

Stand In the Gap

When you pray for someone else, you are engaging in heaven's supernatural rescue mission. Here's how you can become an effective advocate for others in prayer.

When we intercede in prayer, we plead our case before the eternal judge of the universe. Every case we present to God calls for genuine preparation. Without proper preparation a lawyer would make a fool of himself before the judge, his client, his adversary and the gallery of people.

Personal Preparation

Before we prepare a case, we must first prepare ourselves. We do this by experiencing salvation, coming to know God and recognizing our position in Christ.

Salvation. Personal preparation to plead a case in intercessory prayer before God's throne begins with the new birth (see John 3:1-5). Without salvation, we are not prepared to face our own trials or anyone else's. But exactly what is salvation?

Salvation begins with a revelation of the absence of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the overwhelming awareness of our personal sin before a perfect God. It is vital that we each settle this in our own hearts.

But salvation is more than the forgiveness and removal of our sin. We are empowered to live because the Holy Spirit moves in. A Christian is a person in whom the Holy Spirit lives.

Knowing God. Through the new birth we can truly know God. Being born into His family, we become His children. As children of God who spend time in His Word and in His presence, we begin to know Him as He really is, not as we have supposed Him to be.

We asked several lawyers what makes a good attorney. One of them said, "A good attorney is one who knows the judge and knows how he tends to rule." We might add that a good intercessor is one who knows God and knows how He tends to rule!

An attorney who knows the judge and how he tends to rule has a distinct advantage over an attorney who does not. One can have no stronger position in the heavenly court than to be one of the judge's own children. Who would dare challenge us? Or, as Paul wrote, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31, NKJV)

Position in Christ. In every state an attorney must meet certain requirements, which include a very difficult bar exam. So it is with we who pray. We need to be properly equipped (see Eph. 4:11-13).

The courtroom is an adversarial place. It is a place of confrontation and conflict. As our friend Mickey Bonner used to say, "All prayer is warfare."

If we don't know our position in Christ, we may be easily intimidated by the devil. If we are to be effective in intercessory prayer, we must be secure in Christ. If we are to expect to win a case against Satan we must know that Christ is in us.

It is important to know not only what Scripture says about the case we plead, but also what it says about us. Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Col. 2:9-10, NIV). The New King James Version of verse 10 says, "You are complete in Him!"

Knowing your position in Christ fortifies you before the bar of God. It also fortifies you before your adversary.

Qualities of a Good Advocate

Below is a list of personal and professional qualities that make good attorneys. Let's see how these qualities also help make good intercessors.

Dedication. An intercessor must be committed to Christ, to others and to the task of intercession. There simply is no substitute for dedication. As Phillips Brooks once said, "If man is man and God is God, to live without prayer is not merely an awful thing; it is an infinitely foolish thing."

Reliability. It's not our ability that God looks for, but our availability. Paul Daniel Rader once said: "If you can beat the devil in the matter of regular daily prayer, you can beat him anywhere. If he can beat you there, he can possibly beat you anywhere." Or as a country preacher once said, "If your day is hemmed with prayer, it's less likely to come unraveled."

Integrity. In my book *Beyond the Veil*, I (Alice) write: "If we accept an assignment from God, we can be sure that He will

attempt to build integrity into our lives. I love Psalm 26:11-12: 'But I lead a blameless life; redeem me and be merciful to me. My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the Lord.'

"My paraphrase would read: 'In all my public trust I will walk uprightly and pay strict attention to truth, honesty, justice and mercy. I will not plan evil schemes or use myself to promote my own cause. I will be true to the integrity of the Word. I will live a moral life in private and in public. I stand firmly on principles of proper conduct, and I will not turn aside.'"

Objectivity and empathy. Objectivity and empathy are tricky. Both are necessary, but they must be kept in balance.

If we are empathetic intercessors who cannot find objectivity in prayer, we will soon be consumed emotionally and ultimately overwhelmed with the prayer needs we bear. Remember the words of the old song "Leave It There" by Charles Albert Tindley: "Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there."

On the other hand, if we are objective intercessors without empathy, who cannot feel the needs of those for whom we have been commissioned to pray, our prayer life will grow stale and eventually dry up.

