

They held up his hands.

That’s the picture the Bible paints for us, which shows Moses on the mountain, flanked by two helpers, Aaron and Hur, who came to his aid as Moses grew tired. That’s the picture we see here

Notice that Moses is holding a staff, and that staff had significance in the unfolding drama of God’s deliverance of his people. You may recall that Moses took that staff with him when he confronted Pharaoh and demanded that he release God’s people from slavery. By way of that staff he performed signs and wonders in the presence of Pharaoh and his court. That staff accompanied him as the Israelites made their laborious journey across the desert after they exited Egypt. It was with that staff in hand that Moses opened his arms and the Red Sea parted when the Egyptian soldiers were chasing them down from behind with their chariots after they had left Egypt. Then he closed those arms and the waters collapsed on the Egyptian soldiers and they drowned.

Then as the people were camped out at a place called Rephidim, as described a moment ago, there was no water for them to drink. When the people complained saying, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” Then God instructed Moses to take in his hand his staff and strike the rock at Horeb. Moses did so and when he struck the rock, water came gushing forth. That staff represented the power of God.

So when the Amalekites come to do battle with the Israelites in the desert, that staff once more comes prominently into play. Moses says to Joshua, the warrior in charge, “Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill (overlooking the battle) with the staff of God in my hand.” So, the next day, the battle begins, and we are told, “Whenever Moses held up his hand (which held the staff), Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites prevailed.”

But Moses' hands grow weary, his arms begin to sag, the staff drops lower and lower, as he no longer has the strength to keep the staff raised.

And that's when Aaron and Hur rush to his aid. They place a rock beneath him so that he can sit down. Then Aaron stood on one side of Moses, and Hur on the other, and they held up his hands, so that they were steady and they held them there until the sun set and the battle was done. And the Israelites were able to prevail.

I think we can feel good about Aaron and Hur's actions. Here was Moses, their leader, desperate for help, so they dash over to where he was and raise up his arms to assist him. And by helping him, by propping up his hands, the Israelites win the battle. The staff remained raised.

This is what we are called to do in the Christian life. When we see a brother or sister in need, we are to come to their aid. In the NT the apostle Paul says, "Bear one another's burdens, and fulfill the law of Christ." Jesus said, "In as often as you have come to the aid of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me." The apostle says in Philippians, "Let each of you look not to your own needs but to the needs of others." Surely, we should applaud their efforts.

Yet, I'm not sure Moses was applauding. Digging a little deeper, I have to wonder if it was in fact difficult to allow Moses and Hur help him. After all, he was God's appointed one to lead God's people. It was his job to hold that staff and no one else's. And as I picture Moses standing there on top of this mountain, his arms quivering with exhaustion, and the heat of the battle raging below him, he is determined to keep his post and hold that staff up high in the air as God had appointed him to do.

Perhaps his mind raced back to that encounter he had with God at the burning bush, when the voice of God spoke to him, "You are the one I have chosen to lead my people. I have appointed you to confront Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. You will be my spokesperson to my people." Once Moses accepted, his response was yes, I am the one God has chosen, I have

taken on this monstrous weight onto my shoulders up to this point, and I will suck it up and keep the staff of God raised. But his arms grew weary, and they began to sag.

Now we really don't know what was happening in Moses' mind that sweltry afternoon in the desert as the battle raged in the valley below him, but I think we do know something of the struggle of accepting help from others. There's something true to the mark of Moses standing there, wanting to hold that staff up by himself that we see in ourselves.

That's the kind of tradition many of us have inherited. We tend to admire the one who pulls himself or herself up by the bootstraps. We applaud the rugged individualist, the one who carves out his own destiny and who doesn't need the assistance of others. Don't allow others to see your weakness. [heard the story of woman who was shopping with her three-year old girl. And while her mother was perusing the shelves in one of the aisles the little girl sat down and began to play in the dust in the aisle. Then a man walking down the aisle, not expecting to encounter a child on the floor, stepped on the little girl's hand. And she let out a terrible scream. Seeing this, the mother picked her up and said, "Don't cry where all these people can see you." Here is this child with her hand throbbing and in obvious pain and the mother was concerned about how this would appear to others. Don't cry where all these people can see you. Don't allow others to see your weakness.

