

*When Life Gets In The Way*

This past week a 41 year old orthopaedic doctor was on his way to drop off his 5 year old son at day care when he received an emergency call from the hospital. The doctor immediately turned his car around and headed for the hospital.

When he arrived he hurriedly locked his car and ran up to the third floor to perform emergency surgery.

At 4:30 that afternoon his wife arrived at the day care to pick up her little boy only to find out that he'd never arrived. She immediately called her husband who dropped the phone in shock and ran to the parking lot.

At 4:45 PM, more than 8 hours after he had parked his car, he found his little boy unconscious in the back seat with his schoolbag and a little empty water bottle. It had been nearly 90 degrees that day. He rushed his son up to the clinic but to no avail. The boy could not be revived.

Here was a well educated, intelligent, accomplished man who had a goal last Wednesday. His goal was to take his son to day care and then help others with his medical skills.

He started of great. He was headed in the right direction. And then he got sidetracked. Not by something evil or sinful. Not by something that was out of the ordinary for him at all.

He was headed in the right direction then life got in the way. Life got in the way, and the end result was tragedy.

Have you ever been sidetracked? You say, "Sure, we all have. Not is such a tragic, hurtful way as the doctor, but we've all been sidetracked."

I want to challenge you with this this morning. I believe that it's possible for us to be knocked off course in our spiritual life, by the stuff of life. And while we might not always experience the fullness of the consequences like the doctor did, the consequences can be just as serious. In fact, they can be even more serious because they're eternal.

There's a verse in the New Testament book of Galatians that asks the question I want us to consider this morning.

The people of the region of Galatia, which was in Asia Minor, had a problem. An apostle of Jesus named Paul had shared the good news with them. He told them about Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. He explained how Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin and how everyone who puts their trust in Christ are forgiven and part of the family of God.

A whole bunch of people believed and a church was formed but soon after some false teachers came into town and convinced the Galatians that faith in Jesus Christ wasn't enough.

When the apostle Paul got the news he wrote this letter we call Galatians, and in it he asked the question: *You ran well. Who hindered you?* (Galatians 5:7)  
You were doing great what diverted you from the truth?

Did you know it's possible for someone to trust Christ as savior, walk with God, begin to read the Bible, get involved in church, and still end up a spiritual failure in the end?

We work closely with Good News Jail and Prison Ministry here in Anne Arundel County. Bill Simmer is the founder. He tells of meeting several of his fellow classmates from Washington Bible College at the detention center. Not as chaplains, but as inmates. *You ran well. Who hindered you?*

I did my undergraduate work in Florida and one day I preached at the Miami rescue mission. (I was also the special music with 2 other guys that day!)

After I gave the message I got into a lengthy discussion about the Bible with a "no job, no family, no hope" young guy who was staying there. He could quote more Bible verses than I could so I asked him where he learned scripture. His answer was Miami Christian College. *You ran well. Who hindered you?*

I know a man who traveled around the country speaking to youth. He literally led thousands of teens to Christ. One day he left his wife of 30 years and ran off with an 18 year old girl. He just celebrated his 90th birthday last year. She's 48. *You ran well. Who hindered you?*

I'd like you to open your Bibles this morning to **II Chronicles chapter 34, page 414**

We're going to look at the highlights of the life of a man named Josiah. Josiah had a good beginning. Josiah was a guy who got off to a real good start. He ran well.

### *I. God Blesses A Committed Life*

#### **Read verses 1,2**

II Chronicles 34 takes place right around 600 BC. That's 450 years after Samson, the last judge we studied in the book of Judges.

Josiah was literally the one bright spot in the last 100 years of Judah's history. The kings of the Jewish nation at this point were worshippers of the false gods of the Canaanites. They were worshippers of Baal and Ashera.

If you were with us for our Judges study you'll remember that God had commanded His people to do something that sounded very harsh. They were to either drive out or put to death the Canaanite peoples.

The Canaanites had become so debauched and in such rebellion against God that He finally said, "Get rid of them all." Remember, this is after centuries and centuries of debased, depraved, degenerate behavior.

Of course, God's people didn't do what God told them to do and so here they are 450 years later and they're still being tempted and pulled into Canaanite worship.

Just like in the days of the judges God was using the surrounding nations to discipline Israel and He was about to bring Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon to take the people away into captivity.

