

PRIMER 8

FAITH-ROOTED ADVOCACY II

SUMMARY:

In Matthew 10:16, Jesus called us to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves." As a follower of Christ, you can use "dove power" to effectively influence your members of Congress. Use this guide to explore two components of dove power: pastoring the powerful and prophetic call.

TRADITIONAL VS. FAITH-ROOTED ADVOCACY

Primer 8 is the last of a three-party series on traditional and faith-rooted advocacy tactics.[†] This series will equip you to effectively use both "serpent power" strategies, borrowed from traditional advocacy, and "dove power," the unique influence we have as followers of Christ. Primer 6 introduced Matthew 10:16 as a foundational verse for our approach to secular and faith-rooted advocacy:

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” —Matthew 10:16 (ESV)

Dove power advocacy has three primary components:

- 1 Prayer**
- 2 Pastoring the powerful**
- 3 Prophetic call**

In Primer 7, we examined prayer. In this primer we'll explore the role of pastoring the powerful and prophetic call.

[†] World Vision advocacy trainer, Alexia Salvatierra, has contributed heavily to the content in this series. Her book, *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World*, is an excellent resource for those who want to learn more about these principles.

PASTORING THE POWERFUL

While many of us have a strong desire and sense of calling to seek justice, we often have less clarity about how to practically live out that calling. “Advocacy” can seem like a foreign skill set reserved only for professional lobbyists.

Dove power looks less like advocacy and more like ministry. It invites us to care for and engage with our legislators in the same way we do with our neighbors, friends, and church family.



THE POWER OF LOVE:

- » **Love one another** (John 13, 15)
- » **Have equal concern for one another** (1 Corinthians 12:25)
- » **Serve one another** (Galatians 5:13)
- » **Carry each other's burdens** (Galatians 6:2)
- » **Be kind and compassionate toward one another** (Ephesians 4:32)
- » **Encourage one another** (Hebrews 10:25)
- » **Pray for each other** (James 5:16)

In our church communities, we have small groups, service days, and prayer meetings to help us minister to each other in these ways. Unfortunately, we often forget the power that these gestures can have on our leaders, too. They aren't complicated strategies—they are things you already know how to do!



THE ART OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Those who take public office typically seek their positions to do good in the world. They begin with sincere intentions to make positive change and to serve their constituencies. But political pressures are taxing, and their vision can easily shrink. They need our sincere concern, love, and encouragement—even if we disagree with their political views—to remember the good they can do in the world and to wield the power they've been given for the benefit of all.

These behaviors don't merely make our legislators feel supported. They empower them to take risks, endure pressure, and act in ways they may not have naturally done. The word “encouragement” is a compound word that literally means to give courage. With all the pressures they face, your members



of Congress may need courage to tackle an issue you're raising or to show public leadership for it in front of their broader constituency.

Encouragement begins with discernment. As a Christ follower, you can ask God to reveal hidden fears, struggles, or spiritual needs your legislator has so you can speak to their heart in ways traditional advocates might not be able to. As you develop a relationship with your legislator and their staff, research and ask (appropriate) questions about their spiritual life, beliefs, church involvement, and challenges. Seek to discover any underlying reasons they may hesitate to support your request and how you might best encourage them.

PROPHETIC CALL

God used the prophets of the Old Testament in very unique ways to speak to their rulers and to draw attention to injustice. Their methods, while a bit unconventional, give us unique insight into God's "communication strategy" for influencing leaders. Rather than simply using well-reasoned arguments (communicating with the left side of the brain), they leveraged other tactics that influenced people's hearts (communicating with the right side of the brain). The prophets used these methods at God's direction. Their role was to faithfully obey so that God could do the convincing.

Here are four biblically inspired strategies to incorporate prophetic call the next time you advocate.



1 STORIES

In 2 Samuel 12, God sent the prophet Nathan to King David to convict him of his sin (he took the wife of Uriah the Hittite as his own and then killed Uriah to avoid the consequences). However, when Nathan addressed the king, he didn't address David's wrongdoing directly. Instead, he told him a story of a rich man who exploited a poor man. Upon hearing the story, David "burned with anger," quickly recognizing the injustice. Nathan then helped David see that he had committed similar injustice. The story opened David's heart to receive a more direct challenge.

