

If We Love, We Will Pray

Rich Nathan

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Prayer: Hungry for God Series

Exodus 17:8-16

I've been doing a series on prayer and tonight I would like to talk with you about praying for others. The basic thrust of this talk springs from a statement in the wonderful author, Richard Foster's, book titled *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. In Foster's book, he says: "If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them and this will lead us to prayer. Intercession is a way of loving others."

People today desperately need the help we can give them. Marriages are being shattered. Children are being destroyed. Individuals are living lives of quiet desperation without purpose or future. And we can make a difference, if we learn to pray on their behalf.

Because of the baby dedication, I'm going to turn quickly to the scriptures in a talk I've titled, "If We Love, We Will Pray."

Ex 17:8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

Ex 17:9 Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

Ex 17:10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill.

Ex 17:11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

Ex 17:12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

Ex 17:13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

Ex 17:14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

Ex 17:15 Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner.

Ex 17:16 He said, "For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."

I want to put this story in context for you. Many of you know the story of the Exodus. Israel was enslaved in Egypt for at least 400 years. The dating is hard to put together. But for at least four centuries these Israelite slaves are crying out to God. Their lives are absolutely miserable.

Finally, God answers Israel's prayers and brings ten progressive judgments against Egypt, the ten plagues. Finally, after centuries of praying God demonstrates his power that he is stronger than all of the armies in the world. God demonstrates his patience by giving the Egyptians, even after four centuries of oppression and sin, an opportunity to repent. The Egyptians don't. And so, in one climatic act of salvation, God divides the Red Sea. The Israelites march through safely. And when the Egyptian army follows, the Sea returns to its place and the army is drowned. The Israelites are saved.

Moses composed a song to celebrate the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. We read the words in Exodus 15:

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Ex 15:1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD?

"I will sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.

The horse and its rider
he has hurled into the sea.

Ex 15:2 The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.

He is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

Ex 15:3 The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.

Ex 15:4 Pharaoh's chariots and his army
he has hurled into the sea.

The best of Pharaoh's officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.

Ex 15:5 The deep waters have covered them;
they sank to the depths like a stone.

On the heels of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, God goes to work again on Israel's behalf. And through obvious and amazing miracles, God provides food and water for them in the desert. In Exodus 16, God provides manna for the Israelites from the sky. Every morning this bread would fall from the heavens like dew on the grass. We read in Exodus 16:31,

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Ex 16:31 The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.

Could life be any better? It is like one continual birthday party for the Israelites. Their diet is cookies and cake. They are eating this manna and it takes like cookies and cake.

And not only does God give his children cookies and cake, (this was in the day before the popularity of low carb diets) but in chapter 17 when the people are thirsty, the Lord orders Moses to strike a rock with his staff. Water, like a geyser, comes flowing out. Exodus 17:5-6 reads:

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Ex 17:5 The LORD answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

Ex 17:6 I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."

Amazing salvation from Egypt, followed by immediate answers to prayer through obvious miracles of provision. Cookies and cake coming down from the sky; water flowing from a rock.

Now, this is the context of Exodus 17:8 where we read:

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Ex 17:8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

The Israelites are suddenly faced with an organized army that is trying to kill them. Now, why do I emphasize the background of this attack by the Amalekites? Because, I think this story forms a great type, a wonderful paradigm for the experience of Christian salvation by many people. A very typical scenario for a person is to live unhappily for many years. A person may go through a bruising childhood, or a bruising adolescence. As they get older, they may go through divorce or separation, or several painful romantic experiences. And even those who are successful, who manage to navigate around most of the rocks and get degrees, and graduate degrees, and have a substantial income often feel empty inside.

It is typical for people to feel like the Israelites – to experience slavery of various kinds. Your bondage may be to depression, or to an eating disorder, or to substance abuse, or pornography. Or you may feel enslaved to your past, to abuse or to negative words spoken over your life.