Nebuchadnezzar was one of the great leaders and unifiers of Mesopotamia and a hero of Saddam Husien. Saddam liked to think of himself as a modern day Nebuchadnezzar who would unify Mesopotamia again.

This was a wicked time for the nation. Josiah's own father was so evil that he was finally murdered by his own servants in his own house. They couldn't stand the guy.

Out of this kind of background comes Josiah. He was annointed king upon the death of his father and this was at the age of 8. And the Bible says something about Josiah that was pretty rare in those days. *He did what was right in the sight of the LORD.*

Just to give you an idea of how uncommon it was for a king who was ruling over God's chosen people to do right look at a few other references in II Chronicles.

**21:6 22:4 33:2 & 6 33:22**

Josiah walked in the ways of Israel's most revered king, king David. David was described as a man after God's own heart.

**Back to 34:3, 4**

When Josiah was 16 he began to seek the God of David, In his 12th year, when he was 20 years old, he began as purge.

The Canaanites always picked hills or elevations in the land for worship. That's why you read so much about the "high places" in the Old Testament. They were also big on fertility cults and the high places were usually tied into sexual immorality and perversion in the name of worship. (What do you think the discussions were like in those days? Were they like ours? "I don't know what it was but I just didn't get into the worship today!")

Josiah made sure that all the pagan places of worship were obliterated to the point of grinding up the clay idols and sprinkling the dust on the graves of Baal worshippers who had died.

If that wasn't enough he really made his point in verse 5. **Read verse 5**

Nobody said, "I wonder where Josiah stands on the issue of idols!" He definitely wasn't sitting on the fence.

Now God couldn't have been any more clear when it came to instructions on how to respond to false religion but it took a leader. It took a man of God like Josiah to carry out God's orders. It wasn't just coincidence that during Josiah's reign there was peace and prosperity in the land.

Josiah is only 26 years old, but already he has led his nation politically and spiritually in the right direction. Remember, these were people who were used to doing life their way instead of God's way. These were people who wanted to follow the sexually charged Canaanite religions, they didn't want the restrictions of God's truth. These were people who could have cared less about representing Jehovah God. But young Josiah has commanded their respect.

But there's more. Josiah isn't just going to sit back take it easy now.

### **Read verse 8**

The Jewish people had spent such a long time away from God that the temple, which was one of the wonders of the ancient world, was in shambles. The house of God was in disarray.

### **Read verses 14-16**

They were working on the temple and they made an amazing discovery. They found a Bible! Actually it was the first five books of the Bible, but it was a Bible.

Now you have to remember that in 630 BC there weren't any books. The scriptures were written on scrolls, which were very expensive and very rare. If you wanted to hear from the Bible you went to the temple and listened to someone read it. The big Isaiah scroll from Qumran is 25 feet long!

The problem was the temple had been deserted for so many years that no one from that generation had actually seen a copy of the Bible. In fact, it was the high priest who finds it! Even he didn't know it was there. That's bad. That's real bad.

### **Read verse 19**

Can you imagine being 26 years old, a Jewish king with all the promises of God and you've never even seen a copy of the Bible? He's literally hearing the Word of God read for the first time in his life.

So what does Josiah do? Does he say, "Can't we get a more modern translation around here?" Does he complain because church is boring? Does he ask, "How do we know the Bible's true?" Does he say, "That's OK for you but not for me?"

He tears his clothes. This was the Jewish way of showing despair or anguish. Then look at this... **Read verse 21**

Josiah gets it, doesn't he? He gets it. *Great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out on us,*

"This is serious stuff. It doesn't get more serious than this. God is really angry with us because we're treated His truth like it didn't matter. We've played games with God.

You don't play games with the Almighty.”

You know what Josiah did next? The king got everybody together and he personally read the Bible to them. The king has all kinds of people to do stuff for him. He gives the order and they do it.

Not this time. This was too important. Josiah personally read to the people from God's eternal word.

Now compare that with us. We're inundated with Bibles. We must have 12 or 15 English translation available to us. How seriously do you treat that book?

If the Bible wasn't around would you be like the Jews of Josiah's day and not even know it? The Bible's still a best seller in our country but I'd be willing to bet it's not the most read book. It decorates a lot of book shelves and coffee tables but there's a whole lot more TV watching going on than Bible reading.

