

## Victorious Intercession

The praise and worship leader decided that we should pray for those who were not saved. So we joined hands and began to intercede. As we finished, he looked up and said, "I think we did something wrong!" "Why?" I asked. "Because," he said, "I felt like I was in hell!" "Of course, I replied, we were praying for the lost!"

I am always amazed when people say we should intercede, for example, for the whole continent of Africa. Moses interceded for one small nation, a nation which had a covenant with God, a nation which, at least in lip-service, served God, but because of his intercession for that single nation he lost his opportunity to enter the Promised Land. If you do not yet intercede regularly for your neighbor, wait awhile before you begin interceding for a continent or two. Of course, praying for Africa does look more splendidly "spiritual." And it often seems much easier to pray for the entire world than for your neighbor, since the results (or the lack thereof) are clearly visible with your neighbor. Similarly, people have often been offended when I will not pray for them at that moment or in the manner they desire, but Paul instructed, "Do not lay hands [in prayer] on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins (1 Timothy 5:22)."

When we intercede for a person, we are entering a very real spiritual warfare for that person's soul. The way we can be certain of winning is to always treat intercession as warfare. In warfare, a general would never blindly waltz into an enemy position with his entire force. First, he sends in the scouts to reconnoiter the position, then he calculates if he has the strength necessary for the conquest.

Part of the calculation is a check of our spiritual armor. As we put on God's faith, righteousness, and truth, we are empowered to overcome our foe. As you begin to intercede, you will (often) feel the anger, hatred, depression, or other root of sin within the person for whom you are praying. Examine yourself to see how you are doing in that area. If you have the love, holiness, faith, or whatever else is needed to overcome his problem, pour it in! If not, back off, and pray first for answers for yourself.

But you must eventually "pray through," that is, not stop until you feel the victory. The

worst thing you can do is to receive a burden during intercession, allow it to depress you, and then stop, leaving yourself in the midst of the problem, without the solution.

None of us are yet perfected, and there are battles we have not yet fought within ourselves. Paul tells us, in Romans 12:3,6-7, that in everything we should honestly evaluate the gifts, ability, and especially faith which God has given us and serve accordingly: “For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith . . . since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith . . .”

There is a danger signal indicating when you have clearly gone beyond your level of faith and should back off, at least for the moment: in areas where you do not yet have victory, you will become judgmental. Paul says, “you are without excuse, *every man* of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things (Romans 2:1).” Jesus bore witness to the same principle and gave a clue to the remedy in Matthew 7:1-6, when He said, “Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.” Jesus was saying that if you have a condemning attitude toward a person about a situation, you have not yet wrestled victoriously with that problem. When you have taken the log out of your own eye, then you will be able to intercede for that person and remove the sin out of his life as well.

Intercession is the direct opposite of judging. Fortunately, Christ has chosen, not to judge, but to intercede for us. Romans 8:33-34 says, “Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”

In practice, the way we should pray for others is to first reach out just a little. If we can handle it, we press on; if not, we back off. But we do not quit! We temporarily retreat to the Lord's tower, where we draw upon His power to deal with the battle we have come across. After we receive the victory ourselves, we turn around and pass on that victory to the person for whom we are praying.

Victorious intercession against sin is similar to the right way of dealing with a poisonous snake bite. The full bite is harmful or fatal. But a very small hit of that same poison can be used to create a serum which brings healing.