

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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The Valley of Crisis

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Well, this weekend we kick off a new series called 'Valleys'. If you're at our online campus, you can check out the notes and follow along there.

You know what we love mountain tops. We love those moments that represent the high points in our lives. I remember a few years ago, I was driving through the Andes Mountains in Ecuador on a mission trip and you couldn't see the top of the mountain because of cloud cover. And then we drove through the clouds and the clouds formed this celestial carpet and it felt like we were on top the world you could see, for miles. We love mountains, valleys, not so much. In fact, in the valley, it's hard to see two inches. It's hard to see tomorrow. I think the valley represents those low points in our lives. If you have walked through the valley of grief if you have walked through the valley of waiting or the valley of disappointment, you wonder if you'll ever make it to the other side, you wonder if there is another side. And if you do make it to the other side of that divorce, or that loss of a loved one, or the loss of a job or even a crisis like this, what is that new normal going to be like? Here's what I know for sure the valley is where we discover who we really are. And more importantly, it's where we discover who God is. The valley is where faith is forged. The valley is where vision is birthed. The valley is where character is cultivated in our lives. We have some lessons to learn in the valley.

Let me zoom out and then I'll zoom back in. There is an interdisciplinary study called geopolitics. It looks at politics through the filter of geography. And I'll give you a classic case in point. China and India, they're next door neighbors, huge populations very different politically and culturally. Why is it that over thousands of years that there has been relative peace between these two nations? Well, the answer is the highest mountain range in the world, the Himalayas. Listen, politics is shaped more than we know by geography and can you say gerrymandering, we'll leave it right there.

In a similar sense, I think spirituality is shaped by geography more than we know. Why don't we call it geo-spirituality? I just made that up on the spot. But here's the bottom line geography and spirituality are intertwined in intricate ways throughout Scripture. There are a few different lenses through which we can view Scripture; you can look through the lens of theology. You can look through the lens of history. You can look through the lens of biography, or poetry or prophecy or even science.

What I want to do over the next couple of weeks is play the blue card in Trivial Pursuit. We're going to look at it through the lens of geography. And so over the next seven weeks, we will venture into different valleys that are real places, real people, real events and they happen in real time. So why don't you go ahead and grab your blundstones, open your all trails and here we go.

If you have a Bible, you can meet me in the valley of Beracah, you'll find it in II Chronicles 20. It starts out as the Valley of Crisis, but it turns into something very different. And we'll get there. Let me get us situated biblically, and chronologically. II Chronicles was written about 430 BC, hundreds of years after the events that are recorded. It begins with the rain of Solomon right around 970 BC. The kingdom is split around 930 BC. You've got the Northern Kingdom, Israel, Southern Kingdom, Judah and for what it's worth geography is actually a huge factor when it comes to idolatry. Judah has Jerusalem and so they have the temple. They stay centered around this place of worship. Israel doesn't have that and so they make some golden calves in Bethel and Dan. And not an excuse for idolatry but geography plays a part. Now the Chronicler traces the history of Israel, these two kingdoms all the way to 586 BC, the Babylonian captivity. And we're going to zoom in on the fourth king of the Southern Kingdom his name is Jehoshaphat. By the way, no quiz at the end of this no spelling bee, either.

We pick up the story in II Chronicles 20 verse two. King Jehoshaphat is in the Situation Room. He is being briefed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and it is not a good report. It says, "A vast army is coming against you," Moabites, Ammonites, Midianites have marched all the way to En-Gedi. So they're about 50 miles from Jerusalem. Ancient army could march that in about three days. And I want you to remember that three days. King Jehoshaphat finds himself in the valley of crisis.

What do you do when a vast army is coming against you?

What do you do when the things that you trust in are taken away?

What do you do when you feel like you're in a no win situation?