But whether the unhappiness or slavery is external, through broken relationships, and negative circumstances, or it is internal, the result of an emotional problem like depression or anxiety, or inner emptiness, or addiction, at some point in life many people call out to God for salvation. Maybe you have responded in a church service to an invitation to come to Christ. Maybe as a child you responded in a Sunday School class or to your parent's invitation to receive Christ. Maybe you prayed when you were alone in your bedroom, in college, or

with a friend here at Vineyard. We typically invite people at our services to stand, pray and welcome Christ into our lives as Lord and to trust Christ as our Savior.

However when salvation comes to a person, most people immediately notice a change. They're set free. They experience the Exodus from Egypt. A weight of guilt rolls off of our shoulders. We often experience great joy. Initially there is a honeymoon period for many people. God seems so near and he answers our prayers so quickly. For many saved people, at least at the beginning, prayer is the easiest thing in the world. We pray and God answers like he answered the Israelites in the desert. And he just doesn't answer with stale bread. He answers beyond your expectations with cookies and cake from heaven.

And then out of the blue, immediately on the heels of our salvation and a feeling of God's closeness, his love, his Fatherly care, and his answer to our prayers, we often find in the lives of the newly converted, a horrible attack by the Amalekites. A person loses his or her job. They get attacked by their family for their faith. Your temptation arises to get involved in an old sin you thought you had put away in the act of receiving Christ.

A person is doing great. They aren't even interested in pursuing an old sin. But suddenly an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend shows up. Many new Christians will suddenly experience one problem after another. Their car breaks down. They break a tooth. Their kids start having problems. The feeling of God's closeness fades. They try to get it back, but it feels like God is nowhere to be found.

For many new Christians, there comes a point where what they have experienced with Christ seems like a distant dream. They begin to wonder: "Am I really saved? Did anything really happen to me last month? When I stood up in church, was that real? Did Christ make any difference in my life? Maybe it is all just psychological. Maybe I just went through my religious phase. I've gone through other phases. Maybe that was just my religious phase and now I'm moving on. Maybe I don't have the stuff to be a successful Christian. Other people can pull this off, but I'm having too many problems and I'm feeling overwhelmed. I can't pull this thing called the Christian life off. It is just too hard."

Have you experienced anything like this? You had a joyful, wonderful salvation, followed by a brief honeymoon of answered prayer. Then utterly unexpectedly God seems far away. Your prayers don't seem to make a difference. They don't have the impact they had last month. They're just bouncing off the ceiling. And you are under attack by the Amalekites. Things just multiply in your life.

If we love, we will pray. And one particular group that especially needs our prayers are new Christians because they are particularly vulnerable to the attack of the enemy. There is a phenomenal book by my favorite Christian author, C.S. Lewis, titled *The Screwtape Letters*. It is written in the form of a satire in which a

senior devil is instructing his nephew, who is a junior devil, on the art of temptation – how to ruin someone’s life and throw obstacles in the way of their relationship with God. *The Screwtape Letters* is extraordinarily insightful. And if you’ve never read it, I would encourage you to pick up a copy at our bookstore, or put your name in for a copy.

But in this book, Lewis describes those low periods of life that often follow a person’s salvation. He says:

“You must have often wondered why the enemy [he’s talking about God, from the perspective of the devil] does not make more use of his power to be sensibly present to human souls in any degree he chooses and at any moment. But you now see that the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons, which the very nature of his scheme forbids him to use. Merely to override a human will (as his felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for him useless. He cannot ravage. He can only woo. He is prepared to do a little overriding at the beginning. He will set them off with communications of his presence, which though faint, seem great to them, with emotional sweetness, an easy conquest over temptation.

But he never allows this state of affair to last long. Sooner or later he withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience, all the supports and incentives. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs—to carry out from the will alone duties, which have lost all relish. It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that it is growing into the sort of creature he wants it to be. Hence the prayers offered in a state of dryness are those, which please him best. He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away his hands; and if only the will to walk is really there, he is pleased even with their stumbles.

[Now listen to these lines...] Do not be deceived, Wormwood [that’s the junior devil], our cause is never more endangered than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our enemy’s will, looks around upon a universe from which every trace of him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and yet still obeys.”

