

November 9, 2025

An Advocate

“Gentle and Lowly: An Advocate” (Series following Dane Ortlund’s *Gentle and Lowly*)

[1 John 2:1-6](#)

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*** Highlighted text appeared on screen during service.

Good morning. Well – for those of you who read this chapter from Gentle and Lowly, you might be feeling as I was earlier this week – this one’s a doozy! After two separate meetings with Tom and multiple readings of the text, Tom and I laughed a bit as we realized that once again, I received quite a teaching challenge when I said I could cover this Sunday’s sermon! We thought you might appreciate hearing from him – even though he is not here.

Dear Church Family, greetings from the safe confines of my home church - at which I got to pick my own passages to focus on for my sermon. I wanted to publicly declare that I left Adi with the hardest chapter yet. I feel guilt for leaving her to fend for herself. . . and relief for not having to face such a task. I also know God has already worked things out and given Adi a "word from the Lord." Blessings. ~ Tom

Let’s pray.

Jesus Christ our advocate. You are here with us today. We praise You for Your presence and Your advocacy in our lives. We lift hearts in need of healing, renewal, forgiveness and grace. May the words You’ve provided today, meet each person listening in the unique and personal ways You are known for. We give this time to you Lord. Amen.

Well – let’s give it a go – what do ya say?

When I read and contemplated this chapter – the first time, I wrestled with some unnamed discrepancy. It took me days, rereading, and conversations with Tom to pinpoint it, but in the meantime, I remembered that probably the best place to start when getting the opportunity to teach is with the scripture. So, let’s start there.

1 John 2: 1-6 is a small chunk of wisdom pulled from this first letter John wrote to churches he had started that had found themselves in doubt and fear due to the presence of false teachers. In this letter, one of John’s goals was to remind and assure believers of their salvation through Christ. In this small chunk pulled for today, John is still in the opening part of his letter.

In 1 John 1:8-9, the lines right before our passage, it says: ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Anyone else find themselves stirred up in an uncomfortable way when the topic of sin surfaces? In recent years, the [BibleProject](#) has helped me understand this concept of “all have sinned and fallen short” a little bit better. First of all, the BibleProject acknowledges that the concepts of sin, iniquity and transgression all feel a bit antiquated in our modern culture which is likely the source of our discomfort when encountering this very real and important topic in our faith. I

encourage you to check out the BibleProject's short video that teaches on sin, but in essence the word most commonly used in the Bible for sin is Khata.

Khata is a word that is not in fact religious, but it means **to fail or miss the goal**. If you were to aim a dart at a dart board and hit the wall, you would Khata. So within Christianity, what is the mark or the goal missed when a person Khata's or sins? (**picture of a dart board**)

To answer this question, let's take a step back to remember the key verse of this series:

Matthew 11: 28-30 ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Tom has mentioned a few times that a yoke represented the lens through which a Rabbi encountered the world. A rabbi would use this yoke to teach how they might see the world through this lens. In one of the episodes from Season 3 on the Bema Discipleship Podcast, Marty Solomon elaborated on this concept. During the time of Jesus, there were two main rabbinical lines of thinking – two yokes if you will. Like the yoke attached to two oxen, the rabbi's yoke consisted of two priority teachings. The most common yokes of Jesus' day began with the commandment "Love the Lord Your God with all Your Heart, Mind, Soul and Strength." However, the second element of the yoke varied depending on the Rabbi. For some rabbi's the second lens through which to engage the world was to "Obey the Law." We can see this line of thinking in the ways of the Pharisee and the Sadducees. Jesus' lens was different. When asked what he believed to be the greatest commandment, Jesus was being asked to describe his yoke. And here is what Jesus answered.

