

IF YOUR PRESENCE DOES NOT GO WITH US ...

Exodus 32 -33
WEFC January 4, 2009

Going to bat for others is generally neither a pleasant nor a sought after task.

Trying to make the best of what someone else has messed up is at best a salvage operation.

He had one of the most unique experiences ... the opportunity to go up on a mountain, literally, and talk with God.

God had just outdone Himself with a group of people that He had adopted – the Israelites. This disorganized group, God had pulled together, freed them from slavery and led them out of Egypt with impressive acts that would have gotten everyone's attention.

Then God invited Moses to go up on the mountain to talk with Him ... while the people waited in the valley for Moses' return.

God and Moses talked for so long that the people got restless, created a golden calf, and worshiped it, instead of the living God who had just done ten amazing acts to demonstrate His care and concern for them.

God cuts the talk with Moses off, sending him back to the people ... and here is what happened when Moses went to bat for a people who had messed up matters.

In Bible taught, when we go to bat for someone before God, that is called INTERCESSION, interceding for another person, and not for our own benefit.

Key Thought:

A person who has a perfect God on his mind will inevitably have imperfect people on his heart - that's intercession.

As we are formed into Christ's likeness, consider being an INTERCEDER, ONE WHO GOES TO BAT FOR PEOPLE BEFORE GOD.

I am not certain that there are 10 steps, so much as there is an attitude, a hunger for God that works itself out by caring for people.

Exodus 32-33 bring us God and Moses in up close ... when there is NO agreement, NO common ground, NO oneness, except in RELATIONSHIP.

Here is how GOING TO BAT FOR OTHERS WORKS.

There is no delightful conversation. The words are hard and filled with disaster.

EPISODE #1

7 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

God's assessment of the situation:

9 "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. 10 Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

God's accurate and truthful evaluation of the people -

- Moses, get down to YOUR people, whom YOU brought up out of Egypt
- They have quickly turned away from Me to worship an idol
- This is a stiff-necked people
- I am very angry with them and I thinking of destroying them
- Rather than Israel being my chosen, I'll make out of you, Moses, a great nation and get my work done through you and your family.

Before we get the wrong picture of God here, think through the situation.

God has adopted the people; He made them His own, decided to pay their bills, watch over them, set them up for life, teach them along the way.

God puts Himself out for them and they think nothing of majorly snubbing Him.

Its tough being God when you children get off the track so easily.

God can't rest until He gets them back home.

It's like being a parent. You can't do everything for your children. They need to make some decisions and choices themselves. But you can't ever just wash your hands of them.

Moses hears God's anger.

... and Moses goes to bat for the people he has been leading on God's behalf.

11 But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God.

Moses seeks to influence God, to present to God an alternate course of action other than what God has just stated.

He knows he is NOT in charge; that God IS in charge. And so he steps off his personally safe position and "works" on God.

Because He has God on his mind he has people on his heart.

Moses knew God.

He knew His God's heart.

Had not God chosen a slave, oppressed people to be His own?

Had He not already led them where they themselves would never have gotten to if they had to do it on their own?

This God was not like the other gods of the day – a god who got happy when people bought Him off with sacrifices and gifts.

This God of the people was a God who was known for something that no other god was – MERCY, GRACE, FORGIVENESS, FREEDOM.

... and so Moses makes His case.

"O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?"

Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'?

Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' "

Moses "changes God's mind" because ...

1. Intercessors care more about God's reputation than their own success.

If anyone has anything to lose ... it is God.

There is no way that Moses can see God getting rid of this bad apple.

God – You cannot just reject those for whom You have taken responsibility.

These are YOUR people. YOU choose them. YOU adopted them. YOU made that decision ... and you just can't change your mind because of what they have now done.

Moses knows who God is. He knows God's heart ... and he wants to get to it.

God – we must get the right message out of who YOU are.

You have just rescued YOUR people from the Egyptians. They know YOU well. They fought against you and lost. They are impressed by who YOU are.

If YOU now proceed to destroy YOUR people who you just rescued ... they are going to get the wrong message about YOU ... a message that we cannot afford to have out there.

YOU are a God of unlimited patience, working with people who are not just at the top of society, but at the bottom as well.

If YOUR honor, YOUR reputation is to be maintained, then how would this be viewed by the Egyptians?

God – you promised to take them through to the end – no quitting along the way.

Quite a while ago YOU gave YOUR word to Abraham, Isaac and Israel. You did not just mention this in passing. You solemnly and deliberately told them that you would give them this land as their inheritance.

You cannot break YOUR word.

LORD, you are a different kind of God.

There is Your Promise, Your Reputation, Your Choice.

Keep them.

... as for making me and my family into YOUR promised nation ... that is not even the issue.

We cannot give people, YOUR own, or others, the wrong idea of who YOU are. You are too important for them to get mixed up messages.

They need to see you for who You are ... that YOU are OUTSTANDING, UNIQUE, CARING, CONCERNED, PATIENT, GRACIOUS, ... a GOD WHO GOES TO BAT FOR PEOPLE WHO SHOULD BE PUT OUT.

14 Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

When we read of God REPENTING or RELENTING this does NOT indicate that God is owning up to some sin, error or poor judgment.

It indicates rather that God changes His course of action; what He said He would do, He backs off on ... in compassion, because it would be harsh, heavy handed, ... even though it would be just.

God's heart has been broken and angered by this people.

But God has a big heart and a soft heart.

... and one man went to bat for a people who deserved to be severely spanked, and got them some reprieve.

Application

Going to bat for others may be foreign to your lifestyle.

It shouldn't be.

God gives all of us the opportunity to lead others for His sake – whether that is parents of children, pastor of congregation, mentor of student, friend of friend ...

People are paying the price for foolish decisions. They are making dumb choices.

As a church God wants us to be intercessors; He wants us to go to bat for them ...

Austin Carty, a former contestant on the television show Survivor, shares about a mission trip to Indonesia:

Spending a couple of days in this Indonesian environment was quite rewarding for me. The country is 99 percent Muslim, and just this past March, *Time* magazine deemed the small nation "the crossroads of the Muslim faith." Therefore, we were prohibited to talk about Jesus in the Indonesian villages... But not being able to speak about Jesus in the villages didn't mean he wasn't there.

On the final night of our stay in Indonesia, we met on the beach. A bonfire had been lit, and as it stood tall as a man, violently ripping with flames, it spoke of the refining process God had been doing on all of our hearts that week. That night I, along with one of the young boys from the school, played guitar and led a chorus of praise songs that lasted for nearly an hour...

And that's when a remarkable thing happened: a kid fell to his knees to give his life to Christ. And then another followed...and then a third. Ultimately, seven children dedicated their lives to Jesus that night.

I would learn the next morning that the seven kids who gave their lives to Christ were, in fact, the seven very kids for whose salvation the staff had been praying for nearly a year.

*Condensed from our sister publication Today's Christian ©2007 Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit Today's-Christian.com
Austin Carty, "Redemption Songs," *Today's Christian* (9-13-07)*

When we go to bat for people, people get right with God and things change.

It is not pretty work, but it is heart work, hard work, and necessary work.

It is what we – God’s people – are all about.

It is what our God is about.

Things are happening. Justice is carried out and 3000 people died.

Exodus 32

30 The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."

31 So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."

2. Intercessors deeply care about those they lead.

Moses is not hamming it up.

He is not being melodramatic.

Moses took his responsibility seriously.

They sinned ... he is trying to see if he can pay for them.

They blew it ... he is trying to figure out if it can be fixed.

They wiped out ... he is trying to determine whether there is a way back with minimal damage.

That’s his heart.

No put on.

No show.

That’s Moses ... because Moses had picked this up from God along the way.

LORD, the sin of the people is great.

But God, FORGIVE them ... please!

... and if You will not forgive them, then take my name out of Your Book. I’ll do it for their sake, but let them in and put me out.

Intercessors are recognized not just because of their prayers, but how they live.

They give up their life for those God has placed into their world.

Moses’ example conveys the reality that **Intercession does not happen because it makes logical sense; but because of deep love.**

ILLUSTRATION

God steps in and informs Moses that the person who sins pays for their own sin.

We move on to the next exchange between Moses and God.

Exodus 33

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' 2 I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 3 Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

God throws a curve ball into the mix.

He will keep His Word. He will lead the people to the land He promised.

But GOD Himself will not accompany the people ... one of His angels will be their guide.

God doesn't "trust" Himself to go with such a people because at the next foolish move He might just give them what they deserve and destroy them.

12 Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' 13 If

you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."

14 The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

15 Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 16 How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

3. Intercessors go nowhere without God's presence

Moses would not settle for an angel, even God's angel, accompanying them.

Moses wanted God Himself.

If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

God had selected Moses for a special responsibility, as He has given us special responsibilities.

Moses knew that as we know it, as well.

When we read:

If your Presence does not go with us ...

It is literally **FACE** ... God's face.

There is God's attention, care, watch, interest.

God is wholly involved with us.

No angel ... but God Himself ... would satisfy Moses.

Moses did not want to know that they were JUST FORGIVEN, but that they were also accompanied, escorted by God Himself.

God liked Moses.

Here was a person who knew Him ... and that delighted God.

17 And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

... and then Moses took one further leap.

18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

4. Intercessors are thrilled with God

Moses wants to know God to a greater depth.

He wants to find out more about His God ... and that is why he make his request.

