

A COMPANY OF OVERCOMERS

Exodus 17v8–13.

We have arrived at a New Year full of gloomy forecasts. We are promised a year of austerity with more spending cuts, we are experiencing the worst winter for a long time and the Prime Minister has told us that the nation is still on high alert for terrorist attacks. As families and individuals we are already feeling the impact of the recession and some of you have been handling tough personal issues at home. And as a church we have some challenges; in most areas we are punching well above our weight. At times like this we can feel overwhelmed.

But God calls us to be “Overcomers”. The New Testament word can equally be translated “conquerors”, or those who are “victorious”. There is a good reason why Jesus can call us to be overcomers. **John 16v33:** *“In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* **Luke 10v19:** *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority... to overcome all the power of the enemy.”* This is the same language Paul uses in his famous words in **Romans 8v37:** *“We are more than conquerors (pre-eminently victorious) through Christ who loved us.”*

The context of all these stirring words about overcoming is that of *battle* – which leads me to our Bible passage. Over the holiday period I’ve found myself fascinated by an incident in Exodus 17. I would like to share some of this with you because there is plenty here to inspire us to be “A Company of Overcomers”. Do you want to belong to a defeated, retreating bunch of wounded soldiers or belong of a Company of Overcomers? If you want the latter, then this Bible passage is for you. We will look it together at over three weeks.

The Text: Exodus 17

Our text begins in verse 8: **The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.** This assault is the very first the Israelites faced after the exodus from Egypt. It took place in a desert valley known as Rephidim, probably the Wadi Feiran on a modern map of Sinai.

To appreciate this incident we need to remember that the Israelites were not experienced in warfare. That is why God led them on the southern route through the Sinai desert. (Exodus 13:17–18.) The more obvious and direct

route to the north was along the Mediterranean Sea; this was a popular trade route but it was protected by Egyptian forts. Instead they travelled south, on a route known as “the Way of the Wilderness”; this was more familiar to shepherds than armies. God wanted to spare them the many battles they would have faced in the north. They were just not ready for constant military conflict.

But then, even on the safer route, they came under attack.

Verse 8 simply says: **the Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites.** Moses’ speech to second generation Israelites in Deuteronomy 25:17–18, gives us more information: *“Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God.”*

Who were these Amalekites? They were nomadic tribesmen – but more to the point, they were descendents of Esau and therefore part of Israel’s extended family. Jacob was Amalek’s great grandfather. So, why were they attacking Israel? Maybe it was territorial and they saw the large band of travellers as trespassers, especially now that they had found a new source of water at Rephidim. Or perhaps it was to do with historical enmity between the families of Jacob and Esau. Whatever the reason, their unprovoked aggression was regarded as a terrible crime. They had attacked their own family – and in a cowardly way, picking off the weak who were struggling at the back.

But rather than being overwhelmed and overcome by the attack, the Israelites had their first experience of being “Overcomers” in battle. There’s a lot we can learn about being “A Company of Overcomers” from this crucial moment in Israel’s story. I want to explore this with you over the next few weeks.

1. Tough times call for leadership

Moses was certainly a great leader. He gathered his top men to decide what they should do. One option was to continue on from Rephidim while protecting the rear. Instead he chose a bold strategy. They would face up to this enemy. They would launch a counter attack.

Now a second great leader emerges. **Verse 9: Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites.** This is the first mention of Joshua. He would now become Moses’ right hand man and eventually be his successor. *New leaders emerge in the toughest of times.*

These two men were very different but together they were the leaders needed for the tough times ahead.

There is something very inspiring about strong leadership. That is why Sir Winston Churchill was voted “Man of the Twentieth Century”. In a time of great crisis he offered strong leadership. People around the nation and the Empire huddled around their wireless sets and were galvanised by his speeches. One of the greatest was broadcast on 13th May 1940: He said: *I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat..... We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.*” This was a stirring call to be “An Army of Overcomers”. Churchill was the leader this nation needed at a time of great peril. Despite his flaws, he was the man God raised up. Churchill, himself, sensed this. *“I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and this trial.”*

But there was another great leader in the nation at the time. If Churchill directed the war effort, King George VI pointed the nation to God. Echoes of Rephidim!

