

Everyone who knew Lawrence thought this new direction that he was taking in life was crazy. Maybe it was the war that had affected him so that he wasn't thinking clearly. Lawrence had just returned from World War 2 where he had flown 52 missions over Germany as a tail-gunner with the Air Force. He had seen a lot of destruction and devastation. Perhaps his mind wasn't thinking too clearly now. For Lawrence returned from Germany to his home in small town Ottumwa, Iowa only to announce that he was going to Bible school to pursue going into full-time Christian ministry. Now the reason why his family and friends thought this new direction was crazy was not that they weren't sympathetic with the church and its needs for his mother and siblings were all professing Christians. But it was the simple fact that Lawrence was so shy and introverted that they just couldn't picture him in Bible school. He couldn't give his testimony in public, he couldn't pray in public, he couldn't even answer a question in a classroom if the teacher asked him. But Lawrence was determined so he bought a ticket and went to Chicago to enroll at the Moody Bible Institute. He arrived in Chicago with less than a dollar in his pocket. He didn't have to worry about his tuition for the GI bill would take care of that. But he needed a job to pay for his other expenses. He quickly found one loading freight on trucks.

Lawrence had a tough time in school. His introverted nature wasn't easily overcome. He still had trouble speaking publicly. He would even stutter and stammer when the teacher asked him a question in class. But he worked hard and did all of his homework. And he found a small, mission church to worship in on LaSalle Street near to school. His church needed a custodian so Lawrence took on this responsibility in addition to his job loading freight. And he did a good job as custodian. People would often remark that the church never had looked so clean before.

After his study at Moody, Lawrence went to Northern Theological Seminary in Chicago to do further study. With each new year of training he was getting more confidence and ability. But he was still very surprised when one of the elders at his church came up to him and asked him if he would start working with the youth. The church needed a youth pastor, and he had some formal Bible training. After he prayed about the matter for a while, Lawrence decided that he would take the position. It was a fearful experience for him, standing in front of those few young people, teaching them lessons. But he found that he could do it if he wrote every word that he would say down on a piece of paper. It was a lot of work; it took a lot of time; and the presentations were quite wooden and stilted; but the kids saw the sincerity of Lawrence's heart and they responded to his ministry.

When Lawrence graduated from Northern Seminary, he didn't know exactly what direction to go in. By this time he was married with a couple of children. He thought maybe missions would be the direction that God had for him. So he and his wife applied to a mission's agency and were accepted to go to Central America. But then his daughter became very ill with pneumonia and drifted off into a coma for over a year so their departure for the field had to be delayed.

While they were wondering just what to do, an elder at their small church approached them again. Now they were without a senior pastor. They had noticed how conscientious Lawrence had been as a custodian and the dedication that he had demonstrated as a youth pastor. Now they wondered if he would consider the position of Senior Pastor. Their trip to Central America had been delayed indefinitely by their daughter's medical condition, so after prayerful consideration, Lawrence accepted the position. And that is how my father, Lawrence Rowland, became a pastor and served in 6 different churches until he passed away almost 30 years ago.

My father lived out a Biblical principle that as long as a person responds to God's revelation and uses the abilities that God has given to him, God will continue to open up more and more revelation and opportunities to him.

*1 Corinthians 4:2 says:

² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove **faithful**.

*Luke 8:16-18 reads:

LK 8:16 "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. ¹⁷ For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. ¹⁸ Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has **will be given more**; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

The one who allows his light to shine for the Lord will be given more revelation and opportunities. But the one who hides his light under a bushel will never reach his potential for the Lord.

No king of Judah more illustrates this principle than the last king who is said to be good. His name was Josiah. He began his rule at the young age of 8. He was the second youngest good king of Judah, second only to Joash who began his rule under the tutelage of Jehoiada at the age of 7. But unlike Joash who wavered in his commitment to the Lord after his mentor died, Josiah consistently and faithfully served the Lord – and the Lord continued to open more revelation to him and more opportunities for service.

We have been studying the 8 good kings of Judah during these Summer Sundays. Following the division of the nation of Israel after the death of Solomon in 931 B.C., there were 40 kings that ruled over the

Northern and Southern Kingdoms. The Northern 10 tribes that were called Ephraim or Israel had 20 kings – not one of them is declared to be good by the Scriptures. The Southern part called Judah had 20 kings – 8 out of the 20 were declared to be good in the Scriptures. We have already looked at Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham and Hezekiah. We come now to the final king who is called good as we conclude this series – Josiah.

Let's read the Chroniclers account of the beginning of his reign found in 2 Chron. 34:1-7:

2CH 34:1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. ² He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

2CH 34:3 In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, carved idols and cast images. ⁴ Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles, the idols and the images. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. ⁵ He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem. ⁶ In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them, ⁷ he tore down the altars and the Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

Now we must never forget the difficult position that Josiah was in when he began his reign. Not only was he a very young boy, but he also took over the throne after 2 of the most wicked kings that Judah ever had. Both his father, Amon, and his grandfather, Manassah, were wicked, evil men. Manassah especially lead the entire land down an unspeakably wicked road during his long, 55 year reign. Just listen to the summary of Manassah's reign given in 2 Chron. 33:1-6:

2CH 33:1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. ² He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. ³ He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. ⁴ He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "My Name will remain in

Jerusalem forever." ⁵ In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. ⁶ He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.

