

# Advocacy: Lessons Learned from a Young Slave Girl

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# Advocacy

## Lessons Learned from a Young Slave Girl

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### Abstract

The role of the young slave girl in the healing of Naaman in 2 Kings provides valuable lessons for individuals seeking to make a change in this world. The young girl was an effective advocate, and using her example, this paper lays out a framework for small-scale advocacy efforts. Concurrently, the paper also examines a case study on advocacy undertaken for a disabled teenager on the island of American Samoa. Exploring both advocacy illustrations equips the reader with the ability to apply the advocacy steps discussed in this article in a practical manner.

**Keywords:** *advocate, disability, disability studies, advocacy, biblical*

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# Advocacy: Lessons Learned from a Young Slave Girl

## Introduction

Advocacy is defined as the “active promotion of a cause or principle” and can be undertaken by individuals or whole organizations (Prue, accessed on January 29, 2018). This paper explores a smaller-scale advocacy effort initiated and led by one person or a small group. At first thought, it may be easy to underestimate the effects of one person or a small group engaging in advocacy. However, as the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, engagement in advocacy by every individual can have a compounded impact. Christians by their calling have a part to play in advocacy. The Bible says in Proverbs 31:8,9 that those who follow Christ must speak for those who cannot speak for themselves and must advocate for the rights of the destitute, poor, and needy. Further, there are examples of advocates found in the Bible. Their advocacy efforts ranged from a large-scale effort, like Moses who was an advocate for the children of Israel, to a small-scale advocacy effort, exemplified by the young captive servant of Naaman. Naaman was faced with debilitating leprosy that not only impacted his daily activities but also caused him discrimination and marginalization. In light of this, it can be said that Naaman was disabled, especially because his social culture oppressed lepers and excluded him from being “involved from meaningful participation in the social and political system” (Swinton, 2010, 279).

In 2 Kings 5:2,3 the Bible says:

2 Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. 3 She said to her mistress, “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”

This “young girl” that the Bible mentions was a servant in a powerful household who had been taken captive. She was not in any position of power; however, using what influence she had, she still managed to be an advocate—she advocated for the recovery of Naaman. It is quite possible that the slave girl did not expect her suggestion to have such far-reaching implications, and yet her example provides the reader with significant advocacy principles. The core of advocacy work is influence, and she influences her mistress by suggesting that her master could be cured by a prophet

in Samaria. Like this young servant, an advocate desires an improvement in the condition of the person or people on behalf of whom he or she advocates. The young servant “desired the health and welfare of her master, though she was a captive” (Matthew, n.d.).

Living within Naaman’s household, the young servant was part of his community; therefore, she decided to be part of the solution to her master’s problem. She did not shy away from the problem, since it also affected her. It was a serious issue that would affect not only her present life but her future as well. Instead of considering other options, such as revolt, complacency, or indifference, she actively voiced her idea in hopes of providing a solution to heal her master from leprosy. She engaged herself in informal individual advocacy—that is, to focus her efforts on one person. The Center for Excellence in Disabilities states that individual advocacy occurs “when people like parents, friends, family members or agencies speak out and advocate for vulnerable people” (accessed on January 29, 2018). Advocacy has the potential to achieve large-scale results for individuals, families, and communities whether there are one or ten people behind the advocacy effort (Coffman, 2009). In this case, it is not influential persons but an insignificant slave who makes Naaman’s healing possible (von Rad, 1980).

Like Naaman, people with disabilities face multiple barriers on a daily basis. The literature identifies the most common challenges that they experience as attitudinal, physical, and financial (World Health Organization and the World Bank, 2011). Often, more than one barrier occurs at the same time. We assert that advocacy can make a difference to people with disabilities because it is very practical and a tool to meet the needs and capabilities of people who are marginalized in society.

This short paper provides comprehensive steps and advice for individuals to undertake small-scale advocacy in their own sphere of influence. The six steps laid out here can be utilized by anyone who wants to be an advocate for another individual or their society, depending on the level of change or impact they want to see:

1. Identifying the issues for action
2. Developing a solution
3. Influencing power holders
4. Building a coalition
5. Implementing actions
6. Evaluating actions



The story of the young servant of Naaman is used as an example of small-scale advocacy in each of the steps below. Simultaneously, a more recent example of how small-scale advocacy was employed on behalf of a teenager with a disability is also presented. Viewing these stories alongside each other provides a comprehensive picture of the impact of advocacy, even on a personal individual level.

## I. Identify Problems or Issues for Action

Before engaging in advocacy work, it is crucial to properly identify the overarching problem you want to target. VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) define a problem as “a negative situation affecting a specific group of people” (p. 125). Once the broad problem has been determined, one has to dissect the problem even further and select the issues that are related to the problem. Many advocacy efforts fail because not enough time is spent on adequately and strategically identifying the issues, and instead, they target the general problem, which is often too abstract and not focused enough. Breaking down the problem into issues involves an analysis of the root causes of the problem, prioritizing issues, and identifying and comparing potential solutions. The first step of advocacy, however, will not focus on identifying solutions, but solely on identifying and prioritizing issues.

