

PRAYER: AN ESSENTIAL IN CHURCH PLANTING

Part Four: Selecting the Right Personal Intercessors

By Glenn Smith

In our last article we introduced the need for Christian leaders to have personal intercessors (See Part Three: Intercession for Yourself and Other Christian Leaders). In this article we want to discuss how to select personal intercessors. Once again we are deeply indebted to Peter Wagner and his work *Prayer Shield* for much of our understanding.

An Intercessory Team is a group of people recruited by the church planter who cover the new church venture in prayer. This group can be quite large. Personal Intercessors, on the other hand, are a small, select group of highly trusted individuals that the church planter communicates with on a more personal and confidential level. (See Part Three: Intercession for Yourself and Other Christian Leaders). These people should be selected very carefully and prayerfully. They should be people with whom you have a proven track record of trustworthy relationship.

A few years ago a good friend in my church approached me and asked if I would like to get together sometimes and just pray. Very seldom in my 20+ years of vocational ministry have I ever had someone ask such a question. His office was very close to mine and I respected him a lot, so I agreed. We met for less than an hour, had a little chit-chat, shared prayer requests and prayed together. It was a very meaningful time. At the end he asked “Would you like to do this every week?” I said “Sure!” Then he told me something that I’ll never forget. He said throughout his years as an adult (and he was about 10 years older than me) that he had felt a calling to pray for specific Christian leaders in his life. Recently the Lord had been impressing on him to start praying regularly for me. He was very serious and deeply sincere. I was very moved and humbled. That began a regular (almost weekly) prayer time together that continues to this day.

There are some individuals who feel a “calling” to pray for Christian leaders. They are sincere and trustworthy. When you find them, draw on their ministry! But the question is, how do you find them? How do you mobilize a “prayer shield” as a Christian leader? Here are some suggestions.

First, ask God to give you some personal intercessors. Again, be very careful in your selection process! Make this an earnest request of the Father. Ask for His protection and guidance. Next, look for people who have been intercessors on previous occasions. These may be people who already serve on your Intercession Team or who just let you know from time to time that they pray for you. However, be cautious and discerning. Make sure you can trust them before recruiting them to be a “Personal” Intercessor. Finally, filter out what Cindy Jacobs calls “Falky Intercessors.” Jacobs describes flaky intercessors as “men and women who, for a variety of reasons, drift outside biblical guidelines in their zeal for prayer. They bring reproach on their ministries and confusion

and division in the church.”¹ Peter Wagner identifies six characteristics of “flaky intercessors.”² They are:

1. People who want to be your intercessor for bragging purposes.
2. People who want to be your intercessor so they can have influence on your decisions.
3. People who want to be your intercessor out of lust or seduction.
4. People who want to be your intercessor for sentimental reasons.
5. People who want to be your intercessor out of “spiritual pride.”
6. People who want to be your intercessor because of their own personal emotional needs.

What are the qualities of a good personal intercessor? First, they have a genuine concern for you as a leader. This is sometimes expressed (as my friend did) as a “calling” or “burden.” Some people believe that there is a spiritual gift of intercession. Look for people who have this calling, passion, and/or gifting. As was my case, these intercessors sometimes feel a special obligation to pray and support pastors and Christian leaders. Also look for people who clearly have a close, personal relationship with God. These will be people who are faithful to the Word and prayer in their personal lives. They are usually quiet people who do not care to be up front or to be known. Finally, they are trustworthy, confidential, and humble people.

When you identify these precious people, pray for them! Communicate regularly with them, especially when prayers are answered. Let them know specifics of how they can pray for you. Beth Alves offers an excellent suggestion as to what to pray for. Her general outline for intercessors who pray for Christian leaders goes like this:

- Sunday: Favor with God (spiritual revelation, anointing, holiness)
- Monday: Favor with others (congregations, ministry staff, unsaved)
- Tuesday: Increased vision (wisdom and enlightenment, motives, guidance)
- Wednesday: Spirit, Soul, Body (health, appearance, attitudes, spiritual and physical wholeness)
- Thursday: Protection (temptation, deception, enemies)
- Friday: Finances (priorities, blessings)
- Saturday: Family (general, spouse, children)

In conclusion, write your intercessors letters or emails of encouragement and appreciation. Let them know how much you value their ministry to you. However, always be wise when relating to the opposite sex and make sure that your contact and communication is always above reproach. Beware of any type of dependencies, spiritual, emotional, or physical. Always avoid any appearance of evil. But make sure you have at least one or two close intercessors that faithfully undergird your family and your ministry.

¹ Cindy Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy*. Tarrytown, NY: Chosen Books, 1991, p. 126.

² Peter Wagner, *Prayer Shield*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992, pp. 157-159.