Kind. Kindness is a necessary commodity for the intercessor-advocate, as illustrated by the following story.

An old man carried a little can of oil with him everywhere he went. If he passed through a door with squeaky hinges, he put a little oil on the hinges. If the gate was hard to open, he

poured a little oil upon the latch.

Every day he found a variety of ways to use his pocket oil can to others' advantage. Neighbors thought he was eccentric, but he went on his way, doing all within his power to lubricate the hard places and make life easier and more enjoyable for others.

Do we carry with us the oil of human kindness? When the traffic is backed up, the grocery clerk is rude or your boss decides to come down on you, are you exercising the oil of gladness? Go ahead and do it. It will make your day.

Discipline. The intercessor will not be successful without applying discipline to his or her work of intercession. As the next story illustrates, discipline is vitally important.

A visitor to a famous pottery establishment was puzzled by an operation that seemed aimless. In one room there was a mass of clay beside a workman. Every now and then he took up a large mallet and struck several smart blows on the surface of the lump. Curiosity led to the question: "Why do you do that?"

"Wait a bit, sir, and watch it," was the reply.

The visitor obeyed, and soon the top of the mass began to heave and swell. Bubbles formed upon its face.

"Now sir, you will see," said the modeler with a smile. "I could never shape the clay into a vase if these air bubbles were in it, therefore I gradually beat them out."

It sounded in the ears of the visitor like an allegory of Romans 5:3-5, "Tribulation produces " (NKJV). Is not the discipline of life, so hard to bear sometimes, just a beating out of the bubbles of pride and self-will, so the Master may form a vessel of earth to hold heavenly treasures?

Leadership ability. In his book Wind and Fire, Bruce Larson points out some interesting facts about sandhill cranes:

"These large birds that fly great distances across continents have three remarkable qualities. First, they rotate leadership. No one bird stays out in front all the time.

Second, they choose leaders who can handle turbulence. And then, all during the time one bird leads, the rest honk their affirmation.

"That's not a bad model for the church. Certainly we need leaders who can handle turbulence and who are aware that leadership ought to be shared. But most of all, we need a church where we all honk encouragement.

It is safe to say that some of our prayer assignments are also being borne by other Christians. Let's guard our hearts against feeling that we—and our prayers—are "the only reasons" something happens.

The apostle Paul warned us that we are "not to think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3).

High moral character. A Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, who was acquainted with both Christianity and Buddhism, was once asked what he thought was the great difference between the two. He replied, "There is much that is good in each of them, and probably in all religions."

"But what seems to me to be the greatest difference is that you Christians know what is right and have the power to do it, while we Buddhists know what is right but have not any such power."

The monk was right. True freedom is not the right to do as we please. It is the power to do what is right!

A lawyer who lived in the chambers of the temple told a story about an old gray-haired man in the room next to his who knelt down every night and said his prayers aloud. The partition between their rooms was thin, and he heard what the old man said quite distinctly. He was greatly surprised to hear him always say this prayer: "Lord, make me a good boy."

This may seem rather ludicrous. But if you think of it, you will be touched by its beauty. Long years before when, as a little child, that old man had knelt at his mother's knee, she had taught him this petition, "Lord, make me a good boy."

And through the years with their trials and temptations, he still felt the need of offering that cry in the old, simple language of childhood, knowing that in the sight of the ageless God he was still a child.

Just as a good advocate should be a person of high moral character, an effective intercessor must also live a holy life

of high moral character.

A team player. Corporate intercession is almost an unknown art. In most places it is individual intercession in a corporate setting. Thankfully, the church is beginning to understand how to gather as a group and approach God as one person!

We are also beginning to network as intercessors. We realize that the more testimonies we have in court, the stronger our case will be. We are grateful for the 61 personal intercessors who faithfully serve us and our ministry in prayer. We take seriously the hours they spend in court on our behalf.

We never cease to be amazed at the self-discipline exerted by intercessors. The abilities to work well under pressure and with minimal supervision are grace gifts that God has given most intercessors. People of prayer, we admire your faithfulness to voluntarily spend the time you do in prayer on behalf of others.

We can experience transformation of our families, cities and nations if we will be willing to labor together.

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