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Hello and welcome to this episode of the St Andrews Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. And in this episode we are going to be thinking about an issue that is, um, real for all of us at various times in our lives, which is simply this: How do we pray when we're facing a time of crisis in our lives? Crises are just a part of life, aren't they? None of us can escape them. And I guess it's part of the human condition to turn to prayer when we're going through a really difficult time. But prayer isn't easy at the best of times is it? At least, it isn't for me anyway. I mean, I really struggle with prayer to be honest. And, um, particularly when I'm going through a really difficult time in my life, I struggle to know, um, how to pray about it at all.

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Uh, and often I struggle to know how best to approach prayer during those times. Um, there's a deep feeling within me to cry out to God, but what do I do with that feeling? How do I vocalize my feelings? How do I find the right words? Maybe you feel the same way as well. Um, perhaps we're all weak in our prayers, but God still loves us and he still honors us when we pray and he will always bless our efforts. And in this podcast, we're going to be thinking about this topic through a passage from Exodus chapter 17:8-16. It's a passage which I think gives us real encouragement in this area of our spiritual life. Exodus 17:8-16 is an amazing story about how Moses dealt with the problem of the Amalekites who came to attack the people of Israel.

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Um, and it's a story about how he conducted himself before God and how he prayed in the face of this enormous crisis that he was facing. But before we get into the story itself, maybe a bit of context might be helpful. Now, if you've ever read, uh, these sorts of parts of the Old Testament, then you'll know that battles and wars, uh, were really commonplace amongst the nations and the tribal people. Uh, Israel was pretty well used to being physically attacked by other nations, other tribes. But the Amalekites were a different kettle of fish altogether. Um, the Amalekites were vicious beyond all words. They were tough and they were brutal. The Amalekites were nomads living out in the desert regions. And the way that they survived was to attack neighboring people and kill them and take their possessions and their cattle and anything else of worth really.

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And so one day they, they, uh, looked around them and they saw the Israelites and they thought that their luck was in, uh, here were some easy pickings, uh, no problems here. One attack and Israel would be history. And so completely unprovoked and without any warning, uh, as we read in verse eight of Exodus 17, uh, "Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim." Now the Israelites probably didn't know what had hit them. And actually life can be like that for all of us, can't it? Every now and again without any warning at all, when it seems to be all clear sailing, uh, life throws up a major battle for us. Uh, maybe someone we love becomes ill and dies, or maybe we're made

unemployed, or perhaps we contract an illness or our marriage hits the rocks, or we have some sort of financial, uh, difficulty.

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It happens, doesn't it without any warning at all. Our lives become blighted by a major catastrophe, um, that feels like it's the size and the might of the Amalekites. And when that happens, we are left reeling, um, in shock and distress. And, um, we look at the problem that faces us and we think, "How on earth am I ever going to cope with this one?" And, uh, we might be tempted to think that, you know, "If I was a spiritual giant like John Wesley or Hudson Taylor, it'd be okay because I could pray my way out of this one". Uh, but I'm not a John Wesley, uh, I'm not a Hudson Taylor. I'm just me. Uh, frail, vulnerable, fragile me, uh, tattered and torn at the edges, uh, often not knowing which way to turn. And I guess that's how Moses felt as well. But the way that he then went on to handle the situation and the example that he leaves us here, um, in this passage from Exodus 17, uh, it gives us some direction on how to cope with crises, uh, prayerfully, uh, how to, um, come before God with the very real problems that we face in our lives today. Um, and as we explore this passage now there's just three points that I really want to bring out in this podcast.

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The first point that comes out from this passage for me is that Moses begins by putting his crisis into perspective. I wonder if you've ever tried one of those Magic Eye puzzles that looked like a mass of colored dots and you need to see them in a particular way to see the pattern emerging a, but to see the pattern, you need to adjust the way you look at the puzzle. You have to look at the picture a certain way to see the pattern emerging. And I think that's true of the crises that we face in life as well. Uh, maybe you're facing a particularly tough time at the moment, a really difficult situation. And you're trying to find a way to deal with it. But when you look at it, it just seems like a big mess. It just looks like utter confusion. But if we want to see the real issue at hand in our lives, if we want to deal with our crises prayerfully, then I think we need to do two things.

