

Good morning everyone! Before I preach this morning, I wanted to share some good news—this past week we received our building permit for the Upper Room. With this permit in hand, construction will likely begin in the next two weeks—it’s very exciting! Please be praying with us as our building projects begin; you can also be praying about whether the Lord would have you partner financially in these projects.

**illus:** As I begin my sermon this morning, I want to share a story from my past. The first time I laid eyes on my future wife, I was standing at her front door—we had been set up on a blind date. Walking up her driveway was an exercise in courage, knocking on the door was an act of faith, and not passing out was an act of God. My heart was pounding and my stomach churning—if my legs hadn’t become cement I would have turned tail and run. But then the door opened and I saw Naomi—she was stunning, a vision of loveliness.

It was the best, and last, first date I’ve ever had. That first date led to a second, then a third, and six months later I asked Naomi to marry me—thirteen months after our initial “hello,” we stood on this stage and said our “I do’s”.

Before getting married, Naomi lived here on the North Shore and I lived in Calgary; every 4-6 weeks, one of us would fly to the other’s city for 2-3 days. We had a lot of fun when we were together, and when we weren’t we communicated by phone and by letter—I’m dating myself here; email wasn’t an option yet. Getting married meant that for the first time, we were living in the same city; with proximity came both great joy and great learning. Looking back,

Naomi and I knew a lot about one another’s priorities, values, and dreams, but there was an awful lot we didn’t know about one another. The first six months of marriage were difficult, but the next twelve months were much harder.

Six months into our marriage, Naomi’s brother, Nathan, died by drowning—he’d been camping with a group of young adults from North Shore Alliance. We got the call in the middle of the night, quickly packed our car and headed for North Vancouver. The next week was a whirlwind of relationship and activity; we were carried by God’s grace and by adrenaline.

Not long after returning to Calgary, it became apparent that with Nathan’s death a part of Naomi had died—a light had gone out, and a dark cloud settled over my wife and our marriage. Though we were living side by side, she seemed so far away—she sank into a depression that I couldn’t rescue her from. I found myself ill-equipped to love Naomi well—I didn’t know what to do.

*For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health*—at times our commitments are tested; in those days, we were tested. Naomi was in pain, and I was in pain; Naomi was confused, and I was confused; Naomi felt lost, and I felt lost. *What do you do when you don’t know what to do?* Christians pray. When we are confused, and lack wisdom, we pray. When we are in trouble, we pray. When we are sick, we call for others to join us to pray.<sup>1</sup> We pray because we are limited, dependent, creatures; we pray because God is unlimited in His wisdom, power, and love. When we don’t know what to do, we pray.

---

<sup>1</sup> James 1:5; 5:13-16.

Exodus 17:8-16 recounts a battle in which Israel was outmatched and overwhelmed, but in the midst of difficulty we see Moses praying and God intervening. God sees, He knows, He cares, and He is present. Let's take a closer look at this text, Exodus 17:8-16; if you are using the blue Bible in the seat rack in front of you, you can find our text on page 58.

*8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.*

*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.'*

*10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. 11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. 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. 13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*

*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 name of Amalek from under heaven."*

*15 Moses built an altar and called it The Lord is my Banner. 16 He said, 'Because hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord, the Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.'*

If we were to choose one word that best describes Moses, I suspect many of us would choose the word "Leader". Moses was appointed

by God and given the task to lead Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Along the way Moses' leadership activities included planning, communicating the vision, resolving conflicts, and making difficult decisions. Exodus 17 highlights a particular aspect of his leadership, namely, **the Leader as Intercessor**.

It's easy to overlook just how central prayer was to Moses' leadership. From the burning bush onwards, prayer kept Moses in step with what God was doing.

- when Pharaoh refused to let Israel go, Moses cried out to the Lord—Ex. 5:22-23.
- Moses prayed when Israel was discouraged and refused to listen—Ex. 6:9-12.
- when Israel complained against Moses in the desert, he turned to the Lord in prayer—Ex. 15:22-25; 16:1-5; 17:1-4.
- when Israel rebelled against God, turning to false idols, Moses interceded on Israel's behalf, saving Israel from certain destruction—Ex. 32:11, 14.