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.” Vigorous action and prayer go hand in hand. Moses raising his staff above his head was him interceding in prayer. He planned a forceful counter attack but prayer was also crucial in his strategy. Any God-centred strategy will include both vigorous action and prayer. Throughout the Bible they operate together. If we are to be “A Company of Overcomers” we need both.

George VI proved himself to be a great King in the toughest of times. But it was in calling the nation to prayer that he showed his true greatness at times when the enemy seemed all powerful. Here are a few glimpses back into those days. I may sound like the History Channel – but I’ll take that risk.

- **Dunkirk 1940**

On May 27 1940, the German High Command announced: *‘The British army is encircled and our troops are proceeding to its annihilation’.* Churchill

wrote later: *“I thought — and some good judges agreed with me that perhaps 20,000 or 30,000 men might be re-embarked. . . The whole root and core and brain of the British army . . . seemed about to perish on the field or be led into captivity.”* But the previous day, a Sunday, May 26 had been observed as a National Day of Prayer at the request of the King. In a stirring broadcast he called the people of Britain and the empire to commit their cause to God. Three miracles then happened: (1) Hitler stopped his general advance, (2) an extraordinary storm grounded the German Air Force on May 28, and (3) a calm settled over the English Channel for several days. Instead of 30,000 men escaping – 335,000 members of the British army were evacuated from Dunkirk.

After Dunkirk Hitler held back from crossing the Channel to invade Britain, at a time when our army had lost most of its weapons. He continued to hesitate all through June 1940, giving Britain more breathing space.

- **The Battle of Britain 1940**

But a new threat loomed. Field-Marshal Goering told German Air Command that the way ahead for launching an invasion was to destroy the Royal Air Force. That shouldn't take long! Germany had overwhelming superiority in the air. Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command, was asked: *‘What are your plans for defeating an overwhelming number of the German Air Force?’* He replied: *‘I believe in God. And then there is radar.’*

On August 30, 800 enemy aircraft filled the skies of southern England, to attack key airfields and so began the Battle of Britain – in the air. By September 6th Fighter Command was in serious trouble. Aircraft and pilots were being lost at a rate far in excess of replacements. Churchill famously said: *“Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few.”* Defeat in the air appeared inevitable and this would open the way to invasion. But Hitler suddenly ordered the Luftwaffe to switch its attack to London and this saved Fighter Command. It proved to be a catastrophic blunder. The King called for another National Day of Prayer on Sunday September 8th and there was a tremendous response. Nine days later, on September 17, a message was intercepted from the German High Command postponing the invasion of Britain ‘until further notice’.

- **El Alamein 1942**

After the fall of Tobruk, the Eighth Army was in full retreat, reaching the El Alamein line of defence on Monday June 29 1942. Rommel's army came up to it next day. The German radio boasted that the Afrika Korps would sleep in Alexandria on Saturday night. Suddenly the advance stopped and the panzer divisions rolled westward. Why they did so remains a mystery. King George VI called another National Day of Prayer on September 3rd. People flocked to churches all over Britain. On October 23rd General Montgomery prepared a massive counter attack and issued this Order of the Day to the Eighth Army: *'Let us pray that the Lord, mighty in battle, will give us the victory.'*

A succession of remarkable occurrences followed. When the attack on the German forces was opened Rommel was in Germany, sick for the first time in his life. His deputy died of a heart attack the next day, leaving their High Command in a state of confusion. And due to faulty intelligence the Afrika Korps was completely taken off its guard when the bombardment began. Somehow Montgomery's massive pre-offensive build-up had remained completely hidden despite the movement of 900 tanks. And, last but not least, the German Military Attache in Rome responsible for ensuring that supplies of petrol reached the Afrika Korps had been on leave; the German tanks were out of petrol! By the time Rommel arrived back at his headquarters in North Africa on October 25, the battle was already lost. Churchill said afterwards concerning the battle of El Alamein: *'Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat.'*

Don't you find this stirring! There are many other remarkable instances of God's hand in deliverance during that terrible time. In May 1945, on VE Day, Churchill and George VI stood side by side on the balcony of Buckingham Palace. Two very different men, but both great leaders. The King stepped to the microphone and said with great emphasis: *'We give thanks to Almighty God for the victory He has granted us in Europe.'*

Tough times call for special leaders to emerge in a nation. The Bible calls us to pray for our national leaders. We should be doing so at this time.