We pay quite a price as we try to forge through life with that kind of mindset. Perhaps it would do us well to see the rugged individualist is often the ragged individualist. Ask the man who started his own construction business in his early twenties. For years he scrimped and saved to get the equipment he needed for the business. Slowly the business grew and he hired more employees until eventually it became a viable company in which built commercial real estate. He was a no-nonsense kind of boss and his employees knew if you were going to excel in that company you did things his way. They liked him because he knew how to get things done. Yet, as time drew near for him to retire, it was asked of him if he would do anything differently and he said, "Well, after two heart attacks, three ulcers, and a constant battle with high blood pressure, not to mention my divorce and a

son who wants nothing to do with me, I wish I could have delegated more work to others. I wish I could have made more friends. I wish I could have my family back.” As a pastor, I’ve heard variations of that same story many times. If you insist on carrying the loads of life alone, it will cost you.

That’s why this scene in the desert, with Aaron and Hur propping up his drooping arms, becomes another defining moment in the life of Moses. Yes Moses, you are the one God has chosen to lead God’s people. It is a burden for you to carry. But you cannot carry it yourself.

You see, we are called to bear one another’s burdens, as the Bible says, yet we are also called to share the burdens. There cannot be a bearing unless there is a sharing. I used to be involved with a ministerium group, and we would gather once a month to share ideas and things which were happening in our churches. What was especially beneficial was when we would share some of the struggles we experienced as pastors. Yet I remember this one pastor who only wanted to share all the great things which were happening in his church. One time I spoke with him after one of our meetings as we were on our way to the parking lot, and I said, “I’m glad to hear you don’t have some of the problems the rest of us pastors have been facing.” He said, “Oh, I have my share of troubles,” as he opened the door of his car, “but I’m not about to let you guys know about them.” And I thought, what a shame. The very thing which I found helpful and beneficial, was something he could not open himself to do because it would make him too vulnerable. It would make him not appear to be the success he wanted to project.

Something else to consider is that an act to bear a burden can be an act of reconciliation. Remember that just before the battle with the Amalekites, Moses was at odds with the people he was trying to lead. They were complaining because there was no water for them to drink in the desert, and as so often happened during this journey when there was trouble, Moses had to bear the brunt of the complaints. “Did you bring us out here into this barren land to kill us with thirst? We would be better off in Egypt.” And Moses cries out to God, “What shall I do with these people? They are ready to stone me. Even though I’ve done my part O God, and you have done yours in bringing us this far, they still will not be faithful and believe

and I guess that means it's you and I verses them." The Bible says, "The people quarreled and tested the Lord."

Then the battle begins with the Amalekites. And Moses is standing alone on that mountain. With all the strength he can muster, he holds that staff in the air. Then his strength begins to wane, and that's when two of the Israelite men, two of whom he had been at odds, step toward him. "They held up his hands, one on the one side, and the other on the other." Yes Moses, you are right, we have not been faithful, we have not trusted you or trusted that the Lord who brought us out of Egypt and provided for us, will continue to do so now in the days ahead. So, here Moses, accept our help." It was at that moment, when they laid their hands upon him, that Moses had to decide, "Will I let them or not?"

Reconciliation can only occur if two parties want it to happen. A gesture of goodwill must be reciprocated with acceptance, a giving and receiving. Moses had to be willing to set aside his resentments and his anger in order to receive the help he needed.

Now I am convinced there are two kinds of people here today. It could be that God is calling you be Aaron and Hur, to come to the aid of that guy you've been knocked sideways with, or because they've hurt you deeply. Maybe he was right and you were wrong. Maybe you were right and she was wrong. It's time to get over it, and they need your help. Or it could you are standing in the place where Moses stood. I know I was right and they were wrong, but now they're reaching out to me. What should I do?

I allow them to lift my hands.