Every young Christian and every old Christian is going to go through a low period, sometimes many low periods, sometimes extended low periods, in which it seems that God the Father’s presence has utterly withdrawn and so out of love, we pray. Father, strengthen their ability to persevere. Father, give them the will in this difficulty to keep on going. Father, don’t allow them to lose their grip on you. Father, keep your promise that you who began a good work in them will bring it to completion. Don’t allow the blood of Jesus Christ to go in vain in this person’s life.

As an act of love, pray for anyone you know who has made a decision to come to Christ in the last year or two – anyone who used to experience the sweet presence of God and who now has lost that presence.

We read in verse 8,

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Ex 17:8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

Who were the Amalekites? They were a tribe of people who lived just south of Israel. They were descendants of Esau. Esau was Jacob's twin brother. Jacob, of course, was the forefather of the Jewish people. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So the Amalekites are distant cousins of the Jews. Yet throughout the Old Testament, we see the Amalekites regularly attacking the Jewish people. It is happening here in Ex. 17. It happens a year later when the Israelites are trying to enter the Promised Land and are attacked by the Amalekites. In the book of Judges 200 years later, we find Gideon, who was an Israelite, fighting the Amalekites. Then centuries later the prophet Samuel and King David go to war against the Amalekites. And four centuries after David, during the reign of King Hezekiah, there are the Israelites again fighting with the Amalekites.

The last mention of the Amalekites in the Old Testament is in the book of Esther. At least a thousand years after this event that we read about in Ex. 17, a descendant of the Amalekite tribe named Haman tries to cause a holocaust among the Jews. Haman's plot was discovered and Haman was hanged for his crime.

Now, why is there so much hostility between the Israelites and the Amalekites? Even more, why is there hostility between the Lord and the Amalekites? Why is the Lord so opposed to this Amalekite tribe?

I think we find at least two reasons in the Old Testament. First of all, because the Amalekites particularly targeted the weak and the poor in their attacks. We read in the book of Deuteronomy 25:17-18 these words:

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Dt 25:17 Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt.

Dt 25:18 When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God.

The Amalekites were like predatory animals who targeted the sick and the aged, the tired of Israel who lagged behind the rest of the people in their movement across the desert.

Do you know that the Lord always has a special concern for the poor, the sick, the homeless, the defenseless, the unborn child, the elderly person, and the one who can't make it on their own? God has a special concern for the weak. God hates it when the poor are ripped off, when a poor person is sold unnecessary services, or over-priced shoddy goods because they have no options, because they don't have another way to shop, because they don't know what to buy.

God hates it when someone is abused by the legal system because they don't have the money to battle their opponent. God will judge those who abuse the legal system.

God hates it when sales people, contractors, and attorneys rip off the elderly. He will judge those who take advantage of the old.

God hates it when people are discriminated against because of their race, religion, or because they are strangers to this country and they have no family or support system to fall back on. He will judge the bigot.

God hates it when the unborn, the defenseless unborn, are cut out of a womb because they have no advocate. And he will judge the abortionist.

God hates it when kids are made fun of in school and bullied, mocked and pushed around. God stands on the side of the poor. God stands on the side of the weak. God stands on the side of the disabled. God stands on the side of the unborn, the widow, and the widower. And it is our act of love to pray for the weak person, the person who has no one to cry out for them.

Do you know God loves those who love and support the weak? God loves those who love and support the disabled and love and support the unborn. And God loves those who love and support the elderly. In fact, in Proverse 19:17, we read this amazing statement:

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Pr 19:17 He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,
and he will reward him for what he has done.

Imagine this: There is a time when God will call you his creditor. There is a time when God will call himself your debtor. He condescends to put himself into debt to us. The Lord says you are in his debt when you are kind to a person he has special regard for.

