stand on the character of God. God is faithful. If He says it, He will do it. So stand on the character of God. **Thought:** God has no problems - He only has solutions

Secondly, stand firm on what His prophets have said. In other words, stand firm on the truth of God's word. Matthew 24:35 talks about the stability of God's word with

this description of it *Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will remain forever.*

When we're waiting for help in the game we are facing, wait on the basis of the character of God and wait on the basis of the reliability of His word..

G. THANK GOD IN ADVANCE.

V 21 this is Jehoshaphat's plan, *After consulting the leaders of the people, the king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the LORD and praising him for his holy splendor. This is what they sang: "Give thanks to the LORD; his faithful love endures forever!"*

Notice where the singers were, they were ahead of the army. The army would not even have to fight. The singers sang their way to God's victory. They were actually singing praises in advance of the battle and notice the three results of their singing, praising, and thanking God in advance.

First, There was **victory**. V 22 *At the moment they began to sing and give praise, the LORD caused the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir to start fighting among themselves.*

What happened? Well, while they were praising God, The Lord somehow had these three armies start fighting each other and knocking themselves off, ambushing each other. The Israelites just had to stand and watch the enemy devastate itself. There was victory. But wasn't that what God had told them earlier? Stand still and see the victory of the Lord

Secondly, there was **blessing** V 25-28 *King Jehoshaphat and his men went out to gather the plunder. They found vast amounts of equipment, clothing, and other valuables--more than they could carry. There was so much plunder that it took them three days just to collect it all! On the fourth day they gathered in the Valley of Blessing, which got its name that day because the people praised and thanked the LORD there. It is still called the Valley of Blessing today.*

Thought: That was a benefit. There was so much leftover spoils of war it took them three days to collect it. So the result of thanking God in advance was they got to live in the Valley of Blessing What they had feared as they looked at what appeared to be a stacked deck, actually turned out to be the pot of gold when God got done with it.

Thirdly, there is a **witness to the world** about the power of our Lord in the situation we face. *V 29 When the surrounding kingdoms heard that the LORD himself had fought against the enemies of Israel, the fear of God came over them.*

When we let God fight against the stacked deck and He wins the victory then everybody else takes notice. It basically said the whole world took notice that God was fighting their battles.

God is looking for people that He can bless so He can prove to the world that He is alive. He can only bless when we take the steps of faith and move in advance. Yes, sometimes it does seem like the deck has been stacked against us. But we must not forget to factor God into the game.

So rather than be discouraged why not

- A . Tune in to God about His view of things
- B . Pray for help from the Lord
- C . Admit our need for His help
- D . Focus on God and not the problem
- E . Get some support from other people
- F . Relax in faith
- G . And thank God in advance

Thought: With God involved in the game with you, don't sweat the deal from the bottom of the deck by the hand of the enemy.

Maybe you have been living your life without God to help you. If you have and you are tired and you feel the enemy will win as he deals from the bottom of the deck, why not read a few more lines, do what they say and in that moment of time slip over to the winning side through Jesus.

Realize you are a sinner Romans 3:23

Understand that the payday for sin is death or eternal conscious separation from God.
Romans 6:23a

Know that there is a way of escape for you. Romans 6:23b and John 1:12

Desire to escape and pray this or a similar prayer.

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I am truly sorry for my sins, and I confess them all to You [name them]. Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins and come into my heart as my Saviour and Lord. I receive You right now. Help me from this time forward to live for You. Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen."

On the _____ day of _____ I became a Christian by inviting Jesus Christ into my life to forgive my sin.

Signed: _____

If you have further questions or have chosen to do this, be sure to let us know so we can help you, pray for you and encourage you in your new life.

You can reach us at lapeerchurch@gmail.com Subject line: (Salvation)