Tough times also call for leaders to emerge in the church. Please don't think I'm just talking about one or two people here. I believe there are leadership qualities of different kinds in every one. In fact big challenges produce the very soil in which leaders emerge and grow and reach their potential. In such times those who thought of themselves as followers find that they are leaders; those who were already leaders become good leaders; good leaders became great leaders; and great leaders become even greater!

When I was in Brighton I already knew that Terry Virgo was a great leader. But over the years since, I have seen him grow year on year. And almost always it has been in the context of some challenge. I recall our battle in the early 1990's over the new building we wanted to buy and convert in moving from Hove to Brighton. We had such a strong sense of God giving us a large warehouse behind the Railway station. But Brighton Council opposed us at every stage. The regional TV news got on to the story when The Council refused "change of use". Terry was interviewed on camera. "How did he feel about it all?" "I'm not worried", he said. "I believe we will still be successful" "But how can you be so sure Mr. Virgo?" Answer: "We believe God has led us to this building." Watching that broadcast I felt a shiver up my spine. This was risky. This was faith. This was inspiring leadership. The issue went to appeal, and eventually landed on the Minister's desk in London. We were told that it was unlikely that he would find in our favour; minister's rarely overturned unanimous council decisions. We called the church to prayer. The minister overturned the Council's decision. Now the Council use the building.

Will tough times bring out the leader in you? - maybe among your friends, or in the family, or among work colleagues - or some other sphere? or among us here in the church? We need Joshua's - those who emerge in tough times and go on to be great leaders.

2. God calls us to be warriors.

Our wonderful daughter-in-law is a warrior! She was up with the family over Christmas and told us about one of her latest adventures. Shortly before the family moved south in the summer she was talking to a neighbour - not one she had been particularly close to, but the kind you say "hello" to in the street. The conversation threw up that this woman had severe pain in one of her legs and nothing seemed to help. Carol knew immediately she should pray for her but she felt nervous and so, as they parted, she simply said "I'll pray for you." That night Carol had a dream in which she was praying for the sick and seeing them healed. When she woke up she knew what she had to do.

Later that day she knocked on the neighbour's door and told her that over the past few years the church she was part of had prayed for people with all sorts of sicknesses and seen many people healed. So, would she like Carol to pray for her leg right now? The woman popped her head out of the door,

looked up and down the street, and then pulled Carol by the arm into the hallway. She then lifted her dress and said *“There! This is where it really hurts”*. Her husband, not a man who had ever been particularly friendly, stood in the background watching. Carol prayed very simply and then asked her if she felt any difference and the woman said she thought her leg was feeling better. Carol left her saying she would keep praying. This Christmas she knocked on that neighbour’s door again to ask how the leg was. As soon as the woman and her husband saw who it was, their faces lit up. The leg was completely better; it had had been fine ever since Carol had prayed.

Are you a warrior? Do I have a warrior spirit?

Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Remember, these Israelites were novices – none of them had any military training or combat experience; few of them would have been well armed; their background was one of slavery and servitude and more recently they had been discontented and grumbling. Joshua went through the ranks looking for men who had shown some evidence of courage, strength, determination, mettle. Would Joshua have picked *you* – or *me*?