Do you know one of the best ways for you to love, support and care for a weak person, a poor person, a defenseless person is to pray? And do you know throughout the Bible God pays special attention to prayers made on behalf of the poor, the weak, and the sick, and the defenseless? Just read the Psalms. You will read statements like this over and over again. Psalm 10:17-18:

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Ps 10:17 You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
Ps 10:18 defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.

Or Psalm 72:12-14,

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Ps 72:12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
Ps 72:13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.
Ps 72:14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight..

Do you know anyone who has nobody to defend them, no one to take up their cause? Do you know anyone who has no human advocate? Along with advocacy before human structures, before school principals, and human institutions, it is a great act of love for you to advocate someone's case before God.

And the Amalekites were judged by God because they continually opposed God's plan for his people's lives. Listen. You know that God had a plan to bless his people and to bless the world through his people. We read in Gen. 12,

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Ge 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.
Ge 12:2 "I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
Ge 12:3 I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.

Had the Amalekites been kind to Israel, they would have lived under God's blessing. They would have shared the blessing of Israel. The blessing was never for the Jewish people alone. The Jews were chosen to be a blessing for others.

And do you know whenever a Gentile in the Old Testament was kind to one of God's people, that Gentile was blessed. We could be talking about Jethro, the Midianite, who appears in the next chapter following the story of the Amalekites.

Jethro the Midianite appears in Exodus 18. Jethro was blessed because he blessed his son-in-law, Moses. Or we can talk about the prostitute Rehab, who in the book of Joshua protected the Jewish spies in her home and so she was saved. Or we can talk about Ruth, the Gentile from Moab, who blessed her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi and so came into the blessing of Israel. Or the widow at Zarepheth, who provided for the prophet Elijah and whose family was blessed because of that. Whenever a Gentile in the Old Testament blessed one of God's people, that Gentile himself was blessed.

And do you know that today whenever a person is kind to one of God's children, God will be kind to them. This promise is not just an Old Testament promise. It is a New covenant promise spoken to us by Jesus. We read in Matthew 10:40-42,

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Mt 10:40 "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.

Mt 10:41 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward.

Mt 10:42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

But there is a negative side to this issue of blessing. Because we read in Genesis 12,

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and whoever curses you I will curse...

And do you know that God will fight to see his purposes fulfilled in his people's lives. And so for whom should we, as an act of love, pray?

As an act of love, pray for persecuted people, people who are facing opposition simply because of their Christian faith. I would start with people who are near you. Pray for Christian brothers and sisters who you know who are facing hostility from family members simply because of their Christian faith. Pray for Christian wives whose non-Christian husbands make their lives sometimes a living hell by continual hostile comments and put-downs regarding their faith. Pray for Christian husbands, whose non-Christian wives oppose everything they're trying to do in bringing Christ into their homes. Pray for Christian kids that you know whose parents or family members oppose their faith, especially those Christians you know who are coming to Christ from different religions—from a

Jewish background, or a Muslim background, or a Hindu background. Pray especially for these Christian believers.

As an act of love, pray for those whose families may be in some Christian denomination, but who simply do not understand why anyone would be enthusiastic about Christ, why anyone would be that serious about church, or the Bible. Pray for those who are facing opposition to the plan of God in their lives. People whose families are opposing them as they are pursuing missions, or are pursuing ministry, or who are making lifestyle decisions based upon their faith in Christ.

And friend, as an act of love, become educated about persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. We often can't do anything for those living in another country, but we can pray as an act of love. Do you know right now one of the uncovered stories of Iraq is the persecution that Christians are facing in that country following the fall of Saddam Hussein and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism? Let me read to you from an article that was in the Wall Street Journal two weeks ago:

For decades Iraqi Christian Salim Hasan Michael outran his country's tortured and bloody history, raising three children and enjoying mild prosperity as a television news producer.

Today he fears history is beginning to catch up to him. When a massive car bomb outside a nearby police station shattered the windows of his house early this year, Mr. Hasan decided Iraq was too dangerous for his two older sons and sent them to live in Syria. When four young Christians were gunned down as they waited for a ride to work earlier this summer, he and his wife began talking of joining them abroad. And when militants chased a young Christian girl into her garden a few weeks ago and shot her to death, Mr. Hasan and his wife decided to leave the country as soon as they could.