We'll answer those questions but let me put this in present-tense perspective. The COVID-19 virus, it feels like an invisible army, does it not? More than 2 million people infected worldwide, about 150,000 fatalities. It may not be as scary as an actual army but maybe more deadly. I think if you rewind 100 years, there's a case in point. Combat casualties in World War One numbered about 10 million. The Spanish Flu that we've heard so much about in recent weeks killed about 50 million people. And so we find ourselves in a valley of crisis, not unlike King Jehoshaphat.

The question is, what do we do? Well, I want to unpack a couple of best practices. And we'll get as far as we can go in about 25 minutes. I think it's in situations like this, that you go back to basics. And so two things...

One, I think you've got to pray your way through the valley

And two think you've got to worship your way out of the valley.

I'll say this upfront, so many subplots in this story. I don't have time to drill down on all of them so here's what I want to do. I'm going to try something a little bit different. Sunday night, seven o'clock eastern time I'm going to do an Instagram live @MarkBatterson. And I want to get a little bit more back-story, maybe share a few more principles from this passage, and we'll hang out together. Sunday night, seven o'clock Instagram live.

Here we go, verse three, "Jehoshaphat feared". Now let me just say this, normal, natural. If a situation doesn't scare you like this, listen, then you are not human. I don't think there's there needs to be any apology for fear in situations like this. But you can't let fear dictate your decisions. I think faith is the process of unlearning fear. Now we're only born with two fears fear of falling, fear of loud noises, every other fear is learned, which means every other fear can be unlearned. Well, how does that happen? First, John 4:18, "Perfect love casts out all fear". I pray that you would have a revelation of God's love. Because when we understand God's love for us the net result, fearlessness! When you fear God, you don't have to fear anything else.

Let's dig a little bit deeper. I'll give you two translations. The Amplified Version, which I'm reading through this year, says this, "Jehoshaphat feared and set himself to seek the Lord." How? Well by prayer and by fasting. Can I just remind us we are not a people who panic? We are a people who pray. On Easter, we kicked off a 40 day prayer challenge, and if you missed it, it's too late, or it's not too late, day six, day seven, day 17 listen better late than never. Our online hosts will put up that link [NCC.RE/PRAY](https://ncc.re/pray). Can I encourage you to jump in on that prayer challenge? We're kneeling at 7:14am every morning. Why? We're kneeling on a promise. II Chronicles 7:14 *"If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways; I will hear from heaven, I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land."* We're going to pray like it depends on God.

Prayer is not our last resort. Prayer is our first response. And I think this reaction of King Jehoshaphat is revealing. You tell me, in a crisis situation, isn't it telling how someone responds? You know what I've learned? It's a lot easier to act like a Christian than it is to react like a Christian. What I love is that there's this instinct to seek the Lord to pray and to fast.

Now, second translation, says it this way, "Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord." I like the word alarmed because it's a double entendre. Yes, it means anxious awareness of danger, but it's also a device used to wake us up. I think God is shaking us up. I think God is waking us up right now.

Now listen, this could be a game changer. This might be your application today. What if we took fear or jealousy or anger or you fill in the blank with any other emotion. What if we took that emotion and we used it as a trigger for prayer? What if we use it as an alarm for prayer? I mean isn't that what the Apostle Paul said? "Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with

thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus."

Here's all I know, if I feel jealousy towards someone, the only thing that will cure it is me praying for them. If I feel anger towards someone, gotta pray for them. If I feel anxious about a situation, I've got to pray into it, until the peace of God begins to guard my heart and my mind. How do you do that? You pray your way through the valley. I'm praying God would take our prayer lives to an entirely different level as we're in this season of crisis.

Now, I think we need to do the same thing with the news. You can't just watch the news or it's a little bit depressing. Now I love what the Swiss Theologian Karl Barth said, "Take your Bible, and take your newspaper and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible." I think we get this backwards. I think we often filter the Bible through the newspaper and I'll tell you what happens then our theology conforms to our reality. We live down to the circumstances around us. We've got to filter Scripture, filter the news through Scripture, and when we do that, our reality begins to conform to our theology.

