

A PRAYER SHIELD: GOD'S STRATEGY FOR EFFECTIVENESS AND SURVIVAL IN MINISTRY

What is a "Prayer Shield"?

It is a prayer covering provided by intercessors who are gifted in prayer as prayer warriors. Intercessors are defined by Webster as those who "go or pass between, to mediate or make intercession; mediation." Your personal intercessors are those who commit to pray consistently for you. Intercession weakens the enemy! Paul requested prayer covering many times (1 Thes. 5:25; Rom. 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11). It was imperative to his ministry and the furthering of the gospel message.

When we have opportunity to effect great good for the kingdom or are faced with turmoil, persecution and great difficulties, we need God's provision and deliverance (Phil. 1:19). Our "Prayer Shields" will be those willing to hear our heartfelt needs, offer mercy without judgment and stand with us in prayer (both over our times of joy and fruitfulness, as well as seasons of despair and discouragement). They lift us up because they have God's heart for us. They pray from a God-given sense of urgency and fulfillment rather than from a sense of obligation.

Defensive and offensive strategy

This "Prayer Shield" is both a defensive and offensive strategy. Defensively, the intercessor proclaims the victory of Christ on the cross before all that would hinder or attempt to destroy the expression of God's purposes and kingdom among us. Offensively, the intercessor prays for the purposes and plans of God to be brought forth in people, groups, institutions, cities, nations.

Often, those who act as "watchmen on the wall" accomplish effective, defensive prayer. When they go to the throne room on our behalf, they serve us as guards on the alert, as gatekeepers, boundary setters and agents of preservation. When intercessors pray on the offensive, they seek to release individuals, leaders, groups, the church and nations to be and do all that God calls us to (Eph. 4:12). One example of this is when Moses lifted his hands holding "the staff of God" (Ex. 17) while Joshua was out on the front lines fighting the Amalekites. Another is Paul's reminder to the Ephesian church as he alerts them to the "savage wolves" that will come (Acts 20:28-31).

Why is it important?

Each of us have asked others to pray for us just as we are about to embark on something we consider significant or difficult. Yet, many times, we don't realize how much more important it is to have committed intercessors and prayer warriors to pray for us on a regular and consistent basis.

Reasons why it is important:

- a) Those in full-time ministry have more responsibility and accountability (James 3:1).
- b) Because of our visibility in ministry, we are often subject to greater temptation and intensity of the evil one's attack upon us (1 Peter 5:8).

Benefits of having a "Prayer Shield":

- a) Intentional and consistent intercession on our behalf increases our liberty and effectiveness in the ministry to which we are called. It will often be experienced as fruit of the Spirit in our lives, a better personal prayer life, more effective leadership skills, a keener sense of discernment and wisdom, a more positive response to the ministry, a greater personal sense of wholeness and completeness in Christ (Col. 1:9-12).
- b) It is vital to our survival! Biblical examples for praying for others include: Genesis 18:27-28,32-33; Romans 8:15,16; I Chronicles 29:18,19.

How do we gain a "Prayer Shield"?

1. Recognize your need. Consider the prayer of Daniel to the Lord in Daniel 9.
 - a) As a leader, you were never meant to operate alone. God surrounds you with support and protection through personal intercessors (2 Kings 6:15-17).
 - b) Ask God for His plan, and "His" preparation of building a team of intercessors around you. This involves listening. Seek to discern from the Lord who He is raising up as individuals to pray with and for you (those who will stand in the gap on your behalf).
 - c) Trust God for a minimum of 10 key intercessors.
2. Write down a plan to build up your "Prayer Shield"—be specific.
 - a) State the purpose of the event or need for prayer coverage. Be specific, yet keep it simple.
 - b) Make a list of contacts you have which are potential "watchmen" to pray for you. Remember that the personal intercessors' primary call is to pray for you, regularly and consistently. While there may be a specific event that you ask them to focus on, they are called to pray for you and what burden God lays on their hearts for a season of time.
 - c) Take opportunity to share your ministry or personal "burden" with friends, small Bible study groups, prayer groups or churches. Take time to explain to them your need for intercessors and why.
 - d) Trust God to speak to individual hearts. Ask the Lord to handpick "His" team.
3. Contacting interested intercessors:
 - a) Make a phone call, or write a letter. First, clarify your need for prayer, then ask them to consider making a commitment to pray for you for a specific time frame.
 - b) Stress the need for confidentiality.
 - c) Encourage each person to listen to the Lord and his direction as he or she prays for you.

Emphasize that you desire prayer partners who sense a call from the Lord to pray for you and your needs. Encourage prayer from the heart rather than out of duty. Observe the heart cry of the apostle Paul as he prayed for others in 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13.

How can we help our "Prayer Shield" effectively pray?

1. We have a responsibility to regularly communicate with our personal intercessors. Determine the best way to communicate with them regularly (phone call, mail or e-mail) and keep them up-to-date. When you are on a trip, consider introducing them to one contact person and communicate through that person.
 - a) Seek to take an interest in them as a person.
 - b) Seek unity in the spirit. Share with them scriptural insights you are learning.
2. Recognize that your personal intercessors may be burdened for particular things more than others.
 - a) For example, one may be burdened to pray for your family, while another may feel burdened to pray as you travel and for the details of your ministry.
 - b) Trust God to stir each of their hearts to pray with the intensity level to which He calls them.
 - c) Encourage them to journal what God shows them in their time of praying for you.
3. Remember that kingdom work is a partnership.
 - a) You and your intercessors are in ministry together. You operate in the visible realm; they operate in the invisible realm; together you carry out God's purposes in the kingdom.
 - b) Keep a journal of your progress and experiences.
Let your intercessors know the results of their prayers. Compare notes with what they were praying and journaling as they prayed for you.