In a demographic change with enormous political and cultural repercussions, Iraq's Christian community is steadily dissipating, driven out by a campaign of violence and intimidation targeting their homes, offices and places of worship. Precise numbers aren't available, but Iraqi government and church officials estimate as many as 30,000 Christians have left Iraq since a string of church bombings in August, with hundreds more families leaving every week. Iraq's Christian population is estimated at about 850,000, a sharp drop from the one million it numbered before the war and the 1.4 million recorded before the war.

Christians complain of daily harassment designed to intimidate them into fleeing. The backside of prescription slips issued by a prominent Muslim optometrist in the upscale Mansur District, for instance, derides Jesus as an alcoholic, and encourages Christians to convert or leave Iraq. Many Christian families say that

they have had letters slipped under their doors threatening to kill them if they remain in the country.

As an act of love, educate yourself on what's going on with Christian brothers and sisters around the world and pray for them.

Let me switch gears for a moment and talk to you about three roles that people take to express love in this world. Ex. 17:10-13

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Ex 17:10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill.

Ex 17:11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

Ex 17:12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

Ex 17:13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

This is a great story describing the incredible interplay between God's power and our own activity. Moses is up on a hill lifting up his hands in a posture of prayer. He is being supported in his prayer by Aaron and Hur. And down in the valley, there is Joshua and his men fighting for their lives.

You know, some people, and some churches, especially of the hyper-charismatic variety, devalue human effort and human planning, and human striving. "Why bother with all that human stuff when we have the Holy Spirit?" these people say. "Why turn to doctors and to medicine when God heals? Why turn to counselors when God will instantly deliver you from all the effects of the past? Why bother with your puny efforts at evangelism with one person at a time when God can bring about revival and sweep in millions?"

Have you ever been in a church environment or around Christians where the human element, the very human efforts, programs, plans and teachings were all minimized so as to become almost pointless? Have you ever believed or been taught that your activity is basically worthless?

Have you ever believed or been taught that your activity and all that you are trying to do is basically worthless and that all you need to do is pray and trust God? This is not a biblical worldview. To understand God's activity in this world, you have to grasp the amazing truth that God wants to partner together with you in bringing about his purposes in the world.

Now, we are most assuredly junior partners in the partnership of God and his people. But God wants to, in fact he insists on you being his coworker. He wants to partner with you in extending his kingdom in this world. God does not

want to work around you, in spite of you, or without you. God wants to work through you.

Listen to some of these scriptures and you will see the extraordinary partnership of our activity and God's power releasing his purpose in the world.

1 Cor. 15:10, the apostle Paul is talking about his own life and he said:

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^{1Co 15:10} But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

The most important thing was not my work, but God's grace. Nevertheless, I just didn't sit around and wait for God's activity. I was active.

Or how about this, Col. 1:28-29. The apostle Paul was talking about his discipling ministry and says this:

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^{Col 1:28} We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

^{Col 1:29} To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

I am laboring; I am struggling, but I am doing so through the energy of God. There is a partnership.

How does our own growth come about? Philippians 2:12-13,

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^{Phil 2:12} Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

^{Phil 2:13} for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

You see the partnership? We work out what God works in in order to accomplish God's good purpose.

Again, let me read from my favorite author, C.S. Lewis. Lewis writes:

God could, if he chose, repair our bodies miraculously without food; or give us food without the aid of farmers, bakers, and butchers; or knowledge without the aid of learned men; or convert the heathen without missionaries. Instead, he allows soil, weather, and animals and muscles, minds, and wills of men to cooperate in the execution of his Will. "God," said Pascal, "instituted prayer in order to lend to his creatures the dignity of causality." He seems to do nothing by himself, which he possibly can delegate to his creatures.

