

# **Empowering Your Leader**

## ***Prayer & Partnership***

**Romans 15:30-32; 1 Timothy 2:1-8**

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**Bethany Church**

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It was September of 1862. Our nation was locked in a bloody civil war. The North sent Major Ambrose Burnside and a large force to capture the Confederate town of Sharpsberg in northern Maryland. The Union Army vastly outnumbered their Confederate counterparts. However, between Burnside's large army and Sharpsberg lay Antietam Creek. Burnside decided that to launch his offensive his troops needed to take a certain bridge. Although the bridge was defended by a small garrison of Confederate troops, its layout neutralized any advantage Burnside had in numbers. Only a small contingent could cross at one time, and they were fully exposed to the Confederate guns. Burnside was relentless. He sent wave after wave of soldiers onto the bridge; and by the end of day, 22,000 Union soldiers had been killed or injured. Even more tragic, taking the bridge was unimportant. If Burnside had done his research, he would have discovered that less than a mile away the creek was shallow enough for his army to cross. Had he forded the creek there, his invasion would have encountered little resistance.

I'm convinced that strategic errors like Burnside's, errors that could be easily prevented or quickly corrected, are happening in our personal lives and creating all kinds of harm; and they are happening also in our churches. In the United States we've spent millions of dollars, designed the most creative programs, worked ourselves to exhaustion; and lost ground in our communities. What do we do as a result? We work harder at the things that didn't pay off! When I consider the effort being expended and measure the results, I'm embarrassed. We're burning people out, using people up, breaking people down... all in efforts that make little difference. I detect Major Burnside syndrome. As a church is there

something we are overlooking, something that a little research could uncover, something so near that we could bump into it, another path that could change our effectiveness?

The greatest contrast I see between the church and its Lord, between Jesus and us, other than his amazing results is his commitment to prayer. We have the same God and father. We are given the same Holy Spirit. It is obvious from the cross that God loves us no differently than Jesus. However, Jesus spent forty days in prayer before he tried to accomplish anything that would affect the spirit of the people he was called to redeem. For Jesus, prayer punctuated his work, preceded his decisions and prevailed in his ministry.

Last week we discussed how prayer in the Bible is really a conversation with our divine parent and partner. This week I want us to look at it as a weapon. In creation, God partnered with Adam. We found in Genesis 2:19-20 that God brought creation to humanity for definition. God and Adam worked together... in conversation with each other. What makes us think that the redemption of that creation would be any different? In prayer we present creation back to God for redefinition and redemption. Prayer is partnership with God in redemption; and it is a weapon.

John Wesley, the great 18<sup>th</sup> Century apostle through whom much of the world was evangelized, was so convinced of prayer as the critical factor, that he said, "God does nothing but in answer to prayer!" Was he right? Charles Spurgeon observed, "Whenever God determines to do a great work, He first sets his people to pray." Why?

When Adam named creation, there was no opposition in his spirit. There was no deception. Spiritually, Satan was a visitor rather than a resident in this world. His influence was limited to communication through a snake. We often think of a serpent speaking English in a voice to Eve. We have no experience with or concept of the telepathic abilities that first couple had in communicating with God's creatures, the animals. What have we found recently? The modern human being uses only about 10% of their brain? Our potential to think, remember and communicate is unbelievable. Moreover, the point is that in Adam's daunting task of naming and defining all creation, there was no opposition. However, in redeeming humanity and creation, everything is contested. Indeed, every aspect of your life is contested. Grace has preserved you. Unmerited favor was yours before your birth. In many cases, this is true because people prayed for you. In doing so, they battled with Satan's legion for you.

One of many things indicating this is Paul's experience. Turn to Romans 15. (It's on the blue insert). In verses 30 through 32, Paul urges his Christian brothers to pray for him. "Join me in my struggle by **praying**," he writes the Roman believers. He then sets before them three prayer requests. They are to pray for his **rescue** from unbelievers in Judea. They are to pray for **acceptance** by Jerusalem's saints; and they are to pray for his safe **arrival** in Rome. By praying for Paul, they are partnering with God, and they are partnering with Paul in his fight.

The Bible reveals that it was a terrific fight. Paul was accepted by the saints of Jerusalem; however, 5 chapters of Acts reveal assault after assault by the unbelievers in Judea. They even made a pact not to eat until they killed Paul. For two years Paul was in danger from these Judeans even though he was guarded by Roman soldiers in Caesarea. Paul's trip to Rome was another battle. Storms rocked his ship. Soldiers plotted to kill him. His ship was smashed in to rubble; and an aggressive, poisonous, deadly snake bit his hand and wouldn't let go.