One could easily argue that Moses' primary leadership activity was prayer—planning, communicating, and conflict resolution were secondary activities, flowing from his ongoing conversation with God.

The Amalekites attacked Israel without warning. In response, Moses appointed Joshua as General of Israel's army—Joshua was to lead the army into battle, while Moses stood on a nearby hill with the staff of God in his hands.

Six weeks earlier, Moses raised this same staff over the Red Sea and God split the Sea in two. While in the desert, Israel ran out of water,

and God instructed Moses to take his staff and strike the rock at Horeb—water came out and Israel was saved. There was no magic in his staff, but it functioned as a symbol of God’s Presence and Power.

While Joshua led the army into battle, Moses interceded on the hill. You may have noticed that there is no explicit mention of prayer in our text, but prayer is implicit in the posture Moses assumes. Throughout the Old and New Testament, the lifting of hands is the posture of prayer.

- Psalm 28:2 says, “*Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.*”
- Psalm 63:4, “*I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.*”
- Psalm 88:9, “*I call to you, Lord, every day; I spread out my hands to you.*”

*At this time, if you’re physically able, I want to invite each of you to raise your hands over your head and hold them there for a few moments.* With our hands raised, think about what this physical posture communicates. On a football field, a referee raises their hands to communicate a touchdown or field goal; in the context of prayer (or worship), raised hands communicates dependence. If you can, keep your hands up a little longer.

**illus:** Think about a small child, out for a walk with parents; when their legs get tired and heavy, what do they do with their hands? They raise their hands, it’s a posture of dependence—*I’m tired, please carry me!* This is the posture of prayer—*God, I’m tired, I’m weak, I don’t know where to go or what to do, please carry me!*

Are your arms beginning to burn yet? We’re not used to raising our hands for so long—the lactic acid builds up, the muscles begin to

ache, then tremble, and eventually they give out. *You can go ahead and lower your hands.*

On the battlefield, Joshua raised his sword, on a nearby hill, Moses raised his hands to Heaven in prayer. We’re told that as long as Moses held up his hands, Israel was defeating the enemy, but the moment Moses lowered his hands, the Amalekites rallied. We don’t know how long Moses held out his hands alone, but we do know that Moses had backup.

When Moses grew weary, Aaron and Hur took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Then, Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. Together these three were steadfast—with hands raised to heaven; together they interceded and in so doing the battle was won.

Vs. 13 says, “*So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword,*” but the verses that follow put Joshua’s victory in context. Vs. 14-16, “*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.**’ Moses built an altar and called it ‘The Lord is My Banner.’ He said, ‘For hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord.’*”

There’s two ideas in these text that I want briefly touch upon:

**1.** First, the Lord tells Moses to write out an account of the battle—and *make sure that Joshua hears it.* Why was it so important for Joshua to hear Moses’ battle account? What did Moses have that Joshua needed? One word—**perspective.**

Joshua saw what was right in front of him—an enemy army with swords and spears; from Moses vantage point, he saw the God of

Israel fighting on their behalf. Moses' intercession and God's intervention didn't make Joshua's action any less real or necessary—God was working, Joshua was working, and God was working through Joshua's work; the same is true of us.

Joshua needed perspective, we all do if we are to become spiritually mature. Joshua apprenticed under Moses for 40 years and his apprenticeship was filled with events where God taught him something critical for life and leadership.

The first time we see Joshua on the scene, his first lesson is on the subject of prayerful dependence. Right from the start, Joshua learned that prayer is not the prelude to the battle, *prayer is the battle*. Joshua learned that the key to spiritual leadership is staying connected to God and relying on His unfailing strength. He learned that prayer is a leader's best weapon and a leader's greatest gift to his people.

Stephen Seamands writes, “we depend nominally on [God] but primarily on ourselves—our training, our skills, our personality, our past experiences, our knowledge, our sincere efforts. As a result, what we accomplish is limited to what we can do...But when you rely on God, you get what God can do.”<sup>2</sup> Write this on a scroll **as something to be remembered** and make sure Joshua hears it—hands were lifted heavenward, the battle belongs to the Lord.

