

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. I had the privilege of being a FLO Coach this past week, with an outstanding group of nine 8 year old boys. Next week I'll be helping at SummerJam by running games for grades 4-7; these are two of my favourite weeks in the church calendar. Thank you to the many of you have, or will be, volunteering at our camps, and thank you to those who have been praying for the campers—God moves in response to your prayers.

This past week, during one of our half-time talks, we were talking about things that cause us to experience joy. I asked my guys if they could think of anything that God might give them that would produce joy. One of the boys piped up and said “eternal life, heaven,” and in response another boy put up his hand and asked, “*how do we know that heaven is real?*”

I thought it was a brilliant question, and I told him so. I went on to tell him that God the Son, Jesus, came to earth for this very reason—to show us what God is like, to tell us how much God loves us, and to make a way for us know God, both now and forever. Some of you have been this week that God would open the hearts of our campers, and He has done just that. Please continue to be praying for our campers and volunteers as we head into SummerJam next week.

This morning we are going to continue in our preaching series entitled “*The Jesus Way*.” Jesus once said, “*I am the way*,” and His statement begs the question: “*The way to where?*” Jesus not only provides the way to eternal life, but He also shows us the way to live, the way to satisfaction, wholeness, and joy.

Each Sunday we have turned to the Bible to examine the lives of people like Cain, Abraham, and Jacob; *did their lives conform to the way of Jesus? Does our life?* This week we will turn our attention to the life of Moses.

Let me begin with a general question—*what do we know about Moses?* We know that he was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. During a time of extended famine, Jacob's large family immigrated to Egypt where it continued to grow; within 400 years this family had become a nation within a nation. Pharaoh's fear of this growing people group—the Jews—first led him to adopt state-wide policies of slavery, and later, he gave orders that amounted to genocide. Moses was born to Jewish slaves in Egypt, but through a miraculous turn of events, Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and grew up in the royal household.

If asked to choose one word to describe Moses, many would choose the word “Leader;” he is best known for confronting Pharaoh and leading the Jews out of Egypt. Moses' leadership activities included communicating vision, strategic planning, resolving conflicts, and making difficult decisions. But this morning we are not going to consider **Moses the Leader**, instead, were going to look at two scenes from his life that portray **Moses as a Pray-er**.

It's easy to overlook just how central prayer was to Moses' life. 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.
- When Israel refused to listen to Moses, he found his strength in the Lord—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 them 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. This morning I want to talk with you about Moses, about Jesus, and a life of prayer; specifically, I want to look at prayer in terms of intercession and intimacy.

1. Prayer As Intercession (Ex. 17:8-16): The first scene we are going to look at comes from Exodus 17:8-16; here we see **Moses the Intercessor**. To intercede is ask God to act on behalf of another, and this is exactly what Moses did.

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.'"

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 on God. If you are able, keep your hands raised a little longer.

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!*

You can go ahead and lower your hands. On the battlefield, Joshua raised his sword, but on a nearby hill Moses raised his hands to Heaven in prayer. We're told that as long as Moses hands were raised, Israel was defeating the enemy, but the moment Moses lowered his hands, the Amalekites rallied.

We're told that when Moses grew weary, Aaron and Hur found a stone for Moses to sit on. Then, Aaron and Hur lifted his hands—one on each side—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. Together these three were steadfast—with hands raised to heaven, they interceded and in so doing the battle was won.

There's two ideas in the text that I want briefly touch upon:

A. First, the Lord tells Moses to write out an account of the battle—*and make sure that Joshua hears it.* What did Moses have that Joshua

needed? One word—**perspective**...prayer gives us a heavenly perspective.

Joshua saw what was right in front of him—an enemy army with swords and spears—but from Moses vantage point, he saw the God doing battle on Israel's 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.

The first time we are introduced to Joshua, he is taught a life lesson on 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 life is staying to connected to God and relying on His unfailing strength. He learned that prayer is a person's best weapon and a person's greatest gift to others.

Have we learned this lesson? Prayer is an act of dependence; it's an admission of weakness and need. 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." Many of us pray, but we've got a backup plan just in case.

Our fear keeps us off balance, wavering between trust and doubt. We hedge our bets, stockpile for tomorrow, just in case God doesn't

deliver the goods. This wavering makes faith nearly impossible—we believe without believing, trust without trusting, we depend without ever letting go.¹

B. 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.’*”

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. *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 Windsor Dukes, the Argyle Pipers, the Handsworth Royals—a banner identifies who we are, or, who we belong to.

The Lord is My Banner—I am His and He is mine. We pray to a good, loving, and powerful Father who can, and does, intervene as we intercede. If you are new to prayer, you might ask: “*What will happen when I pray?*” For those who are not yet sold on prayer, the best way to say it is that when we pray *coincidences* begin multiply in our lives. William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury once joked, “When I pray, coincidences happen; when I stop praying, the coincidences stop happening.”

illus: My mother-in-law is a pray-er; as far as she is concerned, any time, anywhere, is the right time to pray. Years ago now, right after Naomi and I found out that Anna was going to join our family, my

mother-in-law drove to the store and bought a helium balloon that read “*It’s a girl!*”

But when she arrived home, she got out of her car without a good grasp on the string. The moment the door opened, the balloon escaped—it climbed higher and higher until it was out of sight. She was upset. Naomi and I had been waiting so long time to be matched for adoption, and this balloon was mom’s way of celebrating with us.

I would have gotten angry, or driven back to the store, but my mother-in-law began to pray: “*Lord, I really need that balloon*”. Within seconds it began to rain, and the balloon—now weighed down by rain drops—appeared the sky, slowly descending, until it came to rest in her waiting hand. *Coincidence?*

illus: And while I’m on the subject of balloons, let me tell you another true story. Good friends of our were in Thailand, adopting their daughter. There comes a moment in the adoption transition process where you take your two year old child from their primary care giver—and the only home they have ever known—and you leave. It’s emotionally traumatic for the child, for the caregiver, and for the adoptive parents.