Now look at verse 31. Here's how the reading of the Bible effected Josiah. **Read verse 31**

He wasn't ashamed. He wasn't worried about what everyone else thought. Josiah the king gets up and swears before God to live out God's truth with all his heart, mind, and soul.

Talk about a committed life. That's what God is looking for from us. God is waiting to pour out His blessing on committed followers.

*I. God Blesses A Committed Life*

*II. Even A Committed God-Follower Can Get Sidetracked*

**Read 35:20**

I have to believe that the sweeping reforms Josiah carried out were very unpopular with a lot of people. They liked their lifestyle. They didn't mind being in rebellion. They enjoyed it. That's why they'd been rebelling for so long.

I mean, just think what it would be like here if the government came in tomorrow and passed all kinds of laws that regulated morality. There'd be such an uproar, we'd have riots.

So you can be sure that not every person looked and said, “We're loving the straight

and narrow way.” That means that Josiah wasn’t some mediocre leader or statesman. He wasn’t some indecisive, wishy-washy spiritual leader. He was strong in his faith. He had to be to lead that bunch.

But after all that he had done for God. After all that Josiah accomplished spiritually, he gets sidetracked, big time.

Here’s the situation: To the north of Israel was Assyria, their old enemy that had been troubling them for years. To the west was Babylon, which was an up-and-coming power at the time and who wanted to attack Assyria and do them in. To the south of Israel was the nation of Egypt.

Assyria was declining in power while Babylon was increasing in strength. Pharaoh Neco down in Egypt was keeping a close watch on what was happening to the north. He knew that if Babylon captured Assyria that their next move would be to march through Israel and attack Egypt.

Because of this, the Pharaoh of Egypt decided to move up to defend Assyria against Nebuchadnezzar and maintain the delicate balance of power.

Now follow this. In Josiah’s mind Assyria was his enemy. Assyria had been making his life miserable for years. He was ecstatic that Babylon was going to crush them. The problem was, that wasn’t God’s plan. God never once told Josiah to do anything about the situation.

A problem had come up that Josiah didn’t understand. He didn’t see how things could possibly work out. And because he couldn’t understand what God was doing he lost faith. He refused to trust God’s methods and decided to take the matter into his own hands.

### **Read verses 21 -22**

Somehow Pharaoh Neco knew that he was on God’s mission. I don’t know if God told him in a dream or by some strong impulse or by Jeremiah or one of the other prophets living at that time. What we do know is somehow God was the one sending Pharaoh up to stop Babylon.

We can understand it looking back centuries later but Josiah, who was right in the middle of it all, couldn’t accept that. He said to himself, “Wait a minute. This doesn’t make sense! Why would God want to support our enemy the Assyrians?”

You know why Josiah couldn't trust God's ways of doing things? Because God's way didn't make sense to him. He couldn't figure it all out. Maybe Josiah was trained as an engineer. He couldn't get it all down on paper in a logical sequence. Life got in Josiah's way and look what happened...

### **Read verses 23 & 24**

Is that mind blowing, or what? Here's a guy who had more spiritual insight than anyone in the last 100 years, dead at 39 because life didn't make sense to him.

*I. God Blesses A Committed Life*

*II. Even A Committed God-Follower Can Get Sidetracked*

*III. Following God Long Term Means Walking By Faith*

When we lived in Florida I worked with a guy at Sears. He was a hard drinking, tough talking, angry man. When ever I tried to talk with him about God he'd just blow me off. Then I finally heard his story.

He was in college studying for the ministry when his wife left him for another man.

That was it. He dropped out of school, proclaimed himself an atheist, and was seething with anger at anyone who even mentioned God.

Maybe you know someone like that. Maybe that describes you. There's plenty of people who deny God because life hit them hard and they just gave up.

Then there's Wess Stafford. Wess is president and CEO of Compassion International, a Christian aid organization that has touched the lives of 1.6 million children.

Wess' parents were missionaries in West Africa. In those days children were sent to boarding school. Every year, from the time he was 6, Wess Stafford spent 9 months at the Mamou Alliance Academy.

Looking back, one of the alumnus of Mamou Academy referred to it as "the Auschwitz of missionary boarding schools."

It was a brutal place where the children were beaten and abused. Stafford writes, "At age 9 we learned in math class how to average. The most recurring event in my life I could think of was how many times I had been beaten. For a span of weeks, I kept

track of my beatings, hiding the tally under my pillow. When I did the math, I discovered that I was being beaten an average of 17 times per week.”