Let me give a little bit of cultural context, you know, they inquire to the Lord a little differently 3,000 years ago. Yes, they prayed. Yes, they sought wise counsel. They had prophets that would speak into situations, but they also cast lots. Okay, this is like *eeny meeny miny moe*. And they cast lots all the way into the book of Acts. In fact, you see it when they're replacing Judas. The lot falls to Matthias, you gotta feel a little bit bad for Joseph called Barsabbas, who lost the coin flip. He exits Scripture, but I may share a little bit of his story on that Instagram live.

Long story short, we stopped casting lots when the Holy Spirit came on the scene. Why? Because now we have the Counselor who confirms and convicts and reveals and so you even see it the council Jerusalem in Acts 15. They don't roll dice when they have to make a difficult decision. No, they come to a decision and they say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." And so we've got to learn to discern that still small voice of the Holy Spirit.

I don't have time to drill down on this. I wrote a book called 'Whisper' about seven languages that God speaks in. First language is Scripture. We've got to filter everything through Scripture. But then listen, there are people in promptings, in pain, there are desires and doors and dreams. And so we've got to learn to inquire of Lord when we find ourselves in a valley of crisis.

Now, let me say this prayer is not about outlining our agenda to God. It's about getting into God's word getting into God's presence and letting God outline his agenda to us. Listen, two-fold litmus test gotta be in the will of God and for the glory of God. My prayer batting average, I don't think is any better than anybody else's, oftentimes I asked for the wrong thing. I think someday we'll thank God for the prayers He didn't answer as much as the ones that He did.

Prayer is less about changing our circumstances and more about changing us. I think sometimes we ask God to change the circumstances that God is using to change us. So I want to make a careful distinction. Don't pray away, pray through. But what do I mean? Well, I think God could have kept Joseph out of jail. God could have kept Daniel out of the lion's den; could have kept Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego out of the fiery furnace He could have kept Benaiah out of a pit with a lion on a snowy day. He could have kept Peter out of prison; could have kept John out of exile on the island of Patmos. But if he does that, guess what, some of these miracles do not happen. I think all of us want a miracle. We just don't want to be in a situation that necessitates one, but you can't have one without the other. We've got to walk through this valley of crisis. We've got to learn the lessons that God is trying to teach us.

Now, I love what Jehoshaphat does. He begins to declare who God is. This is so critical in seasons like this; you've got to remind yourself of who God is. You've got to stop talking to God about your problems, start talking to your problems about God. Here's what he says, "Are you not God in heaven?" In other words, God, you are still on the throne. God still reigns in your hand our power and might. He says, "No one can stand against you." If God is for us who can be against us? He says, "Did you not drive out our enemies?" You did it before you can do it again. He says, "Did you not give us this land forever?" He is the Waymaker, the Miracle Worker, the Promise Keeper. God is watching over his word to perform it. He says, "We built a sanctuary to honor your name." It's all from you. It's all for you. And then he says, "Your name is in this house." We've got to remember who God is. He is Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace. He is Alpha and Omega, the Ancient of Days, the Rock of Ages, a strong tower, a hiding place, and you can shelter under his wings. We find our identity in his name.

Prayer is reminding us of who God is. Now I love verse 12. Are you ready for this? It's double underline in my Bible. It says, "*We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*" Don't you love this? Listen, none of us has a crystal ball. We don't know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. We don't know what to do. But our eyes are upon you.

Verse 15, "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army, for the battle is not yours, but God's." Prayer is the difference between us fighting for God and God, fighting for us. God's got this. God has your back. I believe that. We want to do amazing things for God. That's not our job. Our job is to consecrate ourselves and if we do our job, God's gonna do his job. He's gonna do amazing things for us.

I think prayer is the way that we continue to play offense spiritually. I think prayer is the way that we wage war spiritually. We fight our battles on our knees.