God wants us to be really active in our world like Joshua fighting down in the valley, one way that we love others is by doing. If someone is hungry and we have money, we must buy them a sandwich and not just offer to pray. We have to study for tests and not just pray to get a good grade. Sorry to disappoint you about that, students. We must put together a budget to get out of debt, not just cry out to God for financial help. We have to exercise and eat right if we want to lose weight, not just pray. And regarding spiritual growth, we must learn how to have a devotional life, to spend time reading and meditating on the Bible, and praying, and disciplining ourselves to set time aside to build a secret history with God.

Virtually nothing in this world is accomplished simply by God alone without human effort or human contribution. The kingdom of God is ushered in through human beings feeding the hungry, and comforting the grieving, and counseling the addicted, and pushing through all of our excuses for being isolated and separated from each other, and pressing into real transparent relationships in small groups. The kingdom of God is extended as one man reaches out reaches out to one fatherless boy and one woman gets together with another woman to counsel her regarding her marriage. We love other people by doing.

On the other hand, there are way more churches and way more Christians who are engaged in all kinds of human activity for God and who know almost nothing about God's release of God's power through prayer. We love other people by praying for them. Look again at Ex. 17:11,

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Ex 17:11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

Joshua's fighting in the valley was successful because of Moses' praying on the mountain. But we 21st century American Christians know almost nothing about releasing God's power into a situation through prayer. The fact is we 21st century Americans partly because of our culture and partly because of our fallenness continually struggle to achieve self-sufficiency. Prayer for all of us is totally unnatural. We are continually fighting for independence and autonomy.

My granddaughter is about to turn 2. One of her favorite statements over the last three months or so, if you are trying to help her put her shirt on, or put her shoes on, or figure out a puzzle, or help her ride her tricycle is: "I want to do it. I want to do it. Let me. I want to do it."

We have this independent streak before the age of 2! Prayer is completely alien to our pride and our quest for autonomy.

But you know there comes a point for all of us where "I want to do it by myself" doesn't work? Every once in a while I will hear my granddaughter screaming from inside, "Help! Please! Help me! Help me, please?" And I will run in and she is literally dangling from the kitchen counter. She's pulled a stool over and climbed up on the stool and then just decided to make her way up the cabinets, but didn't quite make it.

All of us, no matter how competent, how old, how together, how successful, reach a limit where we realize we need help from someone bigger and stronger than us and wiser than us, if we're going to make it at all. So whether it is natural for us, or unnatural for us, we find ourselves praying. The limit may come for you, friend, in a hospital room where you are being prepped for surgery. Or where a loved one is laying in a bed. Do you realize you have no power in yourself to do anything or say anything that's really going to help?

The realization of your limits may come for you when you finally become honest about an addiction, or someone you care about has an addiction and you realize you can't rescue him or her on your own. Maybe the limit for you will come as you battle depression, or as you wrestle with a failed marriage, or you struggle with a rebellious child, or someone you love is going through a problem you can't fix or a situation you can't manage or control? Maybe reaching your limits came for you at a loved one's funeral or when your marriage broke down.

Again, at some point, no matter how stubborn, how independent, or autonomous and proud we are as human beings, we're all going to reach a limit regarding what we, by our activity, can achieve. May I ask you a personal question? Have you discovered your limits? Have you come face to face with the limits on your ability to help yourself? Have you come face to face with the limits on your ability to help or fix someone you love? We need someone bigger than us; we need someone stronger than us. We need someone wiser than us. In those moments we need to ask God to release his power.

There is an old saying that I mentioned a few weeks ago: When we work, we work. But when we pray, God works. Prayer releases God's power into our lives. And prayer released God's power into the lives of those we love. Again, look at verse 11:

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Ex 17:11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

You see that the major factor in Joshua's victory was the unseen help and power of God. God's power can heal psychological problems. God's power can heal physical problems. God's power can heal absolutely devastated marriages. It can meet financial needs. God's power can change circumstances. God's power can fix relationships we've messed up. God's power alone can enable us to achieve the things we read about in the Bible.