He said, “The boarding school staff abused us in every way a child can be abused—not only physically and emotionally but spiritually as well. We were terrified of their powerful and vengeful God, reminded daily that we were little sinners in the hands of their angry God.”

The children were warned never to tell their parents about the abuse. They were told, if they did and their parents left the field then the children would be responsible for Africans going to hell.

Finally, at age 10 everything came to a crescendo for Wess Stafford. He had told his mother just before he returned to school. Now he would be punished.

He was brought up to the front of the class, made to stand on a chair and given a candle to hold. The houseparent lit both ends of the candle.

“He spoke angrily to the assembled children. “This boy here is Satan's tool. He told, and the Devil used him to destroy his parents' ministry. There will be Africans in hell because of Wesley.”

“Hearing those words, there arose in me a rage, a passion as I had never experienced before and have not since. I had felt I could endure almost any treatment at his hands—I had for years. But the candle incident was different. Never had words cut so deeply.”

“I was not Satan's tool. I was a little boy with a broken heart who had found his voice and cried out for rescue. So, enough—enough shame, enough abuse, enough lies. It had to stop somewhere, sometime. I made my decision: It stops now! I'm not letting go”

“I clenched my teeth, tightened every muscle in my body, and pinched the candle as fiercely as I could. I stared as the edges of my fingers turned red. A blister popped up. I was transported out of my body. I floated above this terrified boy, watching as if it were happening to someone else. I saw a wisp of smoke rise up on either side of my fingers. I would not let go.”

“Just then, a child in the front row couldn't stand it any longer, and he jumped up and slapped the candle out of my hand. The children scattered in all directions. The

meeting was over. But standing there alone on my chair, I had received my calling. In an instant, I had gone from victim to victor. From that day forward, I would protect children. I would forever speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.”

One man lost his wife. He wondered where God was. Life hit him head on and it made no sense. And so instead of hanging on to God and getting through by faith he got sidetracked into a calloused bitterness.

On the other hand, a little boy was put in a situation of suffering that defy description. The ones who should have protected and nurtured him tortured him in the name of God.

In his time of greatest testing and trial, when nothing made sense, God called him to ministry. Today he serves children in the name of God.

What makes the difference?

One ran well for a while but was hindered. The other kept on running with a commitment to finish well.

For the orthopaedic doctor it was just the business of life. For Josiah it was something he couldn't understand. For the guy in Florida it was the pain of personal tragedy.

If life hasn't gotten in your way yet, hang on. It's coming. Our attention, our priority, our concentration has to be on God. If it isn't, then the issues of life will loom over us until they completely cloud our view.

When we look to God we see with clarity. God is the Lord and Master of all things. He's the sovereign ruler, the king of the universe.

In Genesis 14 Abraham said, *I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth.* (Genesis 14:22)

*The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.* (Psalm 46:11)

*For the LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth.* (Psalm 47:2)

We can have confidence to know God's at work even when life doesn't make sense to us because He is the Lord. He possesses heaven and earth and He's our refuge.

Not only that, but the consistent message of the Bible, Old Testament and New, is that the Lord is also our savior.

*The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, My stronghold and my refuge; My Savior. (II Samuel 21:2,3)*

*They forgot God their Savior. (Psalm 106:21)*

*He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them. (Isaiah 19:20)  
For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I, even I, am the LORD,  
And besides Me there is no savior. (Isaiah 43:3,11)*

*Truly You are God... O God of Israel, the Savior! (Isaiah 45:15)*

*Yet I am the LORD your God ever since the land of Egypt, And you shall know no God but Me; For there is no Savior besides Me. (Hosea 13:4)*

From the Passover Lamb in Exodus to The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in the gospel of John the Lord, who is our savior?

It is God. Not a church. Not a religion. Not what you and I do or accomplish. It's not how sincere we are. It's God.

He alone gives eternal life to all who place their faith in Him.

Do you have that confidence? Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your personal savior? Is your hope for eternity in Him?

If it's not, then call on Him today. The Bible makes this promise: *Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.* (Romans 10:13)

And if your hope is in Him and you've called on His name, then keep your eye on the goal. Keep focused. Life won't always make sense. In fact some times it will be very confusing. Life will have a thousand and one distractions.

But, if you're running well, don't let anything hinder you today.