Verse 16, God tells King Jehoshaphat to march into the valley of Berakah. I am thinking twice about this. Listen, if you ever had God prompt you to do something that you aren't so sure about it. This reminds me of one of my favorite moments in an American history. Joshua Chamberlain July 2, 1863.

His 300-soldier regiment is all that stood between the Confederates and certain defeat of the Union army at a battlefield in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. You may know the story the Confederates chose five times. Chamberlain got hit by a bullet in his belt buckle, but gets back up. Only 80 men are left standing. They have one round of ammunition. No reinforcements on the way. What do you do in a situation like that? You surrender, right? Wrong. Chamberlain stands up and yells, "Charge!" It turns the tide of the Civil War. (It) ranks is one of the most improbable victories in military history, as at Union soldiers capture 4,000 Confederates in five minutes flat.

Now, Chamberlain would go on to serve as the governor of Maine. President of Bowdoin College, awarded the Medal of Honor by President Grover Cleveland. He said this, "I had deep within me the inability to do more nothing. I knew that I may die, but I also knew that I would not die with a bullet in my back."

We are here for such a time as this. We're here for such a place as this. I know we can't gather physically seems like a setback. No, God is advancing his kingdom, his kingdom is going to come his will is going to be done. I say, "Charge!" Why? Because the battle belongs to the Lord. We pray our way through the valley and we worship our way out of it.

Now, let me say this Friday, April 24, so excited, we're going to broadcast The Jesus Way Live Album Recording that we did several weeks ago. I just think, listen, we could use an hour of worship right now, and so excited to gather together and worship Friday night and we'll share a little bit more information with you.

Let me try to get us out of this valley. The Lord says, "Stand still and you will see the deliverance of the Lord, who is with you." Jehoshaphat falls flat on his face, all out intercession and it says he worshiped God.

Then he does something interesting verse 21, *"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 is faithful love endures forever."* Are you kidding me? Like this is crazy. I'm going to send the guy with shields; I'm going to send the guys with swords. Jehoshaphat says, "Let's send the sopranos." Like what kind of battle plan is this?

I want to tell you something? If you're in the valley of grief, in the valley of pain, in the valley of suffering, the way out of that valley is worship. You have to give God the sacrifice of praise. The hardest praise is the highest praise. I've been there. I've been at the graveside and have sung 'It is Well, with My Soul'. I've been in the valley of dry bones. And I've learned to sing simple songs in those seasons: 'Jesus Loves me This I know, For the Bible Tells me So'.

Not sure what valley you're in this weekend. But I want you to know that Jesus wants to help get you through it. He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If that's you this weekend, if you're at our online campus, listen, would just raise your hand right now. We want to pray for you. We want to send some follow up to you to help you take that next step, spiritually. We are in your corner, and we want to help you take that step.

I want to invite our worship team to come as we prepare to worship God with a song that I absolutely love but let me get where this is going. King Jehoshaphat and his men went out to gather the plunder verse 25, *"They found vast amounts of equipment, clothing and other valuables more than they could carry. There was so much plunder that it took them, (How long ?) three days."* Three days just to collect it all, thought they had three days on the clock. No, took them three days. Listen what the enemy intends for evil God can turn for good.

Verse 26, *"On the fourth day they assembled in the valley of Berakah where they praised the Lord. This is why it is called the Valley of Berakah to this day."* Can I tell you what it means in Hebrew? It means blessing. And so God turns the valley of crisis into the valley of blessing. This is who God is. This is what God does. It doesn't mean there won't be pain and suffering. It doesn't mean that we won't grieve but we don't grieve as those who have no hope. I want you to know that his rod and his staff will comfort you, that he is preparing a table for you in the presence of your enemies, that he has the oil of joy and that His goodness and mercy are following you all the days of your lives. He is the God who makes sidewalks through the sea. He is the God who makes a way where there is no way. He's the God who gives beauty for ashes the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness in Jesus name. Amen.