It should be no surprise that the New Testament calls us to be like soldiers in a battle: to wear armour, to wield a sword, to obey our commanding officer, to fight the good fight. But ours is not a physical battle; it is spiritual warfare. On the surface, the cultures, ideologies and authorities that clash with Kingdom values are human; but the Bible says that there are spiritual powers behind these earthly powers. *“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”* (Ephesians 6v10–12)

Therefore we do not fight with the worlds’ weapons – guns and suicide bombs, manipulation, lies, control, subterfuge, bribes and personal attacks. *“Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 10v3–5)

Even when Joshua had chosen the pick of the bunch these men were anything but a mighty fighting force. Yet they “overcame”. Their improbable victory wasn’t because of military strength and the latest weapons of war. It was because Moses raised his staff to heaven. And if we are to be an Army of Overcomers, then we must make the most of every spiritual weapon available to us. So, what weapons are at our disposal? You may be surprised at some of the things I’m going to mention – you may never of thought of them as weapons.

- **The Gospel:** *“I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes”* (Romans 1v16); the gospel is dynamite (*dunamis*) when it is proclaimed. When Peter preached the gospel for the first time there was a dramatic response. *‘When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”’* The gospel has the power to break through into the hardest of hearts
- **The word of God:** *“take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.”* (Eph. 6v17) *“The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...”* (Hebrews 4v12) Jesus showed us how to use scripture as a weapon against Satan in his desert temptations. (Matthew 4v1–11) If you are prone to specific temptations store up relevant Bible texts so that you are prepared; don’t be ambushed like a raw recruit.
- **Prayer:** *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”* (James 5v13– 16)
This is the weapon Moses used in the battle with the Amalekites. Last week we saw how powerful this weapon was at crucial moments in the Second World War.
- **Faith:** Jesus said: *“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* (Matthew 9v30)
- **Love:** there is a special word in the New Testament for mighty, world-changing love, ‘*agape.*’ This is God’s love in Christ – laying down His life for us. (Romans 5v6–8) especially in loving your enemies! *“You heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 5v43f.) A few weeks ago our son was beaten up and robbed by three young men in south London. When I heard, like most dad’s, I was angry; I felt like

getting on a train and seeking them out. But vengeance is not a weapon at our disposal. *‘Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written. “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink (mercy in action; the very opposite of the world’s way); in doing this you will heap burning coals on his head.” (You shame your enemy.) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.’* (Romans 12v19–21)

- **The Name (of the Lord):** e.g. David facing Goliath. *“You come against me with a sword, spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel”* (1 Samuel 17v45). Peter and John healing the lame man outside the Temple: *“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”* (Acts 3v6)
- **The Spirit’s power** (dynamite): “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you....” (Acts 1v8) e.g. Paul when confronted by the sorcerer Elymas on Cyprus. (Acts 13v6–12) In 1 Cor. 12v6 Paul refers to spiritual gifts as *“different kinds of working”* (*“energiamaton”*) i.e. activity of a dynamic nature. We get our word “energy” from this. Gifts like wisdom, words of knowledge, healing and miracles, speaking in tongues – contain the very power of God, so handle them with care! The late John Wimber liked to talk about “Power Evangelism” – i.e. word, deed and sign.
- **Serving others.** Jesus showed us how powerful lowly service is. (Mark 10v45; John 13v3,4.) This is a good moment to say a word about volunteering! In the 18th century men were press ganged into His Majesty’s navy. Armies today are often made up of professional soldiers, volunteers and conscripts. But in the local church we are dependent on *volunteers* in every area, not people who are “pressed”. We could not function without you freely giving time, energy and experience. Willing service is a powerful weapon. It disarms people!
- **Forgiveness:** e.g. Jesus on the cross. “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23v34) e.g. Stephen: *“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them”... and Saul was there giving approval to his death.’* (Acts 7v59ff. See also Mark 11v25; Luke 17v4; Eph. 4v32; Col. 3v13.)

