

How to Intercede for Others as If Your Life Depended on It

I heard what may be the best definition of prayer during a missions trip to Central America last year. Our entire time of ministry was spent in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. We linked up with a local Assemblies of God congregation, Iglesia Shalom, to be a funnel for the converts and people who would be reached.

Our first day of ministry involved our team being subdivided into smaller groups and going door-to-door with interpreters to invite people to the church, and hopefully have spiritual conversations that would lead to witnessing opportunities. Like many cities in that part of the world, poverty and pollution are abundant. Many of the neighborhoods are built right along the sides of mountains and hills. Homes are built more out of function than form, keeping out the elements and little else.

Going from house to house frequently involved descending steep and narrow concrete steps with no railing on either side. One false step and there was nothing separating you from falling 10-20 feet.

Our group was joined by the pastor's wife, Migala. She served as a wonderful icebreaker for us frightened Americans, who not only had to conquer our fear of instant evangelism, but also the obvious language barrier. Frequently she would engage in conversation with the residents, allow us to put in our two cents, then move on to the next home.

But when we came to the home of a troubled woman, our guide sensed the need to pursue further ministry. The woman's name was Delmi. She and Migala were having a spirited conversation on opposite sides of an iron fence that led to her

patio. Every so often, Migala would tell us a summary of their conversation so we could stay informed.

It seems that Delmi and her daughter, Suame, had been abandoned by their husband and father respectively. The pain of it was quite evident in Delmi's countenance. She wasn't about to trust anyone quickly; maybe not at all. As Migala tried taking the conversation to spiritual things, Delmi would have no part of it. She seemed closed off to anything involving God, no doubt blaming Him for her loss and pain.

After minutes of persuasion, Delmi opened up the gate and allowed our group to come into her living room. Migala continued in conversation, motioning to me frequently as she spoke in Spanish.

My best guess is that she was prepping me to take charge at some point, pointing out to this hurting woman that I was a pastor and could pray for her. Inside the windowless room was a picture of the Honduran National Soccer Team and various certificates that had been awarded to Suame at different points of her life.

With her young daughter pulled against her side, Delmi pondered whether to have these strangers from another part of the world pray for her. Eventually she relented. In order to cue me, Migala looked at me and said in broken English, "*Eh, her problem* (pointing at Delmi) *ees our problem* (pointing at herself)."

I think that's the best definition of prayer I've ever heard. I think that's what I need to remember the next time a friend calls in need of help, or I hear of someone who is dealing with a life-threatening condition.

How often do I just pray in rote, like a dispenser of religious clichés, with no passion or belief that God will do anything about it? But when we truly intercede (churchy word, but meaning "taking the cause of" or "being an advocate for"),

I need to remember that their problem isn't something for my to-do list. It's my problem too.

Lord, help me to put myself in their shoes, carry their spiritual bags for a few minutes, and get a full picture of the pain and trial they are enduring. Maybe that will change our hospital visits or make us think the next time we anoint someone with oil. Before we get into a rush to pray for the next person or move through our prayer list like a crop duster over a field, let's remember to make their problems our problems.

Matt Anderson serves as youth director for the Ohio District of the Assemblies of God.

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