³⁷ He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22: 37-40)

Jesus claimed that LOVE was the key to the kingdom. Love for God, people, and creation made for a lighter yoke and Jesus offered His own heart to be a landing place for rest from the weariness created by the weight of the law. Jesus was not saying that the law wasn't important. He was just saying that by choosing love for God and people, the law would actually be fulfilled. Jesus teaches that taking/picking up this yoke is lighter. Our lived experiences tell us that loving others well on our own is really difficult. Which brings us back to this passage on sin.

What does it mean when we Khata with regard to the commandments? It means that we miss the mark or fail to love God or other people well. And I think that we can all agree that that is true. No matter how hard I try, it is impossible to go through life without missing the mark or messing this up at times. We all sin. We all miss the mark.

In one line, Johns says confessing sin will bring forgiveness and cleansing, but in the very next sentence this letter is being written so that the church members won't sin. Do these side-by-side contradictions cause anyone else to feel confused? I'm learning that sometimes letting go of my

western drive for logic and certainty helps me wrestle through the text with a more childlike faith.

Speaking of childlike, isn't it lovely how John addresses the letter to his dear children. When I first started thinking about the topic of this sermon – advocate – as an educator and parent my immediate connections were most related to children. In and of itself, the term child is a reminder of a power differential and preciousness. John's term of endearment sets up for us – in 21st century America at least – a connection to our vulnerability that serves us well when considering Jesus as advocate.

John is writing so that these Jesus followers won't sin, but if they do sin, they can rest assured they will be okay because of Jesus the advocate – Jesus the righteous.

Righteous. In my western way of thinking, the term spoke to me of law – right vs. wrong. As I've studied the text and learned from teachers who have a deeper understanding of the Jewish culture in which Jesus lived, the definition of righteousness has been expanded and connects directly to those two great commandments. (Once again, I encourage you to look this up through the BibleProject – the teaching on the concept is super helpful.) The Greek word for righteous is *dikaiousune* which carries the meaning of **living in right relationship with God, other people and all of creation**. This right relationship can be expressed through living justly, being honest and faithful, through fasting and prayer, being generous, practicing forgiveness, and loving others well – even our enemies. When we live in these ways we are doing right by God. Jesus – the righteous - the one who lives right by God and prioritized right relationship.

It's important to understand righteousness in the Biblical context because this is how Jesus shows up as an advocate. With right relationship as the priority. Advocate. The title of chapter 7 in Dane Ortlund's *Gentle and Lowly*, and the title of today's sermon. According to dictionary.com, an **advocate is a person who publicly supports a cause or policy**. This definition works well when we consider Jesus publicly supporting – you guessed it -loving God and loving others– a public declaration of love. In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection He provides continuous personalized examples of this advocacy. John says the way people will know you and I as believers know Jesus because we obey His commands which once again are not new – love God and love people. Easier said than lived. This “not sinning” business was and is more complex than conscious choices in day-to-day life.

Which means we need Jesus the advocate. Dane Ortlund points out that the Greek word for advocate is used only here to describe Jesus, but used to describe the Holy Spirit. It sounds like later in the book Ortlund will be teaching a bit more on the concept of the Trinity, but so far, the book is focused on the heart of Christ. Fully understanding the Trinity and knowing how the three-in-one persons of God all works is one of the beautiful mysteries of our faith, so I'll leave that deep dive alone for now. However, I do want to consider the many words Bible translators choose in addition to **advocate: Helper, counselor, comforter, companion**. Words that lend me to think of the word Eugene Peterson chooses in the Message Translation. **“If anyone sins, we have Priest-Friend in the presence of the Father.”** I like that – Priest-Friend. It is this advocate who shows up when we find ourselves missing the mark, sometimes by choice but more frequently thinking we are actually on the right track. Jesus shows up with a heart passionate to stand

alongside us, publicly declaring His position of our worth and His profound love for us. “He cannot bear to leave us alone to fend for ourselves.”