Now Amon only ruled for 2 years, but he continued the same pattern of his father, Manasseh. Some officials were so fed up with the lack of integrity in their rulers that they plotted and carried out an assassination of Amon. So young Josiah was thrust into a position of leadership at the young age of 8. The moral climate of the land was corrupt. The political climate of the land was unstable at best – his father, the king, had just been assassinated. And here was young Josiah inaugurated as the new king.

It is likely that Josiah received a great deal of help during those early years although we are not given specifics as in Joash's case with Jehoiada. But when Josiah reached his teenage years, he began to act with decisiveness leading the nation in following the Lord. The Bible says that Josiah began to seek the Lord at the age of 16. At age 20 he began a national housecleaning. He removed the altars to the Baals; he just down Asherah poles; he began to round up and destroy idols and cast images. The Bible uses 2 words for the false gods, one meaning that which is carved out and the other meaning that which is cast. Josiah burned the idols that were carved from wood and smashed the idols made out of pottery or stone and he also destroyed the metal images to false deities that were cast probably by melting them down.

I had a very interesting lunch this past week with Dr. DeWayne Coxon. Dr. Coxon is the president of the board of an organization called "Blossoming Rose". Blossoming Rose oversees the archaeological excavations at the ancient Biblical city called Tamar. Tamar is considered to be the most important archaeological site in the Negev because it is designated by Ezekiel to be the southernmost border of Israel in that great prophetic section at the end of Ezekiel's prophecy where the 3rd temple is described. Dr. Coxon told me of some of the artifacts that they have already found in their excavations that go back to the time of Solomon now. They hope to be able to dig all the way back to the city's first periods eventually. But one of these artifacts that is now in the Israeli museum was so timely that I thought I would share it with you. By the way, the purpose of my meeting with him was part of my process of finding a place to write my next book in February. The book is planned to be a biography of David from his own writings in the Psalms. I am considering this desolate desert just south of the Dead Sea, where David spent almost a decade running from King Saul as a possible place from which to write this book. But it was this artifact that I thought might be of interest to you. They found a whole pit of crushed pottery. As the archaeologists began the laborious task of piecing together this pottery, they found that many of these were pagan deities. This is an incense burner to a

pagan deity. As they dated this pottery, they found them to go back to the time of Josiah, King of Judah. Dr. Coxon told me their belief that this pagan incense burner that is now housed in the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem was one of the articles that King Josiah ordered to be crushed in his religious reforms.

Now we cannot underestimate the courage that Josiah had to tackle such a project. We must always remember the close emotional tie that these Jewish people living in an agricultural society must have had to these deities that supposedly controlled the storms (Baal) and fertility (Asherah) and crops (Dagon). And Josiah's father who ruled before him had been assassinated by a coup. But Josiah did not let this deter him. He came to a conviction about what was right and took steps to rid the land of these false deities that were in competition with Jehovah.

Now an interesting thing happened as Josiah committed himself to follow the Lord with all of his heart. As Josiah was faithful to the Lord, God began to open up more revelation to him and more opportunities for service to him. Notice what happened when Josiah was 26 years old as recorded in 2 Chron. 34:8-21:

2CH 34:8 In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, to purify the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and Maaseiah the ruler of the city, with Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the temple of the LORD his God.

2CH 34:9 They went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the temple of God, which the Levites who were the doorkeepers had collected from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim and the entire remnant of Israel and from all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ Then they entrusted it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the LORD's temple. These men paid the workers who repaired and restored the temple. ¹¹ They also gave money to the carpenters and builders to purchase dressed stone, and timber for joists and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had allowed to fall into ruin.

2CH 34:12 The men did the work faithfully. Over them to direct them were Jahath and Obadiah, Levites descended from Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, descended from Kohath. The Levites--all who were skilled in playing musical instruments-- ¹³ had charge of the laborers and supervised all the workers from job to job. Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes and doorkeepers.

2CH 34:14 While they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD that had been given through Moses. ¹⁵ Hilkiah said

to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan.

2CH 34:16 Then Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: "Your officials are doing everything that has been committed to them. ¹⁷ They have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the supervisors and workers." ¹⁸ Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

2CH 34:19 When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. ²⁰ He gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: ²¹ "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book."