- **Giving:** Jesus talked about a spiritual power, called Mammon, behind money. (Matthew 6v24) But giving breaks the power of mammon over us; it deals a deadly blow to greed, selfishness, fear of the future. Money is a real battle area for many people. It is often one of the last areas to fall to the Lordship of Christ. (i) Starting to give is a whole new mindset. (ii) Giving substantially e.g. tithing. (iii) Stepping out courageously in sacrificial giving; not backing off at the first setback.
- And finally, Revelation 12v11 identifies three more powerful spiritual weapons: **the blood of Christ; your personal confession of faith and martyrdom.** *“They overcame (the accuser) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”* Christians in many nations (and those who stand up for their rights) are in mortal danger, as we have witnessed in Pakistan this week. It takes great courage to be willing to die for what you believe. On the surface your enemies seem to have triumphed. But not so.

To be “Overcomers” we need to use every spiritual weapon at our disposal. And as we do so we develop a warrior spirit!

Later in Israel’s history when the people had settled in the land and were coming under constant attack, God raised up men and women with a warrior spirit to lead them against their enemies. You can read about them in the book of ‘Judges’. One of these was Gideon. He took on the Midianite army with a small band of 300 men and was victorious. Yet when God chose him Gideon was no hero. The Midianites had raided the land for seven successive years reducing Israel to a primitive existence. Gideon was hiding like everyone else. He was thinking of survival not victory. He was pessimistic and unbelieving and well on his way to becoming a cynic: *“If the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”* (Joshua 6v13)

Nevertheless the angel of the Lord greeted him with these words *“The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.”* Was God mocking him? Was this heavenly irony? Not at all! It was a prophetic statement. God saw what Gideon would become. You may not feel much like a warrior at this precise moment, maybe Joshua would not have picked you or Gideon out – but God has perfect vision. He sees the warrior in you.

3. Lift God's standard over every battle.

The Israelites were poorly prepared and short on weapons, but the key to overcoming their enemy would be something else entirely. Moses decided on a strategy you won't find in any military manual. **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."**

This was the very staff God had instructed Moses to use in Egypt to demonstrate Yahweh's power to Pharaoh through plagues; it was the same staff that God commanded him to raise over the Red Sea when it parted. And more recently it was the staff used to strike the rock at Rephidim to cause water to flow. This was no ordinary walking stick! It was a sign of God's presence. In his scholarly commentary John Durham describes it as "*an authenticating symbol of Yahweh's powerful Presence.*" ('Exodus' Word Biblical Commentary Vol.3. 1987)

By raising this staff Moses was raising God's standard – in much the same way that a Roman Legion raised its eagle standard as a sign of the might of Rome or later armies raised their flag to proclaim the power of their king or nation. Moses' staff was a sign of the Lord's Almighty's Presence. God Himself was on the field of battle with Israel. When the battle was over Moses built an altar to commemorate the occasion and called it "*the Lord is my Banner,*" literally "*The Lord is my rallying point, ensign, or standard.*"

This idea of lifting up God's standard has been taken literally by military men in the Christian era. In AD 312, prior to becoming emperor of Rome, Constantine faced his crucial battle with Maxentius, whose forces were double that of his own. The early church historian Eusebius says that while marching at midday, "*he saw with his own eyes in the heavens a trophy of the cross arising from the light of the sun, carrying the message, 'In this sign, you will conquer.'*" That night Constantine had a dream in which Christ appeared and told him to make a standard for his army with the sign Chi – Rho ☩, a symbol representing the first two letters of the Greek word *Christos*. He won the crucial battle against all odds and ascribed the victory to Christ; soon Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman empire.

In AD 634 a Welsh king, Cadwalla, terrorized the Northumbrian provinces slaughtering people without mercy. Oswald of Bernicia faced up to him at Heavenfield near Hexham. He placed his army facing east with its flanks protected by the Roman Wall to the south and Brady's Crag to the north.

Before the battle he set up a cross in the field and, according to Bede, said to his men. *“Let us all kneel together, and ask the true and living God Almighty of His mercy to protect us from the arrogant savagery of our enemies, since He knows that we fight in a just cause to save our nation.”* (Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People.') The Northumbrians defeated Cadwalla with his superior numbers, and thereafter Oswald determined to rule Northumbria as a Christian King. Bede remarks that before Oswald set up the cross at Heavenfield there had been no emblem of the Christian faith in the north. It was this same Oswald who made a request to the monks of Iona to send a missionary, resulting in Aidan's arrival in AD 635.