Prayer is an act of dependence; it's an admission of weakness and need. Perhaps you've been the target of the atheist critique: “*Your*

*faith is a crutch, it's for people who can't stand on their own two feet, and control their own destiny.*” Such statements are intended to insult, but why would we be insulted? Of course faith is a crutch, that's exactly the point, faith helps us to stand—we need God. We pray because we are limited, dependent, creatures; we pray because God is unlimited in His wisdom, power, and love. When we don't know what to do, we pray.

Ruth Barton, in writing about Moses' prayer from the hill, says the following, “Being this reliant on God for the actual outcome of things is a very edgy way to [live]. We are much more accustomed to relying partly on God and partly on our own plans if the issues at hand are really important. ‘*If you want to get the job done right, you better do it yourself!*’ is a sentiment that we apply not only to people but to God himself. It is always good to have a back-up plan if the life of faith doesn't come through, we rationalize.”

We are called to the life of faith, a life of prayer, but our fear keeps us off balance, wavering between trust and doubt. We hedge our bets, stockpile for tomorrow, just in case God falls short. This wavering makes faith nearly impossible—we believe without believing, trust without trusting, we depend without letting go of our safety nets and backup plans. Barton writes, “And so we might ask: What is the use of praying if, at the very moment of prayer, we have so little confidence in God that we are busy planning our own kind of answer to our prayer?”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Seamands, *Ministry In The Image of God*, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, Adapted from *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*.

Psalm 20:6-8 says, “*Now this I know: The Lord gives victory to his anointed. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm.*”

2. The second thing I want to touch upon is the reference to an altar. “*Moses built an altar and called it ‘The Lord is My Banner.’ He said, ‘For hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord.’*”

Moses named the altar, “*The Lord is My Banner,*” but biblical scholars are divided on what this phrase is meant to convey. From my perspective, the answer becomes clear when we keep the purpose of the altar and the name of the altar together. Most often, Old Testament altars were associated with some kind of sacrifice, but not here—the purpose for this altar was remembrance.

Moses built an altar, a monument, to remind Israel of God’s victory in the battle. *The Lord is My Banner.* Ask yourself, *what does a Banner do?* It communicates something, it makes a statement. Think of a High School Banner: the Argyle Pipers, the Handsworth Royals, the Windsor Dukes—a banner identifies who we are, or, who we belong to.

*The Lord is My Banner*—I am His and He is mine. The Lord is the One who defines us, and His labels are much better than the labels we attach to ourselves, or inherit from others. He calls us Daughter, Son, Beloved, Friend, Saint—this is who we are.

**Conclusion:** As I draw my message to a close, and move us toward the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, I want to return to the story I began with.

*What do we do when we don’t know what to do?* Christians pray. When we are confused, and lack wisdom, we pray. When we are in trouble, we pray. When we are sick, we call for others to join us to pray. We pray because we are limited, dependent, creatures; we pray because God is unlimited in His wisdom, power, and love. When we don’t know what to do, we pray to the One who knows.

When Naomi sank into depression, I didn’t know what to do. I felt ill-equipped to love Naomi well, but I did the best I could—I stood with her, encouraged her, affirmed my love for her, and, **I prayed.** My prayers were hardly profound—I prayed as much for her as I did for myself; many days my prayers were limited to three words: *Lord, help us!* When Naomi was overwhelmed, when I was overwhelmed, I would lift my hands to heaven and pray, *Lord, help us!* This was my go-to prayer for more than 12 months.

The Lord heard my prayers and He did help the two of us—we weren’t immediately delivered, but His grace was sufficient, His power was as work in our weakness. We learned to depend on the Lord in a way, and at a depth that we could not have learned in still waters. And now, many years later, there is something we know about prayer that we didn’t know then.

