

## **HOLDING ON**

Harry Foster

UNCLE JOE was Fred's favorite uncle. He was a preacher and often had interesting stories to tell. He also had some rather unusual ways of talking, as for instance when he spoke of "holding on" in prayer. This phrase so puzzled Fred that one day he asked his uncle what it meant. He had heard his parents ask telephone callers to "hold on" a moment, but somehow he did not think that it was this kind of holding on to which his uncle referred. "How do you hold on in prayer?" he asked Uncle Joe, rather hoping that his question might produce a story -- and so it did.

The story was concerned with an experience which Uncle Joe had while in missionary work in Brazil. The only method of travelling then was by dugout canoe, and this was often dangerous because of the many rapids in the middle reaches of the river. To shoot these rapids was swift and exciting, but to find a way slowly through them when going upstream was very hard work. At places the only possible way of progress was by the members of the crew hauling the boat up by means of a rope. One end was tied to the canoe and the men took the other end to a suitable rock. When they were all in position, the one man left in the canoe pushed away from the bank and then, hand over hand, the others slowly pulled the canoe up through a gap in the rocks.

This was a man-sized job, so that when one day Aatu, a teenage Red Indian, begged to be included in the crew, Uncle Joe was inclined to refuse. However Aatu was a good lad and one of the first of that tribe to become a Christian, and at last Uncle Joe agreed to take him.

When they had these perilous pulls through the rapids, it was always Uncle Joe who stayed in the canoe while the Indian members of the crew took the rope on ahead to drag it up past the danger. On this trip they had used this method several times until once when things went all wrong. Everything seemed to be going according to plan and with the men hanging on to the rope Uncle Joe pushed off into midstream, only to discover to his dismay that some commotion had made all the men except Aatu

lose their foothold and fall into the river. There was no danger for them, for they could all swim well and were used to getting wet: the danger was for the canoe which could have been dashed on to the rocks with Uncle Joe in it.

“There was I,” he told Fred, “standing helplessly looking at Aatu at the other end of the rope, and there was he, just as helpless, looking back at me in the canoe. Of course he could not pull me to safety -- even a strong man would not have been able to do that alone -- but he could hold on until something happened. And how I hoped and prayed that he would just hold on!”

“And did he?” asked Fred.

“Oh yes,” replied his uncle. “He held on all right. Otherwise I should not be here alive today. And it was not long before the other men swam back to the rock and joined in pulling me to safety. It seemed a very long time to me, of course, and for that moment everything depended on Aatu. All he could do was to stand firm and not let go of the rope. And I am thankful to say that that was what he did.”

After a pause Uncle Joe asked Fred if he understood better now what he meant when he used the phrase about “holding on” in prayer. “Yes, Uncle,” answered Fred, “but I am afraid that I am not very good at it. Not like Aatu.”

“Well,” said his uncle, “that is true of most of us. We start full of eager interest but we feel helpless and are tempted to let go. Yet it was not a matter of skill for Aatu, was it? Nor was it a matter of strength. It was just a case of -- well, holding on. Wasn't it?”

To each one of us there come times when our strength seems quite insufficient and the case so hopeless that we are ready to let go. How important it is not to do so, but just to keep holding on. This is especially the case in the matter of prayer. Really that was why the Lord Jesus told His disciples to "Watch and pray". And that is also why we are all told to go on "praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance ..." (Ephesians 6:18).

**So hold on!**

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