This is all very stirring. But subsequent history is full of bloody battles in which banners have been raised with some symbol of Christ on them – bringing dishonor on the name of Jesus.

We have already said that ours is a spiritual rather than a military battle. So what might it mean for us to lift up a standard over every battle?

- **Declare God's glory rather than agonise over the problem.**

God is greater than any enemy we may face. Moses holding up the staff was a prophetic sign – declaring they had a great God!

When we pray we need to spend much more time lifting up God's name and declaring His power, than concentrating on the problems before us. Whether it is – a battle over personal finances, career, job, business, some major disappointment, marriage, sickness, or some vulnerable area of your life – spend more time declaring God's greatness over the situation rather than dwell on the minutiae of the problem. We can spend so much time describing the odds against us that our faith takes a dive.

If you want to stir your faith, and the faith of those around you, for example in prayer and group meetings– then raise God's banner over every battle. Spend more time declaring His glory than agonising over the scale of your difficulties.

- **Expect God's power to be released as you lift Him up**

v11: As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. Peter

Wagner puts it like this: *“On the hill overlooking the battle, Moses soon observed that while his hands were up, Joshua was winning, but while his hands were down, Joshua was losing. Moses caught on real fast and decided that the best place for his hands was up.”* Even heavyweight Old Testament scholars get excited by this. John Durham suggests that Moses’ upraised hands became *“conductors”* of God’s power. John Goldingay writes of Moses exercising *“supernatural authority”* as he raises his staff.

When we lift Him up God’s power is released. This might be worship, praise, thanksgiving or simply declaring His greatness. This is one way in which the gift of tongues operates. It is primarily a God-ward gift; it helps you express your adoration for God, free from the restraints of ordinary speech and vocabulary. You may be facing such overwhelming odds that you simply don't know what to pray. Tongues by-passes the mind and releases your spirit to engage with God. I have been in tough pastoral situations where I have quietly lifted up my heart to God and used this spiritual gift – sometimes with astonishing results.

Jackie Pullinger in her pioneering work among heroin addicts in Hong Kong did much the same. She faced, what looked like, impossible odds, but the power of God was released in extraordinary ways as she used the gift of tongues. (Her book 'Chasing the Dragon', written back in 1980, is a classic and well worth reading.)

When we lift Him up God’s power is released. When we *don’t* – we deprive ourselves and others of his power. Keep your eyes open to see how God works. Ask yourself, “What is God doing?” Is there a change in momentum as I declare God’s greatness?” You can do the same in reverse i.e. recognise the tell-tale signs that accompany neglect of these things: *“the feeling of being overwhelmed, over-run, beaten down, pushed around, defeated.”* (Bill Hybels: ‘Too Busy Not to Pray.’)

The Fourth Gospel uses the language of “being lifted up” of Jesus’ death on the cross. The word used by John can mean exalted, but of course it also describes Jesus being physically raised up on the cross. **John 12v32:** Jesus said, *“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.”* (See also John 3v14f; 8v28) This was Jesus’ strange display of glory – death on a Roman cross.

This message of Jesus’ death on the cross is at the very heart of our faith, and the Bible says that this great truth has been invested with the power of God. When we believe it, confess it, declare it, celebrate it – in other words,

raise it up like a banner – then the power of God is released. See **1 Corinthians 1v18-25**.

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I have already mentioned George VI. A movie, ‘The King’s Speech,’ about his struggle with a serious stammer, has just been released this month. The King was no Churchill when it came to oratory but he could still inspire a nation. In 1939, at the beginning of the Second World War, George VI’s gave his first Christmas Broadcast. He quoted this simple poem by Minnie Louise Harkins. It can be taken up by Overcomers at the start of our New Year.

*I said to the man
who stood at the gate of the year,
‘Give me a light
that I may tread safely into the unknown.’
And he replied,
‘Go out into the darkness
and put your hand into the hand of God.
That shall be to you
better than light
and safer than a known way!’*

John Wilthew. January 2011