



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

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Holding Up Tired Hands

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Moses' burden was getting heavier. Already charged with leading a stubborn and rebellious people through the wilderness, he was now also personally responsible for the outcome of their battles.

You probably remember the episode, recorded in Exodus 17.8-13. The Amalekites had attacked Israel at Rephidim. With the staff of God in hand, Moses watched the battle atop a nearby hill. Aaron and Hur were with him; Joshua led the troops. As long as Moses' hands held up his hands, Israel was winning; whenever he lowered them, the Amalekites prevailed.

But "Moses' hands grew tired" (v. 12a NIV). Without assistance, a man can hold up his hands just so long. Fortunately, Aaron and Hur were there to help. They found a stone for Moses to sit on, then stood on either side to support him "so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword" (vv. 12b-13).

That battle occurred just before Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came for a visit. He was there the day "Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening" (Exod 18.13). Jethro saw the problem and offered some wise advice:

"What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.... But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you" (vv.17-18, 21-22).

Moses listened and appointed others to decide lesser cases. He would now "be able to stand the strain" (v. 23).

Among God's people today, the specific tasks are different, but leaders still bear heavy loads: watching over us (Heb 13.17); shepherding the flock and exercising oversight over its journey (1 Pet 5.2); guarding themselves and the church against wolves with evil intentions

(Acts 20.28-29). Their responsibility is so important that the ones who do well “are worthy of double honor” (1 Tim 5.17), the latter word denoting both respect and compensation.¹

Like Moses, modern shepherds need assistance to “hold up their tired hands.” In Hebrews 13, the writer follows his reminder that they watch for our souls with an exhortation to do what is needed to let them do their jobs with joy. How can we help? From instructions applicable to all relationships, we can identify ways we can do so.

First, pray for them. They need wisdom for guidance and to strengthen their courage. They are often called on to make tough calls, some of which are heart-wrenching. They want to do God’s will. Prayer will help them in ways criticisms never can.

Second, practice the teaching of Matthew 18.15-18. If your problem is with them, talk to them. Know, too, that sometimes, their burdens increase because they are dealing with matters that should have been addressed elsewhere. If your problem is with another brother or sister, try to work it out with him or her first. If you have questions or criticisms about a ministry program, go first to the ministry leader. You might be surprised to find him open to your input and grateful you went to him first. And you will have helped lighten the shepherds’ load.

Third, examine yourself. No doubt, there will be times when you think something should have been decided and done differently. But ask yourself, “Must everything be done my way? Is there room for judgment here (Romans 14)? Do I have the information and perspective they do? On this matter? On life generally? On the condition of the church and how this decision fits with its other needs?” And then ask yourself this: “If I was in their place, how would I want to be treated (Matt 7.12)?”

Fourth, stop and remember that their work matters for eternity and evaluate the relative importance of your concern in light of that. And keep in mind Paul’s advice to Timothy: “Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments” (2 Tim 2.23).

“Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task” (1 Tim 3.1). Let’s help.

October 2023
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¹ See NIV footnote and the text note in the NET notes.