Stories have a powerful way of helping us remember the poor. In *Reflections on Advocacy and Justice*, former Director of Christian Commitments for World Vision International Tim Dearborn reminds us that:



"A member is someone that belongs to a group. To 're-member' is to reconnect. Remembrance is a relational word, not simply a word describing mental memory. Advocacy as re-membering is to connect victims of injustice, oppression and poverty with those who are in a position to be used by God to deliver them." [page 8]

By sharing stories and bringing pictures of people living in poverty who you've seen or met, you can help reconnect your leaders with who they're called to serve. You can remind them that the policies you're asking them to support will impact real people, with names, families, hopes, and dreams—just like them. God may give you a story to help reframe the opportunity or issue you are discussing, to help them see their role in a new light, or to help prepare their heart to receive your challenge.

The next time you meet with your member of Congress, bring the poor with you into the room through a story ... and ask God to move their hearts to action as a result.





2

DREAMS AND VISIONS



“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.” —Acts 2:17 (NIV)

In the United States, legislators are called “representatives” because their job is to represent the constituency they serve—those who elect them. Effective advocacy in our system often cannot be done by an individual alone; other constituents need to agree. This requires organizing. “Organizing” is bringing people together to create change—the kind of community change they couldn’t accomplish as individuals.

How do we bring people together? How do we unite people in a common effort? Most organizing brings people together around a problem that can best be solved by working together. They come together because they recognize their common self-interest.

Scripture gives us an alternative way to bring people together—a common vision or dream can both inspire and unite. When we love each other, we can even be moved to action to support each other in the realization of our dreams. Our dreams are most powerful when they are rooted in God’s vision for us. His design is always bigger than we can imagine. It includes more people than those in our group; it includes the whole world.

Our public leaders also have dreams for the community. Few people ever ask them about those dreams or try to dialogue with them to identify common dreams. When we have discerned a common vision that is rooted in God’s vision, we’re able to engage in more meaningful conversations with our representatives.

As you engage with your legislator, seek to discover the dreams that drive their service and cast vision for how your request helps achieve common desires.

3 EXPOSING LIES



“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” —John 8:32 (NIV)

In New Testament Greek, there are two words for time—chronos and kairos. Chronos refers to chronological time—yesterday, today, tomorrow. Kairos refers to the moments of God’s intervention in human history, the way He brings His eternal perspective to bear on the present moment. The biblical prophets discerned the ways in which God wanted to intervene in the society of

their day and then spoke the words that revealed and responded to the kairos moment. These prophets began by exposing the lies that most people believed and counteracting those lies with God’s truth. They prioritized the core issues that most clearly revealed human lies and divine truth.

The worst injustices in our world are founded on lies. When most of the members of a society believe that some people are worth more than others, the natural implication is that the lives of those who are worth less can legitimately be sacrificed. When we expose the lies that rationalize injustice, we can then counter them with biblical truths that call for change. Often these lies are not overtly spoken. They are assumed, and the decisions of policymakers are based on those assumptions. When these lies are exposed to policymakers and challenged by biblical truths, the whole conversation changes.

What lies might be interrupting your legislator’s ability to act on your request? What truth can you share—directly or indirectly—to combat them?



4 SYMBOLS

The old saying, “Pictures are worth a thousand words,” stood true even when God communicated to leaders through his prophets. Their admonitions were filled with imagery—trumpets, earthquakes, eagles, fire, mountains, locusts, scrolls—all used to make concepts more tangible. In advocacy, symbols can stimulate the right side of your legislator’s mind, helping them to see the truth or remember the opportunity you present to them more vividly.

What symbol might you bring to your meeting to help illustrate the issue you discuss, your request, or to give them courage?



Advocates in North Carolina shared their passion for justice by tapping into the power of symbols. They met with a staffer from their congresswoman's local office to discuss U.S. foreign assistance. World Vision supported them with talking points, meeting goals, and handouts, but the advocates drove the message home with some creative gifts: freshly baked bread and a pot of wheatgrass with a quote from Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman Borlaug: "If you desire peace, cultivate justice, but at the same time cultivate the fields to produce more bread; otherwise there will be no peace."

These symbols made global hunger a more tangible reality for the congressional aide, exemplifying the power of faith-rooted advocacy. Statistics and talking points are important, but God often moves our hearts through images and symbols. If you approach your advocacy in prayer, God may show you creative ways to move the hearts of your leaders.



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