

What Leaders Need from Intercessors

Fulfill Your Calling to Love and Pray

By Alice Smith



Fervent, focused prayer is a leader's greatest asset and primary protection against spiritual attack. Leaders and their families and ministries need to be surrounded by a shield of prayer.

For more than 40 years, my husband and I have been surrounded by a prayer shield of personal intercessors who pray for us. They stand beside us and uphold our hands in prayer. In some ways, they are more like family than friends. We genuinely love them and enjoy their fellowship.

I remember an invitation I received some years ago to minister in Haiti. I'm a fearless person (probably to a fault), and I have traveled all over the world alone. But for some reason, I didn't feel peace in my spirit to go. Without giving any

additional information to our intercessors, I emailed them and asked for their spiritual insight. I was overwhelmed with “No!” responses. It wasn’t that the assignment was too much for me, they replied, but the timing wasn’t correct. Good thing I didn’t go. The massive earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010 occurred during the time I would have been there.

God promised that those who welcome a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward (Matt. 10:41). For that reason, I fully expect that any heavenly reward we earn in ministry will be accounted to the intercessors as well. Only God knows how much of our spiritual success results directly from their labor of love in the prayer closet!

For Leaders

Christian leader, if you don’t have a prayer shield, I strongly urge you to ask the Father for one. However, the mistake many leaders make is to ask every intercessor in their church to serve as their people of prayer. Here are three reasons I believe that’s unwise.

Mature intercessors rarely accept a long-term assignment without a sure word from God. They understand that their extended assignments are commissioned by the Lord. They know the weight of that level of responsibility will require His grace to complete it.

Immature intercessors will often be so flattered by your invitation that they will jump at a chance for “inside access” to you. In most cases, they will become weary after a season. They tend to drop out from a sense of guilt, reluctant to admit failure.

Some intercessors shouldn’t hold leadership positions because they are either wounded warriors or recklessly independent Rambos. If called into duty, they will present problems for you and your ministry. Their own personal healing and restoration should be their current priority.

Don't be surprised if God raises up some intercessors you would have never selected based on your own analysis. But if they are to be effective and remain faithful, they need to be God-called, not man-chosen. Rather than recruit openly, ask the heavenly Father for intercessors. He will answer you. Once you ask, listen closely to what people say to you in casual conversation. You'll start to hear comments like, "The Lord has asked me to pray for you." Or, "God placed you on my heart all week." You prayed for intercessors, so the Lord will call and commission them—and then He will reveal them to you.

When you hear comments like that, you should reply, "I've asked God to give me a prayer team. Do you believe God is calling you to intercede for me?" If they say, "Yes," then add them to your list and begin to share your prayer needs with them. Be careful in what requests you share. Some things are private enough that only one or two special confidants should know the details.

For Intercessors

If you have a calling to be an intercessor for leaders, it is important that you understand that role. Even if you are not called into a unique role as a personal intercessor for your pastor, you can still pray faithfully for your leaders. Whether you have a special assignment or not, here are suggestions that can help you become a valuable asset to any spiritual leader:

- 1. Your leader needs privacy.** Some intercessors find it hard to accept that they may not be invited to experience a close, personal friendship with their leader. They need to remember they are simply called to intercede. Partnership and communication don't necessarily mean "social closeness." When God told Peter Wagner that He wanted me to be his number-one intercessor, God also told him that we wouldn't have a close, personal relationship. It's true. The assignment was for intercession, but I didn't see Peter often and still don't.

2. Your leader may know little about your calling. A leader may not be acquainted with the role and calling of an intercessor. There are many assignments in the Body of Christ. Intercession is one of them—and in some ways it is a unique one that many leaders do not understand.

3. Your leader may assign a staff member to interface with you on a regular basis. Time restraints or the sheer size of a ministry may dictate this. It's biblical. It follows the pattern that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, gave him for leading the children of Israel. One person can focus on only so many responsibilities. And to the leader: if you assign this task to a staff member, choose someone who is reasonably acquainted with intercessors and intercession, and who will be sensitive to your intercessors' unique needs.

4. Your leader needs your understanding as well as your prayer. Most Christians don't understand the level of pressure that rests on the shoulders of their leaders. They are on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Ministry emergencies can interrupt a leader's day off, even his or her family vacation. Don't make unnecessary demands on your leaders. Exercise sensitivity.

5. The visibility of leadership means that leaders "live in glass houses." Leaders and their families are constantly on display, or even "on trial." What they do and say, what they wear, and where they go can be continually scrutinized. The prayer warrior should be supportive and protective in all things.

6. Spiritual leaders are targeted by Satan for failure. Leaders are like commissioned officers in God's army—and Satan's attacks are aimed directly at them. We often hear of leaders losing their emotional, mental, or physical health due to stress and overwork (Titus 1:7–9). In worse cases, some leaders fall out of the ministry due to sin. No one can succeed at true Christian ministry on their own, regardless of

their gifts and talents. Supernatural power of the Spirit is required—and Satan will seek to drum a leader out of the ministry.

A leader's faithfulness influences others. When one falls, the cause of Christ is damaged and many are wounded. Leaders carry enormous demands and extraordinary pressures that often require solutions only intercession can provide.

7. A leader's family is also subject to Satan's attack. The enemy loves to inflict pain on a leader by causing his or her spouse to suffer an accident or illness, mental or emotional distress.

Leaders' children are favorite targets for the devil. They are unfairly held to a higher standard than their peers because of who their parents are. Eyes are on them, and Satan knows that ministry anointing can increase generationally. Therefore, because the next generation can cause him even greater problems, he'll work overtime to make sure that doesn't happen.

8. Your leader needs your love. Christian leaders can suffer rejection and the pain of shattered friendships. Though not necessarily obvious in public settings, some are lonely, wounded, or depressed due to a barrage of criticism. And yes, some even lose their lives due to the crushing weight of ministry. I see more discouragement in pastors and leaders today than I ever have before.

Thank you for your commitment to pray for leaders. I've learned that few people can love a leader or make a difference in a leader's ministry like an intercessory prayer warrior.

ALICE SMITH is the executive director of the U.S. Prayer Center in Houston, TX, and the author of several books. She is a member of America's National Prayer Committee.