Well, the mom was hoping to lessen the trauma and so she decided she would buy a bright pink, Hello Kitty balloon. She looked everywhere but there were no Hello Kitty balloons to be found. And so she began to pray, *Lord, help me to find a ballon*—no matter how hard she looked, she came up empty.

¹ Ruth Haley Barton, Adapted from *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*.

On the day they were to receive their daughter, they began to walk from the rental house to the home where their daughter had been living. As they walked, the husband noticed something high in the air above but he couldn't quite make it out. As they continued to walk, this something began to descend and not more than ten feet in front of them, a bright pink, Hello Kitty balloon came to rest on the ground. *Coincidence?*

When we pray, things happen because God is present, loving, and active in our lives.

2. Prayer As Intimacy (Ex. 33:7-23): The second scene I want to draw your attention to can be found in Exodus 33:7-23. If the first scene depicts prayer in terms of intercession, then the second depicts prayer in terms of intimacy.

God's desire for humanity has always been unhindered relationship—no barriers, no division, nothing to stand in the way of His love for us. When Moses led Israel out of Egypt, into the desert, God had skilled craftsmen construct what was called “the Tent of Meeting”—it was the place where Moses went to speak with God.

We're told, in verse 9, that as “*Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud—a symbol of the Lord's presence—would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses.*” Vs. 11, “*The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.*”

When you think about God, does the concept of friendship come to mind? Friends enjoy one another's company; they talk about big things, everyday things, matters of school or business, as well as matters of the heart. Prayer is much more than intercession—asking

God to intervene; for the Christian, prayer is the language of the heart.

Moses said to the Lord, vs. 12, “*You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.*” Vs. 14, “*The Lord replied, ‘My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ Then Moses said to him, ‘If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?’ And the Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.’ Then Moses said, ‘Now show me your glory.’*”

Most religions have holy books that give instruction about life, about their god, about the afterlife, etc; in this regard, Christianity is no different. But what sets Christians apart is that God has come to dwell in our midst. He is not far off and removed; He lives within us—we are people of His presence. Through prayer we cultivate intimacy with God; with speak with God as we do with a friend, and we learn to listen for His voice.

We cannot love someone that we do not know; it's for this reason that Jesus came. John 1:14 tells us that at just the right time, God the Son, Jesus, “*became human and made His home among us.*” John writes, “*He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*” John 1:18 says, “*No one has ever seen God. But the [Son], who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.*”

Like Moses, **Jesus was a Pray-er**. For too long in Western Christianity, we've bought into the myth that prayer precedes activity. For Jesus, prayer was never hived off from the rest of His life—prayer wasn't the sacred 15 minutes in an otherwise secular day.

At the most important junctures of His life—the 40 days in the wilderness, before choosing 12 disciples, and the night before the cross—we see Jesus devoting long periods of time to prayer. But most of the time, we just see Jesus living and praying: praying as He worked, praying while at rest, praying in the company of friends and crowds—He integrated prayer into everyday activity.

With the Holy Spirit's help, Jesus walked in step with God the Father, so much so, that Jesus could say: *"I go where the Father tells me to go; I say what the Father tells me to say; I only do what the Father Himself is doing."* In the Tent of Meeting, Moses spoke face to face with God as one speaks to a friend. Jesus didn't have a tent per se, but the same friendship—intimacy—marked His relationship with God.

I wonder, *do you want to know this kind of intimacy? Is it available for people like us?* Yes!

A second century theologian, Clement of Alexandria, once defined prayer in the following way: "Prayer is keeping company with God". I like this definition because it gets to the heart of things. In prayer we keep company with God and we are ushered into a love deeper than we could have imagined. In His presence we find He's stronger

than we hoped, less angry and more forgiving than we had dared to dream; He's more creative, less stingy, and so much more alive than anyone we've ever experienced.

And that's why it's less important *what* we pray and more important *that* we pray; we need to just get there, into His presence where He can bless us, love us, heal us, transform us.

We all want to know that our life matters, that we are loved, that someone delights in us. There is nothing wrong with desiring affirmation, we were created to receive it, and *Our Father in heaven* is best able to give us the affirmation we need.

In John 17, we hear Jesus praying; He said, *"I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me."*² I hope you caught that; it's worth repeating: may the world know that **"You love them as much as you love me."** It's one of the most staggering statements in all of Scripture—God the Father loves you as much as He loves Jesus.

As I conclude this morning, I want to read a few words that express the Father's joy and delight in you:

In Psalm 17:8, God speaks about us saying, *"You are the apple of my eye and I hide you in the shelter of my wings"*. In Isaiah 49:15-16, God says, *"I have engraved your name on the palms of my hands..."*

² John 17:21, 23, NLT.

though a mother may forget the baby at her breast, I will not forget you.”

In Romans 8 we read, *“If I am for you, who can be against you? Who or what can separate you from my love? Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither your fears for today nor your worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate you from my love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate you from my love that has been revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*³

Conclusion: The way of Moses, the way of Jesus, is the way of prayer, the way of intercession and intimacy.

Perhaps you, or someone you love, needs God’s intervention; it’s time to intercede, trusting in the Lord’s goodness, wisdom, and timing.

Perhaps you long to experience God in the way that Moses did, in the way that Jesus did; prayer is the vehicle to cultivate friendship with God.

Pray

Worship

Invitation to Prayer Ministry

Benediction

³ Romans 8:31, 38-39.