People with disabilities face a number of problems, including inaccessibility to health-related services, proper education and employment, stigmatization, and human rights violations (World Health Organization, 2015). These barriers prevent such individuals from gaining autonomy and enjoying equal access to services and resources. Ratliffe, Rao, Skouge, & Peter (2012) illustrate such barriers in the case of Pualei, an American Samoan teenager who dropped out of high school due to juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Her disease embarrassed her and the extreme pain made it difficult for her to leave her home much. Pualei had little access to assistive technology that would have aided her in completing her education, and the small island of American Samoa provided few options for wheelchair transportation. The authors identified these issues as central to their advocacy effort.

Shifting back to the story of the servant girl, once she had arrived in her new home in Syria, she noticed that her master was sick with leprosy. It was a dreadful and incurable disease that was greatly feared in her own homeland. She was an Israelite, and her culture and beliefs had taught her that such a person would not have been allowed to live in any community with his own people (Numbers 5:2).

Being in his home as a slave was likely a troubling change for her. While living with Naaman, she soon discovered that they had tried many methods to cure him, but their efforts had not been successful. She found Naaman's leprosy a serious issue that needed to be addressed. She said, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:3). The change in life at Naaman's household began once the young servant identified the issue and decided to do something about it.

In undertaking an advocacy effort, there are a variety of tools that are available that can be used to identify an issue. These tools include the Five Whys technique, Problem Tree Analysis, and other tools from the International NGO Training and Research Center (IMS International, 2015; VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002; Ross, 2013). In the analysis of the advocacy of the young servant, we use the Five Whys technique as an example of a tool that can be used to identify Naaman's problem. The Five Whys technique can help identify an issue as well as the underlying causes in order to determine the specifics of the issue. The process is delineated below:

Issue: Naaman had leprosy and they had not been able to cure him.

1. Why has Naaman not been cured? Because the treatments they have used have not been effective.
2. Why is he still taking treatments? Because they want to try as many doctors as are available in order to cure him.
3. Why have they tried many doctors and medicines? Because they have not found the correct ones to cure Naaman.
4. Why have they not found the correct one? Because they don't know which doctor can cure leprosy nor what the best medicine is to cure leprosy.
5. Why don't they know the best doctor? Because at the time no one knew enough about leprosy to cure it.

The response to the last Why is the main dilemma that Naaman is experiencing: A cure for leprosy had not been developed by any of the doctors of his time. When using the Five Whys technique, it is important to remember that at each stage there can be multiple reasons—all of which need to be probed further. Once the problem and its causes are identified, then an advocate moves to develop solutions.

Although it may be tempting to want to address every issue, successful advocacy planning depends on being able to pick priority issues wisely. The Checklist for Choosing an Issue is an effective tool that aids the individual



or group in choosing the issue, determining criteria by which the issue will be selected, and analyzing and exploring strategic solutions (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). These solutions can then be further explored in the next step: develop solutions.

## 2. Develop Solutions

Once issues have been selected and prioritized, advocacy actors explore different solutions and select the most feasible option. Then, proposed actions related to the advocacy goals are explored.

In the case study mentioned above, Ratliffe et al. (2012) developed potential solutions that would address the limitations Pualei faced due to her disability. They presented her with a technologically assistive computer, offered a weekly technology class, and looked for a van to transport her to her classes. However, the authors acknowledged that the greatest challenge rested in persuading Pualei to leave her house. As such, they collaborated with her mother to convince Pualei that it was time to stop secluding herself. Similarly, Naaman's young servant came up with a solution to address Naaman's debilitating disease after she had identified the issue in the previous step: to "see the prophet who is in Samaria." This solution was the answer to the final why in the Five Whys technique: there were no doctors capable of healing leprosy, but she knew of a prophet who could. Both stories present us with a valuable lesson capable of furthering or deterring a small-scale advocacy effort being done on another's behalf. That is, a solution can only be successful if the individuals being advocated for are willing to carry out their part in the solution. Though Pualei and Naaman were reluctant to leave the house and bathe in the Jordan, respectively, they ultimately obliged, which contributed to the success of the advocacy effort.

Naaman's problem had one main solution; however, it is possible that there could be more than one solution to an issue. The Checklist for Choosing an Issue, mentioned in step one, can also be used in identifying possible solutions. Solutions are chosen by using criteria such as, "Will the solution result in real improvement in people's lives?" and "Will the solution be widely and deeply felt?"

Another approach to generating solutions is the rational model, which includes various steps to problem solving that could include problem definition, alternative generations, alternative evaluation and selection, and solution implementations (Beecroft, Duffy, & Moran, 2003; Levi, 2015). The rational approach is often used when addressing large, complex matters in

strategic planning. There is also the organic approach, which does not have specific steps but is dependent upon the initiative and process of the group. One example of a tool is the Ben Franklin balance sheet (Harbour, 2012). This is a tool that simply requires writing the pros and cons of a solution and then weighing the options based on the results.