**Prayer is more God’s work than ours—through prayer, we enter into a conversation that is already going on.**

**illus:** Have you ever joined a circle of conversation, only to discover that they were talking about you? At best it's awkward, at worst it's shameful or infuriating—we don't like it when people are talking behind our back. But what if you joined the conversation and discovered that people were praising your character qualities, talking about how much they loved you, or discussing the ways they could stand by you in difficulty? A conversation like that would be welcome, wouldn't it?

Prayer isn't something we initiate, it's a Triune activity—in prayer, we enter into the conversation that is already going on, about us, between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I suspect that thought might frighten some of you—*what is God saying about us?*—but keep in mind what I said earlier. The first thing that God notices about us is our belovedness, not our sin—God is for us, not against us. He calls us Daughter, Son, Beloved, Friend, Saint—this is who we are.

When we don't know what to do, we pray, but so often we stumble in our praying because we don't know what to pray. All too often we pray selfish, short-sighted prayers. The truth is, none of us knows how to pray as we ought to, but when we come to God in prayer we find One who is praying for us, with us, and in us.

Hebrews 7:25 speaks of Jesus' ongoing work of intercession saying, "*he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*" Think of it, right now, Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and He's talking to the Father about you. He's telling the Father what He loves about you, what He wants for you, and what you need.

Romans 8:26-27 tells us that the Holy Spirit is in on the conversation as well. We may not know what to pray, but the Spirit prays within us with groans that our words could never express. The Father knows us inside and out, and the Spirit prays for us in keeping with the Father's plans and purposes.

James Torrance writes, "The God to whom we pray and with whom we commune knows what we want to pray, try to pray, but cannot pray. So God comes to us as man in Jesus Christ to stand in for us, to pray for us, teach us to pray and lead our prayers. God in grace gives us what he seeks from us—a life of prayer—in giving us Jesus Christ and the Spirit."<sup>4</sup> This is a game changer in our praying.

Perhaps you feel trapped by your past—you can't seem to break free from things you've done, or from things done to you; guilt, shame, and hurt may dog you. Perhaps you feel afflicted by your present circumstances; unsure of what to do or where to turn. Perhaps it's the future that frightens you most—there is so much unknown, so little you can control. It makes a difference, doesn't it, knowing that Jesus and the Spirit are speaking to the Father on our behalf? Our perspective, wisdom, our strength is limited, but theirs knows no bounds.

**The Lord's Supper:** On this Remembrance Day weekend, we come to the Table of Remembrance—eating bread, and drinking from a cup that reminds us of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. We come remembering who He is—as God, He reveals the fullness of the Father's love, as Man, He presents us to the Father, clothed in His righteousness.

---

<sup>4</sup> James Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 64.

On the cross, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus offered Himself to the Father—the One for the Many—a perfect, sinless, sacrifice. The bread we eat symbolizes Jesus' body that was broken for us; the cup we drink symbolizes Jesus' blood which was poured out for our forgiveness. In nearly every culture throughout history, a shared meal is a sign of friendship—this table of remembrance is the table of the Lord's friendship.

Right now, Christ our Brother, Saviour, and High Priest is seated at the right hand of God. The One who died for us, is the One interceding for us today. And Christ is present to us this morning by the Spirit, who at this very moment is praying within us in keeping with God's good plan and purpose.

As you eat this bread and drink this cup, come with your pain, come with your confusion, Christ understands our struggle and weakness. Come with your disobedience, your pride, and your selfishness—He has made atonement for our sin. As you come let Him name you again today: Daughter, Son, Beloved, Friend, Saint—this is who we are. Come with your worship, your gratitude, and your joy—come and find new life in His generous love.

At this time I'd like to invite those who are serving to come forward. In just a moment Paul and the worship team will begin to play, and as they do, please come forward, tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup and eat with thanksgiving.

## **Worship**

---

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from the Prayer of Saint Patrick)

## **Benediction**

May Christ be with you, Christ before you, Christ behind you,  
Christ in you, Christ beneath you, Christ above you,  
Christ on your right, Christ on your left,  
Christ when you lie down, Christ when you sit down,  
Christ when you arise,  
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of you,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of you,  
Christ in every eye that sees you,  
Christ in every ear that hears you.

May you arise today in the mighty strength and love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.<sup>5</sup>