Isn't this interesting? As the Levites were executing Josiah's orders to renovate the temple, they made an amazing discovery. They found a copy of the law of God. Now it is amazing to us to realize that Josiah had been carrying out this religious renewal without any clear direction from God's word. He didn't have even a single copy of God's law. We can understand why this would be the case. Amon and Manassah were such wicked men that they undoubtedly would have destroyed every copy of the law that they could. We have the example of wicked kings doing this in the O.T. Jeremiah paints the picture of Jehoiakim sitting in his palace during the winter months with a fire pot before him, cutting up the scroll of the prophet's writings and throwing the pieces into the pot to be burned after hearing the word of the Lord. Likely, some godly priest saw that the copies of the law of God that they had were in jeopardy when Mannasah took the throne so he hid a copy of the law in the one place where he knew Mannasah would never go – the temple of Jehovah. There the law lay dormant for the 5 plus decades when wicked men ruled over the land. But when a godly man came to the throne who demonstrated his desire to please the Lord and lead God's people in a righteous direction, God led him to His law as Josiah obeyed the light that he had.

Now Josiah was understandably both encouraged with joy and discouraged with guilt when he was made aware of God's law. He would have been thrilled to find a copy of God's word. But when he read it, he then began to realize how far the nation was falling short of what God had revealed to them. But this added revelation that God had given to Josiah enabled him to take another step in bringing God's people closer into fellowship with the Lord.

2CH 34:29 Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ³⁰ He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites--all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. ³¹ The king stood by his pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD--to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book.

2CH 34:32 Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it; the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. . .

2CH 35:1 Josiah celebrated the Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and the Passover lamb was slaughtered on the fourteenth day of the first month. ² He appointed the priests to their duties and encouraged them in the service of the LORD's temple. ³ He said to the Levites, who instructed all Israel and who had been consecrated to the LORD: "Put the sacred ark in the temple that Solomon son of David king of Israel built. It is not to be carried about on your shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and his people Israel. ⁴ Prepare yourselves by families in your divisions, according to the directions written by David king of Israel and by his son Solomon.

2CH 35:5 "Stand in the holy place with a group of Levites for each subdivision of the families of your fellow countrymen, the lay people. ⁶ Slaughter the Passover lambs, consecrate yourselves and prepare the lambs for your fellow countrymen, doing what the LORD commanded through Moses." . .

2CH 35:16 So at that time the entire service of the LORD was carried out for the celebration of the Passover and the offering of burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, as King Josiah had ordered. ¹⁷ The Israelites who were present celebrated the Passover at that time and observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.

Because Josiah was given the clear revelation from God about the feasts and celebrations that God had ordained, he was able to lead the people in renewing the celebration of the Passover. The people were able to remember and celebrate the great deliverance that God had brought about for the children of Israel. They were able to remember and celebrate the fact that God was a forgiving and delivering God through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb that pictured the Lord Jesus Christ who was yet to come. All of this joy and celebration was brought about by the added revelation that God gave to Josiah in response to his commitment to do what he knew to be right before the Lord.

Now I trust that you are beginning to see the pattern that Josiah sets before us. Josiah was faithful in executing what he knew to be right before the Lord. As he was faithful, God continued to expand his knowledge. As long as Josiah continued to be faithful in obeying the Lord, God continued to reveal more and more to him.

Now most Christians that I have met want to know the deeper truths of God. But many of us desire to have those truths without obeying the revelation that we already have. We need to realize that it just doesn't work that way. The only way to grow in our knowledge of the Lord is to obey the light that God has already given to us. As we are faithful to the light we have been given, God will give us more and more.

Over 50 years ago, a man named Charlie Riggs came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Another Christian named Lorne Sanny who was being disciplined by Dawson Trotman took on Charlie as a discipleship project. You might have heard of Dawson Trotman – he was the founder of the Navigators. Lorne was very discouraged discipling Charlie because he didn't seem to have much potential. But Dawson encouraged Lorne by reminding him, *You never know what God might do through him. Stay with your man.* A few years passed and Charlie continued to be faithful in using his abilities as limited as they were for the Lord. In 1952, a young preacher named Billy Graham asked Dawson Trotman if the Navigators could lend him someone to organize the follow-up in an evangelistic crusade that he was planning. The Navigators lent Charlie Riggs to Billy Graham. He planned to return to the Navigators in a year or so, but Riggs worked out so well with the Billy Graham organization that he continued on with them. Then a crisis occurred. In 1957, on the eve of the New York City crusade at Madison Square Garden, the crusade director became very ill and had to be quickly replaced. The only person who appeared to be available for the job was Charlie Riggs. Dr. Graham admitted being very hesitant about choosing Riggs, but his back was to the wall. The rest is history. Charlie Riggs did such a good job with that campaign that it became the model for all of the Billy Graham crusades. And Charlie Riggs became the crusade director for all of the Billy Graham crusades.

After he retired several years ago now, Charlie was asked how a man such as him with little formal training could arise to such a prominent position and hold it for so long. Here was his answer: *I always asked the Lord to put me in over my head. That way, when I had a job to do, either the Lord had to help me or I was sunk.*

Charlie Riggs was a very ordinary man. But he was a person who used everything that he had for the Lord. He was a person who obeyed all the revelation that he knew from the Lord. And the Lord kept expanding his horizons little by little. Josiah would have understood Charlie's success – because Josiah was that same type of person.

Are we obeying the revelation that God has given to us and are we using our gifts to the best of our abilities for the Lord?