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And the first is this, actually we need to make some practical planning. In verse nine, Moses says to Joshua, "Choose some men for us and go out and fight with Amalek tomorrow". Now that seems to me to be an eminently sensible thing to do. The Amalekites are out there, they're ready to attack. So the logical thing to do is to prepare an army to defend. And so Moses takes Joshua to one side, not just any old military leader. Um, we know from the other parts of the Bible that Joshua was the best man for the job, the top military leader in Israel. And Moses tells him to make plans to sort the situation out. Now, there is a school of thought amongst some Christians that is scathing actually about making plans for the future. I've come across it many times in my life.

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Uh, not least, when, um, some of the people I've loved dearest were suffering from terminal illnesses. And some Christians would say, "Oh, don't worry about the doctors. Just pray. God will bring healing." Well, let me tell you what I think. Um, if you're in a crisis at the moment, uh, the lack of making proper plans is

not a sign of godliness. Um, it's a sign of ignorance. If your finances are in a mess, you need to do something positive about the situation. If you're ill or someone you love is ill, you need to see a doctor. The Bible does not condone lack of practical activity as a sign of godliness. We're all called to take some degree of responsibility for our lives. And that's exactly what Moses did when he was faced with an Amalekite attack. Now, he didn't sit around waiting for a thunderbolt from heaven to wipe out the Amalekites.

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He sorted out his leaders. He sorted out his strategy. He sorted out his troops and he got them ready for the counter attack. But that's only half the story of course, because then we go on to read, uh, the rest of Moses words where he says this, he says, "Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." Now this is where Moses and I, uh, have something in common because if I looked out over the desert and saw the Amalekites there, I think I too would have volunteered to get out of the way and go stand on a hill near by. But the difference is of course, that I'm a complete coward and Moses was a man of action! You see, Moses knew that when facing the might and the strength of the Amalekites, practical planning just wasn't enough.

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It was important, but it wasn't enough. And when we face crises in life as well, practical planning just isn't enough. It's important, but it isn't enough. We need to back up our activity with some serious prayer. Now, Moses knew that Joshua was the military man and he knew that he, Moses, was the prayer man, so he goes off to pray while the battle commences. Now there's something really important to notice here as well that when when Moses prays he doesn't do it from the front line but he backs off some distance and he goes up a hill to pray. And this is where perspective comes into things because if we want to pray for a solution to the problems we face that we need to be prepared to back off a bit to try to distance ourselves a bit so that we can get a proper perspective.

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The secret to praying for a solution to a particular crisis in life I think is having the ability to stand back from the problem so that we can see things a bit more clearly. Standing on the front line with the troops is not the best place to pray for the battle. Standing on a hill some distance away where you can see the whole game plan is a much better way to pray. It's a really tough call, but we need to find a little bit of space each day to distance ourselves from our problems so that we can hear God's voice more clearly speaking to us. So praying in times of crisis then I think, um, is all about perspective. Practical planning, yes, but matched with a bit of distance, uh, away from the tumult of the battle so that we can hear the still small voice of God a little bit more clearly.

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And then the second example that Moses gives us here is that he prays to God in that time of crisis and he experiences real power when he prays. In verse 11, it says, "Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed. And whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed". The truth is that there is real power in

prayer. It's not some fairy tale. It's not make believe. It's not fate or luck or coincidence. When we pray, things happen. People are healed. Situations are altered, churches grow. Grief is dealt with. Spiritual battles are won. Prayer is real. Prayer is powerful. Prayer works. But for some mysterious reason I can't explain, the other side of the coin is true as well. When we stop praying, we inhibit the power of God at work in our lives. Uh, but as I said at the beginning, the beauty of this story is that it shows Moses, uh, not as a prayer warrior, but like us as a frail, vulnerable and weak human being.

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And we know that because in this story, uh, Moses got tired and his arms dropped, but God could handle that. And what solution did God provide? Well he provided Moses with two wonderful companions, Aaron and Hur, to help him along. In verse 12, we read this, it says, "But Moses hands grew weary. So they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side and the other on the other side." And to be honest with you, uh, there are many times, uh, throughout my life when my arms have dropped in prayer and I cannot tell you how much I value the ministry of other Christians being Aaron and Hur to me, uh, sitting me down and encouraging me to go on praying and go on walking with God when all I want to do sometimes is to give up.