All three of Paul's prayer requests were fulfilled. But they were lengthy battles, and you can just imagine the individual prayers, the collective cries as believers gathered to pray for Paul and the overnight vigils when his life was in danger. Prayer was partnering with God. Prayer was partnering with Paul, and prayer was warring with our spiritual enemies.

One of St. Paul's greatest priorities was developing leaders. We know more about his investment in Timothy than anyone else because we have two of Paul's letters to Timothy. We read in his first letter what advice Paul considered important. God had an unfolding plan for this young man. The priority, the most important thing for Timothy to do, were things consistent with that plan. Paul advised Timothy to do things in keeping with the prophecies that had been spoken over Timothy. Paul taught that the priority for Timothy *is in step with God's unfolding plan*. He taught that it *is sequential* - in other words, it's the first thing we do, it's first of all. Not only is it sequential; it is *strategic*. It makes a difference. It's critical to the future. What was strategic, what was sequential, what was in step with God's unfolding plan? Mobilizing people in prayer! Timothy was to mobilize believers to pray for everyone. That was good and pleasing to God because God loved and wanted to redeem everyone. Paul advised Timothy to mobilize your people to become partners in their neighbor's redemption through prayer. However, the priority was even more *specific*. "Especially have them pray for their leaders," Paul advised, "for that will affect the course of their own lives."

When Paul wrote those words, he was thinking of civic leaders, for he used the terms kings and those in authority. But I believe God directed Paul in that expression because "those in authority" include spiritual leaders. Prayer for your pastor will make a difference in what you experience and accomplish spiritually. The morale, the faith, the atmosphere for growth and the redemption of a community rely greatly on that community's pastors and spiritual leaders.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century God used one leader, Charles Finley to profoundly change the climate of Rochester, New York. Through Finney's ministry one tenth of Rochester was converted in just one year. Finney knew his effectiveness was not innate. He knew that prayer was critical. He wrote about Abel Clary who would go to a private place and pray for Finney. Clary would pray before Finney preached, while he preached, and Clary continued to pray until after Finney was done. Every moment of Finney's ministry was covered in prayer.

My own ministry moved into a different dimension when I was joined by that kind of partnership in prayer. In May of 1998 I enlisted 12 special prayer partners who embraced

Clary's type of commitment. Each day of the week someone was intensely lifting me up. One man put a penny in his shoe, and every time he felt that penny he prayed for me on his assigned day. Each worship service was covered by at least one or two people (and sometimes up to four people). I was covered in prayer until we were finished. In those two years the number of prayer partners grew to 16, and the fruit of my work far surpassed what I had accomplished in the previous 17 years.

I personally discovered that prayer partners are critical to a leader. Because of our influence, we leaders are in a white hot, fiery contest with Satan for the redemption of our communities and the mobilization of our congregations. We're tested and challenged at every turn. As a result, there is a lot of failure. I've heard some years ago that as many as one out of five pastors quit within their first five years of ministry. Listen to these statistics. (You can feel in the blanks on your blue notes, if you want). A Fuller Institute survey in 1991 revealed that 90% of the pastors feel that they were inadequately trained for church leadership; 50% feel they are unable to meet the needs of the job; 70% feel worse about themselves, have a lower self-image; 33% say pastoral ministry is an outright hazard to their families, and 80% believe it hurts their families; 70% of the pastors feel very lonely and do not have a close friend; and finally, talk about failure - 33% of the pastors confess having been involved in some inappropriate sexual behavior with someone from their church.

You want to know why the American church, despite all the money and education, makes little headway? The pastors, the spiritual leaders, are getting beaten down, outwitted and steam-rolled. Pastors need partners. They need prayer partners. They need people who will join their personal struggle in prayer. That's more important than the generous giver or the tireless worker.

Last year Kurt Warner was the MVP, the Most Valuable Player in the National Football League. Warner's tenacity, ability and leadership led the St. Louis Rams to a Super Bowl victory. Who is the church's MVP? We need the generous giver. We need the dedicated worker. But history shows that the future hinges on the decisions of leaders like Major Burnside. If their decisions are flawed, we get no where. If the spiritual leader is defeated, frustrated or deceived, we are paralyzed as a force for redemption. Those believers, who partnered with the Apostle Paul in prayer, brought redemption in their sacrifice. Abel Clary was as important to the welfare of Rochester, New York as Charles Finney. The MVP is the one who prays.