

2 Chronicles 17:1-13 • An Old Testament Model for Church Growth

Introduction

“Church Growth” invokes a variety of images for different people, not all of them good. One of the most popular strategies overwhelming the shelves at Christian bookstores advocates polling the community and radically changing services to create a “seeker sensitive” environment. We must not be afraid to use new techniques or technologies to reach people for Christ, we simply have an obligation to substantiate that their use is validated by God’s Word. If you’re preaching God’s Word, for instance, it matters not if it’s one-on-one or through a microphone or camera to millions. The message just has to remain true to God’s Word even though the medium changes. In Jehoshaphat we have an Old Testament example of how a revival took deep and effective root with both God’s people and those around them.

¹Jehoshaphat his son then became king in his place, and made his position over Israel firm. ²He placed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had captured.

³The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father David’s earlier days and did not seek the Baals, ⁴but sought the God of his father, followed His commandments, and did not act as Israel did. ⁵So the LORD established the kingdom in his control, and all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honor. ⁶He took great pride in the ways of the LORD and again removed the high places and the Asherim from Judah.

[Read v.1-6]

Q: Although v.1-2 serve as an overview with the rest of the chapter to provide the details of how it was accomplished, primarily against whom were these preparations made? Why do you suppose that was?

A: It states no one other than the northern kingdom of “Israel”. This was not only practical in that Israel and Judah never got along, but since under Asa, Jehoshaphat’s father, some of Israel had been captured and occupied by Judah (“the cities of Ephraim”), retaliation was probably expected. Lastly, Israel was a spiritual enemy in its embrace and worship of false gods, so it might also be seen as a step towards protecting those in Judah who were still faithful from those in Israel who were not.

Q: What seems to be the overall issue first addressed in v.3-6?

A: The quality of Jehoshaphat’s spiritual walk or faithfulness. It is likened to “David’s earlier days” before his sins of unfaithfulness with Bathsheba and so forth, and stands as a stark contrast to King Ahab of Israel who embraced Baal worship.

Q: What are the 3 specific actions listed in v.4 which resulted in Jehoshaphat’s personal faithfulness?

1. “...sought the God of his father...” This is an Old Testament expression of someone earnestly praying, worshiping, and serving God. It expresses the most extreme commitment to seeking and serving God.
2. “...followed His commandments...” He wasn’t just knowledgeable in or ware, but he put God’s Word into practice.
3. “...did not act as Israel did.” He did not pursue false doctrine or false religion, but stayed on the right path. He was content with the scope of God’s Word, never seeking to supplement or supplant it with anything else.

Point: It combines to show someone committed to God’s Word and will sincerely from the heart.

Q: According to v.5, what was the result of this personal commitment detailed in v.4?

A: As a result of his personal commitment, “the LORD established the kingdom in his control”. Jehoshaphat’s personal strength or will did not elevate him or make him successful, but God did so as a result of his personal commitment to God. He focused on honoring God, and in turn God honored him.

Application: Why is it that spiritual leaders are not to operate as corporate or worldly leaders? What is their biblical model? (Hint: Both the Hebrew and Greek words are “shepherd”.)

And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

Luke 22:24-27

Q: What is the thing which is intimated as being most dear to Jehoshaphat in what it says about him in v.6? What does "pride in the ways of God" and his removal of false spiritual influences have in common?

A: Jehoshaphat is someone wholly committed to the truth.

Application: Have you ever considered that something of God needs to first be established, affirmed, and even cleansed in the truth? If one person begins a work for God, how effective will it be if either that person or others joining them do not share the same truth? How difficult will it be if they fail to remove all the spiritual influences working against them? Or the false notions opposed to the biblical basis for the work?

[Read v.7-9]

⁷Then in the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah; ⁸and with them the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tobadonijah, the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests. ⁹They taught in Judah, *having* the book of the law of the LORD with them; and they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.

Q: Whereas the previous verses detail Jehoshaphat's personal spiritual commitment, how would you characterize the next step taken?

A: He actively worked on the people's faithfulness.

Q: What are the 3 types of men Jehoshaphat sent? What do you suppose they taught?

1. Officials or Princes. They most likely taught the laws of Jehoshaphat's kingdom and oversaw the whole process.
2. Levites. They most likely instructed the people in everything pertaining to temple service and the ritual laws of God's Word.
3. Priests. They most likely taught the design and doctrine of their religion based on God's Word.

It's most likely that they would tie all these aspects together into a cohesive representation of God's Word which instructed the people in their duty to God, the king, and each other. The people would have seen no separation between "church and state" and that **EVERYONE** from top to bottom, from slave to king, all followed something higher than even the king: God's Word. (How should this be applied to the local church?)

Q: What might be significant about the fact that they taught in "all the cities of Judah"? How does this show that **EVERONE had to have a commitment to God's Word regardless of their rank, status, or position?**

A: Because **SOME** of the cities would have belonged to the Levites, and some would have been specially devoted to the king. Therefore even the priests and Levites received the same instruction along with every level of Jehoshaphat's military and government.

Point: In v.1-6 we saw that Jehoshaphat began with himself as someone wholly committed to God's truth. Here we see it as the essential ingredient for growth among the people as a whole. Jehoshaphat joins everyone together through a commitment to not just the knowledge, but the truth of God's Word.

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¹⁰Now the dread of the LORD was on all the kingdoms of the lands which *were* around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. ¹¹Some of the Philistines brought gifts and silver as tribute to Jehoshaphat; the Arabians also brought him flocks, 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats. ¹²So Jehoshaphat grew greater and greater, and he built fortresses and store cities in Judah. ¹³He had large supplies in the cities of Judah, and warriors, valiant men, in Jerusalem.

Application: *Is there a ministry or “Christian” activity that can take place without being grounded somehow in the truth of God’s Word? (If someone thinks so, let them try to explain it.) How well do your church’s or your own activities trace their foundation to God’s Word? Does everyone in the ministry/activity know the scriptural basis for what is taking place? Might this explain why some things are struggling, maybe even in need of removal or radical re-evaluation?*

[Read v.10-13]

Q: Did Jehoshaphat begin his reign preparing to wage war against the many nations and enemies surrounding him?

A: No, his efforts were defensive in nature, to protect against and be rid of all bad spiritual influences. His “training” program was actually a training program of righteousness according to one’s obedience to God’s Word.

Point: *One man’s commitment to personal faithfulness led to him to being joined by an entire nation, followed by **THEIR** being the influence on everyone around them instead of the other way around.*

Epilogue

So much of what the Church Growth Movement offers is a discussion of how to make church appealing, how to make visitors comfortable, how to gain visibility into the community. The majority of suggestions have to do with changing the atmosphere at church, increasing the production values of music and multi-media presentations, even in altering the sermon so as to de-emphasize if not eliminate many of the core doctrines of God’s Word. Very little, if anything, is mentioned about the power of personal faithfulness to God’s Word and ways as the essential, biblical approaches to church growth.

According to Jesus, to forsake personal faithfulness is disastrous both personally and for the community we live in:

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:13-16