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And I'm sure that some of you carry burdens far greater than mine. Um, but let me just tell you two things. Firstly, if you bring those burdens to God, he will lighten your load and he will give you the strength you need to carry on. Uh, Jesus loves each one of us so much. He longs for us to turn to him in prayer for help and he's never going to let us down. And secondly, whatever cares and worries you are carrying today, you are probably surrounded by Aarons and Hurs who will help you to carry the load. If we share our problems with each other, uh, we will be sure to find support and strength from other people who will love you and accept you just as you are with all your problems and all your fears and anxieties and vulnerabilities about the future. Um, there is an Aaron and a Hur for each one of us. And so when we're in times of crisis, uh, we mustn't despise the love and the acceptance which is on offer from God and from other people. But let God and let other people stand with you in prayer as you try to work through the difficulties you're facing in life.

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So then in praying for strength in times of crisis, we need to get a right perspective, uh, planning for all eventualities backed up with serious prayer and we need to understand the power of prayer and the power of a community of Aaron's and Hurs who will stand with us. And finally, my third point really is the response of praise, which we see, uh, when prayers are answered. In verse 13, uh, from this passage, it says "Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword." Uh, it wasn't a temporary setback. It was a total defeat. And what does God then tell Moses to do after this? Well, in verse 14, uh, God says, "Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it." So when God does answer our prayers in times of crisis, we need to then, uh, remember his goodness to us.

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And I think what is important about living in Christian community together is sharing our experiences of God answering prayers so that we can encourage one another with the victories that God has won in our lives. There may be somebody you know, who is going through a deep crisis in their life right now. If that's the case, then why not share some good news stories from your life with them, uh, about how God has stood with you in times of crisis? Um, if you yourself are going through a particular crisis at the moment, you could do a lot worse than to, uh, seek out people who can encourage you with their stories of how God has been at work for them. Um, we need to encourage one another with the stories of God at work in our lives, and that will then lead us to praise God, uh, which is of course the appropriate response to answered prayer. And that's what we read in verse 15. It says, "Moses built an altar and called it 'the Lord is my banner'". Answered prayer results in praise, and praise builds the Kingdom of God.

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So I think the lessons from this passage are pretty clear. Uh, Moses and the Israelites were facing an enormous crisis, bigger than anything they'd faced before. And their prayerful response claimed the victory that God had for them. They got a, a sense of perspective. They experienced God's power, and then they chose to praise God for what he'd done in their lives. And I think the same is true for us today. What burdens are you carrying today? What's the emotional baggage that weighs you down? We were all invited through this story to follow the example of Moses, uh, to put our problems into perspective and then to experience the power of God and then to praise God for his goodness. That's the way for us to live out our lives as new creations in God. We need to rest in the promise that God has for us

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that whatever our personal situation, whatever Amalekite-sized problem we might face, uh, Moses words, his final words in this passage in verse 16 sort of say it all, he says, "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation". That's God's promise to each one of us. That no matter how big your crisis or the depths of your suffering, God will not allow you to be swallowed up by it. Um, as each generation passes from Moses through to the present day and even beyond ourselves, the Lord will have war with Amalek. He won't allow any of us to be swallowed up by the crises we face. Uh, God fights for you each and every day. God is your strength and your rock and your salvation. Um, and we know that in the strength and in the power of God our victory over life struggles is secure.

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So I hope you have found that a useful podcast. If you want to carry on the conversation, then please do email me, [steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org](mailto:steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org). Uh, check out our website, which is [standrewsenfield.com](http://standrewsenfield.com) and our Facebook page is St Andrew's Enfield. Uh, please subscribe to these podcasts, tell other people about them, and then we can continue to grow together as a learning

community across the globe. It's just so encouraging to see how many people from how many countries are listening to these podcasts and we're kind of growing together as a global community. So thank you for the time you're giving to do that. Um, and uh, wherever you are, whatever you're doing today, um, particularly if you're facing a real crisis in your life right now. My hope and my prayer is that you will get all the support you need from the Christian community, uh, that you'll be able to put things into perspective and know God's power at work in you, so that eventually, um, on the other side of this crisis, uh, you will be in a position to praise God and look back on what he's done in your life. So I hope that you'll feel God's closeness to you today, and that you will know just how much you are loved by him. Bye.

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