If you don't know the power of God, if God is not released to do what he wants to do in a church then the church is absolutely going to lower the standard regarding what we think God wants to accomplish in this world. We can pretend that all God wants to do in this world is to get people together for a meeting once a week on Sunday morning. We can pretend that all God wants to do in the world is cause us to feel guilty every once in a while so that we throw a little bit of money into an offering plate. We can pretend that God doesn't really care all that much about converting Muslim people in Iraq and Central Asia to Christ. We pretend that God doesn't really care about the sons and daughters of single parents in our community and that he doesn't really want to give them a chance at success in life. We can pretend God doesn't really care about the homeless. God doesn't really care about failed marriages.

If you don't know the power of God, if the church doesn't know the power of God then what we will always do is lower the standard and play pretend and say: "This low standard is acceptable to God." Without God's power we can organize meetings. Without God's power we can have lots of activities going on. Without God's power we can manage and strategize and plan. But wouldn't you like to be part of a church where what we were aiming to do would only work if God showed up? Wouldn't you like to be in a church that said: "We cannot accomplish what God has put in our heart to accomplish, unless the power of God is released. If God doesn't show up, nothing's going to happen."

Wouldn't you like to be in a church that says the only explanation for how this whole thing works, how it all runs together, is God and his power? This is not humanly doable without God's power. Beating the Amalekites was not humanly doable by the Israelites in their stage of military development. So God's power had to be released because those folks had reached their human limit.

And you know God's power comes in lots of different forms. It may come in the form of wisdom. A plan or idea can suddenly form in your mind that you didn't have before. God's power may come in an extraordinary, amazing, miraculous ability to not quit or throw in the towel, even when the situation is not turning around. God's power may come in physical healing. God's power may come in

a changed heart. Someone that you thought you could never love, you suddenly are able to love again. You may feel differently about your roommate, your parents, or your situation. Whatever form God's power takes, God's power comes to those who pray.

And when we don't pray for ourselves and we don't pray for others, we are robbing ourselves of God's power. We're saying, "We're going to let this other person, we're going to let ourselves be overwhelmed by life. We're going to let this other person be defeated, be discouraged, be beaten down." We love others by releasing God's power through prayer.

And we love others by supporting them in their prayers. Moses did everything he could to keep praying. But notice, sometimes we need the support of faithful friends who enable us to persevere in our prayers. Ex. 17:12, we read these words:

SLIDE

Ex 17:12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

Prayer is exhausting work. And when answers are not immediately forthcoming, when God says to a person: "I'm not going to deliver you out of this circumstance; I want you to persevere in the circumstance. I'm not going to deliver you from this thing; I'm going to deliver you in it. I'm not going to change the situation right now. I'm not going to heal right now. I'm not going to provide right now. I'm not going to convert right now." It is easy to give up.

So we need supporters around us who will help us to not give up. Last scripture, 1 Cor. 13:7-8 reads this way:

SLIDE

1Co 13:7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1Co 13:8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

How can a person always trust in God? How can a person always hope in God? How can a person persevere in prayer, never quit, never say forget it, never wave the white flag, never say surrender? When supportive lovers surround us and lift our hands in prayer. We need an Aaron. We need a Hur. We need dear, supportive people who can hold our arms up.

Each role is needed in the battle. Each role is a role of love. Joshua had to fight. Moses had to pray. And Aaron and Hur had to support them. These roles aren't fixed. All of us are called to do all three things. Love demands this. Let's pray.

If We Love, We Will Pray

Rich Nathan

October 9-10, 2004

Prayer: Hungry for God Series

Exodus 17:8-16

I. Prayer as an Act of Love

A. For New Believers (Ex. 15:1-4; 16:31; 17:5,6)

B. For the Defenseless (Ex. 17:8; Dt. 25:17, 18; Pr. 19:17)

C. For the Persecuted (Gen. 12:1-3; Mt. 10:40-42)

II. The Three Roles of Lovers

A. Doers (Ex. 17:10, 13; Phil. 2:12, 13; Col. 1:29; 1 Cor. 15:10)

B. Pray-ers (Ex. 17:11)

C. Supporters (Ex. 17:12)