

# Act in Faith!

## *Lessons for Overcomers:*

2 Chronicles 20:18-22

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Bethany Church

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What do you do when times get really tough? I suppose there may be times when you hide in a bunker, but no one has ever won a battle hiding in a bunker. There must be a time, even if it is very short, when you have to rise from the bunker and face the enemy. The Apostle Paul often took to the bunker. With the help of the church, the apostle escaped seven different cities: Damascus, Jerusalem, Iconium, Lystra (after surviving a stoning), Thessalonica, Berea and Ephesus. Yet, he also turned and faced his opposition, suffering deprivation, abuse and imprisonment. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote:

*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*  
(2 Corinthians 4:8-9, NIV)

The apostle wrote that like cheap, clay jars that carry priceless oil, he and his partners in their turmoil and weakness carry the all-surpassing power of God. They carried it in the light and life of Christ who lives and works within them. This is the most important lesson for overcoming. We've discussed three lessons in this series. First, to be an overcomer, you need to get on the right side. God's not your servant. You're his! Second, in overcoming you need wisdom from heaven. Immediate results are not necessarily signs of that wisdom. Results have been used to justify all kinds of behavior, yet those behaviors often carry little similarity to heavenly wisdom that is pure from any selfish ambition or jealousy. Third, overcomers must

keep on trusting despite contrary winds. They must become strong, unyielding to contrary currents, and they must become courageous responding in faith rather than in fear. Today, we look at the most important lesson for overcomers.

This lesson is embodied in the experience of two kings in the Old Testament. Early in King Saul's dominion, God solidified Saul's leadership with a stunning victory. Afterwards, Saul sent his warriors home to their tribal regions, but kept three thousand as professional soldiers. Saul took personal charge of two thousand and installed his son as commander of the other thousand. They still had a problem. First, they continued to live under Philistine rule and occupation. The Philistines were garrisoned in cities around Israel. Second, the Philistines controlled the blacksmiths who only sharpened farm tools. They made certain no Israelite produced or possessed a sword or spear. Consequently, the Israelite army had an assortment of rakes, pitchforks, hoes, axes, sickles and who knows what else. Can you imagine training a soldier to use a hoe? Were they going out to fight or weed? All of this is described in 1 Samuel 13 and 14. There were only two swords. King Saul had one, and his son Jonathon had the other. With all the exuberance and enthusiasm of youth, Jonathon took his thousand hoe-carrying soldiers and overcame the Philistine garrison in an Israelite city. Can you imagine King Saul? "Ah, thanks son. You displayed great courage. However, by chance, you made sure no one escaped, didn't you? You made certain that no one informed the Philistines so that we wouldn't have to face their entire army, didn't you? I mean you wouldn't do something so utterly reckless and dumb, would you?" Saul quickly signaled Israel to gather at the same place where Joshua had prepared earlier Israelites to conquer the land. In the mean time, the Philistines assembled *"three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as sands on the seashore"* (1 Samuel 13:5). The Israelite men who came to help King Saul and his professional

army detoured into some bunkers: caves, thickets, clumps of rocks, pits and cisterns. The professional army stayed with King Saul for a time but suffered the shakes as they grew a negative opinion of Saul and his son. Soon, they melted away so that only six hundred soldiers with farm implements were with Saul and Jonathon when Samuel arrived to seek God's favor. Do you think they had a people problem, a resource problem and a morale problem? Can you think of a time when your circumstance was more hopeless? When Samuel arrived, he scolded the king. The problem wasn't the enemy, nor was it Jonathon's enthusiasm. The problem was that King Saul was more driven by fear than faith. Because God's word didn't suit his situation, he disobeyed it. He forgot the treasure we carry in these clay jars. His son didn't. God used an act of faith by his son Jonathon who attacked accompanied only by his armor bearer. Together they defeated 20 Philistine soldiers; and God used that faith, that skill, that spectacle to throw the entire Philistine army into panic. That day 600 farm-implement-equipped soldiers pursued 6,000 charioteers and a sword-wielding army as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Israelite men would reclaim their bravery and climb out of pits, cisterns, caves and clefts to help them.

What is the lesson you learn? What is the most important lesson in overcoming? Years later, King Jehoshaphat faced the armies of three kingdoms. Once again, the odds were stacked against the people of God. The king called a nationwide fast, and in that nation every single family, including the babies, traveled to Jerusalem to seek God's favor at the temple. God spoke through a single person in that assembly. He said that the battle belonged to God. The nation would see the victory of the Lord. From that moment on, Jehoshaphat and his leaders encouraged the people to trust God and the prophets of God. They sung praise to God. As they marched out to meet their enemies, the leaders decided to have singers lead their army. Their trust was not in their weapons. Their trust was not in their skill. Their trust was not in their

abilities. Their trust was in the one they worshiped. ***“Give thanks to the Lord; his faithful love endures forever,”*** they sang. Something happened as they sang in an act of faith. Something happened to the spirit of their enemies. They turned on one another and devoured themselves. The people of God did not brandish a single sword. Instead, they collected plunder for three days and held a celebration to honor the Lord. The Bible says that this victory brought peace to the nation because the neighboring kingdoms now feared God.

The most important lesson to overcoming is not getting on the right side... although that is important. The most important lesson is not getting wisdom from heaven... although it is important. The most important lesson is not being strong and courageous... although it is important to keep trusting. These are all vital things to do and doing them changes everything; however, the most important lesson for overcomers is to know that the all-surpassing power of God is carried in very common and even flawed jars of clay, that the light and life of Christ lives in those who trust him. It is to know that and then act in faith. Through faith Jonathon, the son of King Saul, climbed up a hill and took on a numberless army and beat them. Through faith in God’s word, a king and his nation marched out to meet an overwhelming enemy singing their faith and watched God secure their peace.

Today, whatever your circumstance, act in faith. Know that the priceless treasure of God’s love, truth and power is carried in very common jars of clay. The lid comes off and the power flows out as we act in faith. Don’t get discouraged. Worship the Lord. Don’t accept defeat, offer Christ praise. Eliminate the word “can’t” and “impossible” from your vocabulary, “for we are more than conquerors through him who loves us!” Listen to this benediction:

***Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.***  
(Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV)