

Impact of One: Question

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Empathy can be communicated through a card or phone call.

But to advocate for someone means you are with them in their need.

You must speak and act on their behalf because they can't.

They cannot speak or act on their own.

Advocacy takes place person to person.

We don't try to fix a person from a distant position of superiority.

Henri Nouwen put it like this: "The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares."

Jesus is an advocate.

He is the Good Shepherd who lies down His life for the sheep.

When the thief comes to steal and destroy a hireling runs away.

But not Jesus, Jesus stays and protects and fights for the sheep.

He stays in the middle of the fight and doesn't head for the sidelines.

Jesus is the shepherd who cares because each sheep is His.

And Jesus refused to leave us without an advocate.

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever" (John 14:16)

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about Me." (John 15:26)

"But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7)

Jesus assured us we would never have to go through a trial alone.

God is our Advocate.

Being an advocate catches people by surprise.

People do not expect the presence of an advocate.

The Pharisees did not believe in advocates.

They had the law and the law made things black and white.

They had lawyers, keepers of the law.

They had judges, enforcers of the law.

They saw no need for an advocate.

A person is either guilty of the law or they are not.

Their system had no wiggle room.

Their world was black and white.

If the world is black and white an advocate is redundant.

When it is black and white; either wrong or right, there is no middle ground.

But the Father sent Jesus to create the middle ground.

There was a transition territory between right and wrong.

Something could exist between the law and sin.

That territory was given a name.

The middle territory between the law and sin is called grace.

The place where an advocate works is called grace.

Grace does not deny the existence of the law.
Grace does not call the law evil or unnecessary.
Grace does not short circuit judgment.
Nor does grace minimize or excuse sin.
Grace is not blind to sin and its destruction.

Grace is not a spiritual loophole.

It is not the work of an advocate to find a loophole in the law.
Grace identifies a deeper need, sees below appearances.
Grace sees value beyond the law.

Grace sees individuals who have unique worth and beauty.

Whenever there is a need for grace, there is the need for an advocate.
If there was ever a need for an advocate it was in a story that John captured.
We have probably heard the story dozens of times.
But I read it from a different perspective while at Prayer Retreat this year.
I was reading the book *The Tangible Kingdom* by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay.
And in the book they recount the story in our Scripture.
Jesus was brought into a situation.
Jesus was forced into a black and white situation.

He was put between the truth of law and the real life of a sinner.

The Pharisees bring to Jesus as woman caught in adultery.
They are in a pretty good spot.
The Law of Moses and the Law of God are on their side.
Stoning is the straight-forward consequence of an adulterous woman.
It is a slam dunk, can't miss, open and shut case.
There were hundreds of years of precedence.
Hundreds, perhaps thousands of women had faced stoning.
Everything in their society was calling them to stone her to death.
Did she need to face the truth? Absolutely!
Did she need to repent? Of course!
Did her sin deserve death?
According to their law, yes, there was no back door.
People like her don't get to go to heaven.
So condemn her to hell now.

I imagine that the posture of this woman must have been low.
She was thrown into the crowd gathered at the temple.
Everyone was at the temple to study the efficient execution of the law.
Everyone, that is, except Jesus who was there to teach something new.
The woman was bent over, covering her head and body.
She had no allies in that crowd.
She would be near to convulsing with fear.
Tears of terror splash in the dirt near her knees.
She knows what's coming and is powerless to stop it.
She might even assume she deserves the verdict of guilty.
The torrent of rocks that are about to bludgeon her body are poised.
There is the silence of death in the air.
Jesus is asked to pass the verdict of guilt and stones.
Why didn't Jesus just call a spade a spade?
Was He savouring her demise?
Was He like all the others, relishing the anticipation of brutality?
Why didn't He just speak the expected truth?
He is truth; He can't speak anything but the truth.

But notice what Jesus did (vs. 6).

He does something totally unexpected.
And it might have even seemed futile.
Jesus advocates for her.

He physically postures Himself at the level of the exposed woman.

Truth bends down.

