

# Praying With Eyes

## Three Pivotal Acts

**Exodus 17:8-16**

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I can think of nothing more pivotal, more influential, or more crucial to what people experience than prayer. A dying thief cried out to Jesus, “Remember me,” and Jesus answered, “This day you will join me in paradise.” A blind beggar named Bartimaeus heard Jesus coming. He cried out, but his friends told him to be quiet. I can imagine their counsel: “Accept your blindness. This is your lot in life. Don’t waste Jesus’ time.” Bartimaeus kept calling, and finally Jesus stopped and conversed with him. Before they were done, Bartimaeus could see. Prayer saved him from a life of dark despair. St. Paul and the prophet Joel wrote, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (Romans 10:13 and Joel 2:32 ). Does that convince you that prayer is pivotal?

Prayer is not a sure-fire formula to get what you want. Prayer is not hocus pocus magic to control your world. Prayer is not manipulation of God. It is not working God over or the control of God. It is communication with God who has all power and who really loves you... as your real father.

It is important to pray with faith. If you don't pray with faith, you won't pray, you'll shortly give up praying, or you'll resort to some formulaic manipulation. You will turn a relationship with God into ritual and religion. Some of you struggle to pray with faith. You've had a deep disappointment. Some heartache was not resolved by prayer. You prayed and there was no satisfactory answer. Maybe your loved one died. Maybe the situation got worse and the marriage dissolved. Maybe years of prayer yielded no change. The result is that you have nagging doubts about prayer. You have little confidence in prayer. You have more confidence in your own effort. If that describes you, I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that unbelief is hindering your relationship with Christ and your experience as his disciple. The good news is that God can heal your hurt and renew your confidence today. Would you like that?

We all go through low moments when Satan seems to have the upper hand. This enemy of God, you and me certainly is visibly working at times. Moses went through one of these periods of attack when he led the Israelites to a place in the desert called Rephidim. There was no water. There was no water to drink, no water to bathe with and no water to offer the animals. There was no water, but there was plenty of anger. The people doubted that Moses was following God. Moses feared the people might stone him and return to Egypt. Moses was so upset and angry himself that he did not honor God in his response. God provided water, but disciplined Moses. He would see the Promised Land, but never walk in it. That had to be a low time, but it got worse. Amalekite raiders surprised the Israelites at Rephidim. I don't know what all they took. Perhaps they took animals. Perhaps they captured some of the children and women. Whatever the case, Moses told Joshua to choose some Israelites to fight the Amalekites. He said:

***Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.*** (Exodus 17:9)

The next day Moses climbed up a hill with the shepherd's staff that he once used to herd sheep. He called it the staff of God because God had revealed his power with that simple stick. The staff had become a snake and then wood again. With that staff God turned the Nile River and canals of Egypt into blood. With that staff God brought plagues of frogs, gnats, hail and locusts on the Egyptians. With that staff God parted the Red Sea and then filled it in destroying the Egyptian army. With that staff God brought water from a rock, enough to supply the Israelite nation in the Sinai desert at Rephidim. Now the Israelites would fight while Moses on a hill above them held that staff up to God. Moses watched the action. When he lowered the staff, the Amalekites advanced. When he raised it, the Israelites succeeded. As the day advanced, Aaron and Hur pulled up a stone so Moses could sit. They stood on both sides supporting Moses' arms until darkness ended the battle. The Amalekites were defeated. God told Moses write the whole account on a scroll so that people would remember. Something pivotal occurred at Rephidim that God wanted us to remember. God also wanted Joshua to hear what happened so that Joshua would not fear the people of Amalek when Moses was gone.

On that hill Moses gathered rocks as an altar of thanksgiving and gave it the name *Yahweh-Nissi*, the Lord is my Banner. Years ago when soldiers fought, the flag-bearer or standard-bearer played a crucial role. With his banner held high, he let soldiers know where their help was. If they got disoriented, they could spot the banner. It gave them courage. It gave them perspective. It revealed where the strength of their side was and it

reminded them that they were not alone. They were still in the fight. They had not lost. When Moses raised up that staff, it gave comfort and courage to the soldiers who spotted it. But something greater happened than the lifting of any flag. The staff wasn't the banner. Moses called the Lord his banner not the staff. He called the Lord his banner, the Lord his comfort, the Lord his courage, the Lord his strength, because his hands were lifted up to the throne of God where the fate of human kind is decided. That's why many Christians around the world raise their hands in worship and prayer. They are telling God that he is their banner, their trust and strength. That day Moses showed us how to pray not so much with our arms and hands but with our eyes. He showed us the importance of praying with eyes open to what God is doing. If he had not watched and prayed, he would have never known to keep his hands up. If he had not observed the battle and the effects of his prayer, he may have given up when his prayers were needed most. If he had not watched and prayed, he may have never discovered the necessity and power of persevering prayer in shaping our experience. James the brother of Jesus wrote, "***We have not because we ask not***" (James 4:2). Is it possible he was teaching us to persevere? Is that why Jesus taught, "***Keep on asking and you will receive, keep on seeking and you will find, keep on knocking and the door will be opened***"? If Moses had not watched and prayed, he would have never known how prayer is part of the struggle, how it's part of the battle and critical to winning.

In Moses' lowest moments, he discovered how important it is to watch and pray. He also discovered that he needed help. He needed people to join him and help him with his prayer burden. He couldn't go it alone. Do you remember what Jesus did in his lowest moments? It was minutes before his betrayal and the night before his crucifixion.

He didn't want to be alone. He didn't want to pray alone. He called three of his friends, three of his disciples to pray with him. He said, "*Stay here and keep watch with me.*" "*Watch and pray,*" he pleaded.

When you pray with open eyes, when you pray with alertness to God's response, when you pray and watch for God's response, you begin to see reality in a way you never fathomed. You also see the results of your prayers. Those results inform you. They cause you to pray differently. Where others see no God, you see God moving in great power.

I remember six years ago when I lost a forty year old friend to cancer. She and I were ordained pastors together. I saw her get married, have children and then I and others became her partners in prayer as together we battled her cancer. She lived 170 miles away, yet a team from my church supported her each week. The morning after she died, we had not received the news. A lady that day in our prayer group did not pray for her healing. She asked God to prepare the family for a new mother. She was surprised by what she said and so was I. When we got the news, we knew God was answering and directing us. Those children did get a new mother about two years ago. They also got twin siblings 10 months ago. Praying with eyes changes how you pray.

Indeed, praying with eyes keeps you praying, for *prayer not evaluated becomes evaporated*. If you don't see what your prayer is doing, if you don't watch for its effect, are you that serious, will you really keep praying? The Bible teaches us to keep praying because the nature of life requires it. We will learn about this in coming weeks when we look at the real battle in life and discuss how to win it.

What helped me pray with faith and with eyes was praying with others who believed and saw. As I saw them watch and pray and heard them evaluate, my faith grew. Soon I could see God's hand myself, and I could identify his voice. Things I once described as coincidences multiplied, and I soon knew they were not. I found myself believing in God rather than in chance. I realized God's hand was on me and he was responding to my call. It was so helpful to pray with others. Moses needed it. Jesus wanted it. I need it. How about you?

I don't know what disappointments you've had or what hurts you carry, but I know God your father never dismissed your prayers. Even if your loved one is gone, he still is responding to your prayer. Your prayer does not control God, but it motivates him; and you may not have opened your eyes yet to see him responding. Will you let the hurt go? Will you face the resentment and anger and let go of it? Confess it. He'll forgive you and heal you now. He'll replace your unbelief with a new faith. Are you ready? Do you want to be free? Do you want to believe? Do you want to experience the love and power of God?