As I reread the chapter, that sentence stirred something up within my spirit, and I began to wonder more about who or what we need help fending against. Jesus and the Father are unified. They are with us. Christ is an advocate for us with the Father. With, not against. As Tom and I talked through some of the challenges of this text, he said something like, we must be careful if we start to think that something is pitting Jesus against the Father – that’s not the storyline of the Kingdom of God. Unity, shalom, wholeness – that is the storyline. So, we brainstormed places we see Jesus as advocate. Here are a few stories we considered:

- With the sick man who has sat by the pools for 35 years, Jesus comes alongside him and heals him. The excuses that prevented his healing are silenced. He stands up and walks.
- When the leaders of the law accuse a woman of adultery in an attempt to condemn both her and Jesus, Jesus silences the accusers with a question. They are forced to face their own sinful natures. And when Jesus moves toward this woman, whose backstory is unknown but who has certainly been betrayed, He compassionately engages with her and tells her He does not condemn her.
- Even on the cross, as He is dying Jesus cries out on behalf of those who are actively killing Him. He gets it that they really think that what they are doing is the right thing. And yet Jesus cries out, forgive them – they don’t know what they are doing.

Who or what is it that Jesus as advocate stands up with us to fend off? The sickness and patterns that keep us stuck for decades. The rules and laws we place above people and even use to manipulate and harm people for our own disordered desires. The powers and principalities that cause us to stumble – to forget the way to live out the most important commandments. We are in desperate need of an advocate in this world. God so loved the world that He sent us One. An advocate who would show up in the stories of our scripture to teach us how it’s done – how to walk with people. An advocate who would cry out on our behalf for the very personal ways we miss the mark. A cry that pierces through insanity of a moment. An advocate who defeated the very powers of darkness that attempted to shut all love and light down.

As I drove to church on Wednesday to meet for the second time with Tom, (and just minutes after some intercessory prayer by the Wednesday in the Word crew), one of my favorite stories in literature came to mind. There is a story from my childhood, one that many of you may well know in which a Lion by the name of Aslan exchanges himself for a young man named Edmund. You see Edmund unknowingly aligned himself with a witch and then knowingly chose to betray his family and the lion to the witch’s cause. In this story, the powerful Lion stands alongside Edmund and intentionally offers to give his life for Edmund’s freedom. Aslan, advocates for the precious and powerless child despite his failures, despite the ways he missed the mark. In the tension of Edmund’s life on the line, the advocate Aslan says this. **“Fall back all of you. I will talk to the witch alone.”** (C. S. Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*)

Aslan makes a deal with the witch. Exchanging his own life and blood for Edmund's. The witch and her army then kill Aslan, while Edmund's two sisters watch in horror. But it is the next day when the greatest result occurs. Aslan returns to life. He then explains to the girls, "though the witch knew the deep magic, "Her knowledge only goes back to the Dawn of Time. But if she could have looked a little further back into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards." (C. S. Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*)

From this moment on, Aslan and the four human children are able to defeat the white witch. It is Edmund whose leadership and wisdom ends the witch's ability to turn Aslan's followers to stone. In Aslan's standing up for Edmund, against the powers of darkness, Edmund is freed to lead and contribute to the ending victory for Aslan's kingdom.

Praise be to God for C. S. Lewis!

As I thought about this story, Dane Ortland's question and answer on page 93 began to really sink in.

"What if we never needed to advocate for ourselves because another had undertaken to do so? ... We would be free. Free of the need to defend ourselves, to bolster our sense of worth through self-contribution, to quietly parade before others our virtues in painful subconscious awareness of our inferiorities and weaknesses."

And perhaps we would be free to, like Edmund, take our intended place in the work of the Kingdom. A Kingdom in which Christ models *power with* instead of *power over*, where wholeness is the desired outcome of our lives and of all lives, and where the King of Heaven continually delights in His creation. This is a Kingdom I want to belong to – a King I want to abide in – be nourished by and learn to walk like. How fortunate are we to have an advocate who "silences all accusations, astonishes the angels and celebrates the Father's embrace of us in spite of our messiness."