If Moses was going to continue on with his responsibilities and lead, he already knew God, but He wanted to know something more about His God.

Here was the God who had met him at the burning bush.

The God who had worked on Egypt.

The God who refused to let him make atonement.

These were new experiences for Moses, and if he was going to lead, He wanted to know more about this God.

... and so the arrangement is made and Moses is hid in a crevice in the mountainous rock ... and God "passes" by.

And Moses heard God say ...

Exodus 34:5-7

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD.

We need to pick up just a bit on the way a person in the Middle East thought.

We read of God proclaiming His name.

These people did not just give names to their children.

The name was connected to the character.

Here is GOD ... and this is who God is; this is His personality.

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming,

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

Study the list just a bit.

There is little in this list of darkness, the cloud, a trembling mountain, flashing lightning.

None of the dramatic experiences Moses had had with God pointed in this direction ... whether that be the ten plagues in Egypt, the drowning of Pharaoh's army ...

God spoke about Himself.

His Word explained Himself.

... and who is this God ... the God of HOLY LOVE.

Here is the unique, awesome God ... who is at the center of Christianity.

Here we see Jesus.

God in flesh – God in all His glory.

... and He made Himself known to an intercessor, one who went to bat for those who should have been left to stew in their own juices.

A person who has a perfect God on his mind will inevitably have imperfect people on his heart - that's intercession.

Thinking on God does not put us out of touch, but more in touch with our world and the people in it.

It coordinates God's authority and grace with our problems and sin.

His name was Tim, and he was the bane of my existence. I can't remember now any particular thing he did to irk me; I simply recall from the fourth grade on he gave me a general sense of panic. Tim was unpredictable—content one moment and angry the next—and I half feared and half loathed him.

I thought slugging him in the nose might solve the problem. My mom suggested praying for him. That's just like a mom, I thought. But she insisted, and each night before bed, she prayed, and encouraged me to pray, for Tim. I don't remember either of us asking God that I would like him more; it seems Mom always prayed for his peace. Over time, something remarkable happened. Tim seemed calmer more often. As he grew more peaceful, I grew less fearful of him. God answered our prayers.

That's what God does: he answers prayers. His eagerness to meet our needs is an important element of his character. I'm convinced my mother knew that full well. She recognized my crisis as one through which God could whisper a word to me about his character. She clung to God's promise to offer peace to his children, and she was confident that God would hear me when I called out to him.

May we all be so wise.

Brandon O'Brien, "His Name Was Tim," taken from the PreachingToday Sermons newsletter (8-16-07)

Pastor and author Tony Evans was in Columbia, South Carolina, to preach at a crusade being held in the University of South Carolina football stadium. Thousands had gathered for the evening session, but news reports indicated a serious thunderstorm was on the way. In fact, the storm was expected to hit at 7:00 pm—the exact time the meeting was scheduled to start.

As the sky grew darker and darker, the threat of cancellation was a valid possibility. A group of preachers and other church leaders decided to gather for a prayer meeting. Evans noted that all the preachers prayed what many would consider safe prayers—ones quite undemanding of God. Then, a woman named Linda spoke up, asking if she could pray. Linda's prayer went something like this:

"Lord, thousands have gathered to hear the Good News about your Son. It would be a shame on your name for us to have all these unbelievers go without the gospel when you control the weather, and you don't stop it. In the name of Jesus Christ, address this storm!"

So ended the prayer meeting.

Everyone took their places under the dark, threatening sky. The leader of the crusade told the people, "We'll go as long as we can." Umbrellas sprouted up among the crowd. A man sitting next to Linda opened his umbrella and offered to shield her as well. Linda refused.

Evans says he and his wife watched as the rain clouds came up to the stadium and then split in two. The storm rained on both sides of the stadium and came back together on the other side. All of those gathered for the crusade stayed dry.

As Evans points out: "How did Linda get what the preachers didn't? She had the boldness, the shameless audacity, to ask."

Taken from a sermon by Tony Evans at The Brooklyn Tabernacle Pastors and Leaders Conference (4-16-07); John Beukema, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania

In 2005, a Vietnamese pastor known as Silas was told by local authorities that he could expect to see trouble if his church continued to operate without a permit. "Be careful," one official told him. "Watch out."

This was a threat as much as a warning. In Vietnam, as in many other Communist (and some Islamic) countries, governments commonly deny or delay church permits, then jail Christians for meeting without a permit.

Silas shot back: "I don't have to watch out or be careful; God will care for us." He went on to thank the official for the harassment and opposition that Vietnamese authorities had meted out, as he felt it had unified the country's Christians.

"Your persecution has made us stronger," he told the officer.

Moreover, the pastor told him that he loved him. "You can shut down our churches, jail us, torture us. It doesn't matter, because we'll still love you," he said. "We'll love you, because God loves you and wants to see you come to know Christ's salvation." Then he delivered the final, loving blow—asking the official if he didn't feel badly about mistreating Christians. Silas told him he suspected it was tearing him up inside.

The official stalked away. Late one night, he came back. When the pastor heard him knock on the door, he assumed he was going to be hauled off to jail. But the official's manner was more like that of Nicodemus visiting Jesus, the pastor said. He needed to talk. He was depressed.

Silas invited him in, and in tears the officer told him how he did, indeed, feel badly about forcibly restraining Christians from worship. Most upsetting, though, was that he feared for his job if he did not beat and otherwise harm Christians. He himself felt mistreated at the office; peers who were lesser officers than he looked down their noses at him, advancing through the ranks by purchasing successively higher positions. The force was rife with such corruption.

Silas told him that God had a sterling plan for his life, and that he would care for him and guide him if he would only follow his son, Jesus. Before the night was over, the official prayed to receive Jesus. The next miracle was that the official advanced to a high position—without bribes. He advanced high enough to know when church raids were about to take place, so he could tip off Silas.

"He would tell us on Saturday that the police were coming on Sunday morning, so they'd come and find nobody there," the pastor said. "Then we'd meet for worship in the afternoon."

These miracles, the pastor concluded, could not have happened without the prayers of believers worldwide. Many other oppressed believers tell of receiving supernatural consolation in the midst of their ordeals. Suffering Christians are actually protected, comforted, and rescued through our prayers.

Jeff Sellers, "Cure for the IDOP Holiday Blues," ChristianityToday.com (11-16-05)

During the Great Awakening, when the Spirit of God revived much of our nation's early faith, Jonathan Edwards was presiding over a massive prayer meeting. Eight hundred men prayed with him.

Into that meeting a woman sent a message asking the men to pray for her husband. The note described a man who had become unloving, prideful, and difficult.

Edwards read the message in private and then, thinking that perhaps the man described was present, made a bold request. Edwards read the note to the 800 men. Then he asked if the man who had been described would raise his hand, so that the whole assembly could pray for him. Three hundred men raised their hands.

Bryan Chapell, Holiness By Grace, (Crossway, 2001), p. 80. Used by permission of Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois

In April 2001, in the midst of Israeli/Arab conflict, a motorcade carrying the Security Service Chief of Gaza came under bullet fire from Israeli troops. The frightened security official called Yasir Arafat from his car for help. Arafat, in turn called the U.S. Ambassador, who then called the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell. Colin Powell then phoned Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister, who ordered the shooting to stop immediately. And it did. The Security Chief's connections eventually saved his life.

In a similar way, Christians have a divine connection to the ultimate power of the universe that can make a world of difference in any situation.

"Washington Whispers," U. S. News and World Report (4-30-01), p. 6; submitted by Kevin Short, Springfield, Missouri

Through a variety of tragic circumstances, Becky Greer lost all four of her children. The grieving mother shared a testimony of how God's presence brought her comfort in that painful time. Becky had the following words printed on a card, with a picture of a lily on the front:

"When the blooms die, plant it outside, Mom! That's exactly what the lady at the florist said to do, and it will come back next year," exclaimed my 9-year-old daughter, Kami, as she proudly presented me with a beautiful potted Stargazer lily for Mother's Day. I told Kami I didn't believe the lily would come back. "But Mom, the lady said it would!" When the blooms faded and died, Kami kept reminding me to plant the lily outside, and I kept putting her off by saying I just didn't believe the lily would come back. Kami remained persistent and insistent until I finally relented, and together we went outside to plant the lily in the backyard. Winter came and the lily died. Kami and two of her brothers also died that winter. My world became totally dark.

The following spring when the lily sprouted and grew to produce 27 fragrant pink blooms, I became filled with inexpressible joy. Joy in my darkness! How could that be? Without my children I believed I could never feel joy or happiness again. What a beautiful gift! Kami, an innocent child, had no trouble believing that the lily would live again. Jesus said we are to have the faith of a child. God can resurrect even those things which we believe can't be resurrected. I did not believe the lily could survive the darkness of winter, and I did not believe that I could survive the darkness of my grief and suffering after losing all four of my children. God was working on the lily in the darkness of the earth, and he was working on me in the darkness of my grief. I just didn't know it. Just because we don't always experience God's presence doesn't mean he isn't there.

To see the lily click [here](#).

Becky Greer's testimony; submitted by Van Morris, Mt. Washington, Kentucky

It is said that Abraham Lincoln, when he was President of the U.S., was advised to include a certain man in his cabinet. When he refused he was asked why he would not accept him.

"I don't like his face," the President replied.

"But the poor man isn't responsible for his face," responded his advocate.

"Every man over forty is responsible for his face" countered Lincoln.

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