The Truth adjusts His posture, and without a word kneels near her.
He's now at her level; if the stones start He's in the line of fire.
She can feel and hear His breath.
She longs to sink through the dust of the temple floor.
Oh if she could just be swallowed by the ground.
But something is even lower than her.
She sees Jesus' hand drifting through the ground.
His hand was moving where she wanted to be.

The religious leaders challenge Him, and Jesus stands up to speak to them.
The actions of the advocate assume a voice of authority.
There was no argument or debate in His voice.
He threw wide open the gates of the middle ground of grace.
His statement was more invitation than rebuke.
The one without sin may throw the first stone.
In that moment they saw and recognized grace.
Did they receive it, did Jesus become their Advocate?
Jesus bent down again and continued to etch the ground.
More important, He bent down to let this woman know He was still by her side.
If any stones were thrown they would come their way not just her way.
But the stones didn't come and the stoners didn't stay.
Beginning with the eldest they all left.
They left the One - Jesus - who could have been their Advocate too.
They saw the reality of their sin and knew they needed judgment as well.
Jesus was the only One who could help them in their guilt.
But they all left until only the woman remained.
Only then does Jesus reveal Himself with words.
Jesus - the God of the universe in flesh.
Jesus - the only One who should have genuinely been offended.
Jesus, who could have postured Himself as judge and executioner.
But Jesus, - literally lowers Himself to her level.
In the midst of her sin He has postured Himself as an advocate.
This is key!
Jesus addresses her head only after He has her heart.
His first words to this woman were a question.
"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"
She said, "No one, sir."
"Then neither do I condemn you. Go and do not sin again!"
Notice what Truth, embodied in Jesus, did.
He removed condemnation from her first.
Then Jesus called for behavioral change.
He won her heart first by removing condemnation.
Only then does He challenge her lifestyle and sin.

The impact of one question!
What kind of questions have you been asked during your low times?
The religious world asks questions that scream judgment and condemnation.
But Jesus made this place called grace.
Grace asks questions that liberate and heal.
Where are your accusers, arresters, attackers?
The Church today is surrounded by people the law says should be stoned.
Our words and questions of disapproval can be as hard as stones.
The law can be as hard as the stones on which it was written.
But Paul knew something about Jesus as his Advocate.
The first question Jesus asked Paul was, "Why do you persecute Me?"
Jesus knew Saul by name.
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Paul came to know what Jesus wanted of him.

Jesus wanted Paul to live among people.

And Jesus called Paul to live without judgment.

Paul informs us that we are never to judge sinners.

We are to leave judgment for those who are disoriented, to God.

Maybe that takes the fun out of being a Christian for you.

Our job is to be like Jesus in the world.

We are called to help communicate God's love and acceptance.

We are to win people's hearts through close contact.

We are to be their advocate and covering.

Christ's example and His teaching show us what God desires.

God is as concerned with our posture as He is with our message.

He is not pleased when we make our message more important than our posture.

Jesus didn't, and we shouldn't.

Jesus wants us to look like Him and to talk like Him.

He leads us to be with people that He would be with.

What would happen if our posture became that of an advocate?

What if we spent more time wrapping people in arms of love?

What if we just lived in front of others as Christ would?

How might God lead us if we were a 'friend of sinners'?

Might people start having the same feeling for us as they did for Jesus?

When they hand their hearts to God, they'll want to leave sin.

The questions of an advocate bring hope.

How can you share hope with those around you?

It begins with our posture.

Our posture says more than our words.

Is our posture one of holier than thou?

If it is, our questions will bring judgment and condemnation.

If our posture is wrong our words will come out wrong.

For our posture to change, our heart must change.

We must know what it is to live in the territory of grace.

"When He saw the crowds He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36)

The best words of an advocate are a question that determines need.

At Lenora Peace's funeral that became clear in a story we heard.

There is a tradition in India that shows the power of an advocate.

When you go to visit a home you are always greeted with a question.

It is a question of concern and compassion.

Would you like a drink of water?

It is a question that determines need and offers help to change a condition.

The impact of that question frees a person to receive.

What question can you ask those in your world that communicates compassion?

What question can you ask that places you at the heart of someone's life?

Song - And Can It Be?

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