### 3. Identify and Influence Power Holders

After a solution has been developed, the ability to properly identify and influence decision makers and power holders is crucial and can either further or hinder advocacy efforts. VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) categorize power holders as targets, allies, or opponents, which all have varying degrees of power. A thorough analysis of power holders will aid in understanding who is involved and who can be influenced.

When Ratliffe et al. (2012) devised their solutions to assist Pualei, they recognized that involving the director of the only nursing home in American Samoa was critical. With the director's help, they were able to procure a spare van that was used to transport Pualei around the island. The identification of Pualei's mother as a power holder who was able to influence Pualei's decisions proved beneficial in being able to assist Pualei.

In the case of the young servant, she had no power because of her status as a captive in a foreign household. However, she identified a problem and its underlying issues, came up with a viable solution, and now needed a way to put her solution into action. The young servant did not keep her solution to herself but shared it with her mistress. Though the servant girl probably did not classify her mistress as a potential ally, she did recognize the power her mistress held in the household. In vocalizing her solution, she influenced her mistress to inform Naaman of the prophet in Samaria.

Although not explicitly mentioned in the story, it is not unreasonable to assume that the slave girl viewed God as the ultimate power holder. In light of Naaman's high-ranking position, the slave girl could have worried about the possible repercussions she would face if the prophet were unable to heal her master. Yet, her implicit faith in God's ability to bring about healing through Elisha compelled her to boldly talk to her mistress. As Christians involved in advocacy, we can recognize the power that God has and can at least rely on God's power to provide the strength necessary to persevere in advocacy despite challenges that may arise.

Conducting a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis can provide insight on the internal forces that can advance



your solution and the external forces that will help or hinder your efforts (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). Internal forces (strengths and weaknesses) may include you or your organization’s commitment, funds and skills. External forces (opportunities and threats) can relate to resource availability, allies and opposition, and the environment in which you are operating.

Table 1

**SWOT analysis**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Servant girl’s relationship with her mistress</p> <p>Servant girl’s courage, boldness, and knowledge of prophet’s power</p>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>Prophet is well known</p> <p>Master is sick and needs healing</p> <p>Master has exhausted all other options</p>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <p>Role as a servant</p> <p>Servant’s lack of influence</p>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <p>Credibility</p> <p>Different beliefs/religions</p>

Other tools that can be used to identify power holders are the Forcefield Analysis, Mapping power, and Stakeholder analysis. Once identifying stakeholders is completed, you can now analyze what degree of influence each stakeholder has. This can be done through influence mapping, which includes both decision makers, who have the actual power to make a decision, and opinion leaders, who can influence decision makers (Start & Hovland, 2004). The next step is to influence power holders to take action in favor of a specific cause. This can be done through networking, lobbying, collaborating with other interested individuals, and researching the issue (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). Employing the four P’s of being influential—passion, position, power, and persuasiveness—can assist individuals when undertaking advocacy efforts.

### 4. Build a Coalition

Forming a coalition is the next stage of advocacy. Your coalition will be comprised of the allies that you have previously identified. A coalition is a temporary union and collaboration between groups that have the same goals



to work on a specific issue for the purpose of gaining more influence and power in an advocacy effort. It plays an important role in advocacy because it can make it possible to coordinate resources (network, people, finance) and advocacy capacities (ideas, intelligence, expertise, and competence) to build credibility, especially when it is carefully formed.

The following stakeholders may form a coalition for any advocacy effort for people with disabilities: their parents, families or caregiver; disability change movements and activists; organization of disabled people; organizations that provide services for disabled people or families; agencies whose purpose relates to disability; human rights organization and agencies, the media; and the people with disabilities themselves. These stakeholders can be found at different levels: local, national, and international. In Pualei's case, the coalition was comprised of the four authors, the director of the nursing home, Pualei's mother and sister, the Developmental Disabilities Council, and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (Ratliffe et al., 2012).

Similarly, the young servant's coalition was made up of those she knew and those who surrounded and knew her. They included God (implied in the power of the prophet and in her faith), the prophet in Samaria, her mistress, and her master. Looking carefully at what she said, we can highlight the members of her coalition: "She said to her mistress, 'If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy'" (2 Kings 5:2,3). Unknowingly, she formed a coalition of actors that partook in the implementation of her proposed solution.

When recruiting coalition members, it is important to clearly articulate the campaign goal, describe goals and expectations, explain benefits for potential coalition members, and emphasize why they are needed for your advocacy effort (Fresina and Pickles, 2013). Many existing tools can be used to establish and build coalitions, such as coalition mapping, community mapping, and participatory asset mapping (Burns, Paul, & Paz, 2012).

One example of a useful tool is the Power Prism Coalition Mapping Worksheet. The worksheet is composed of four categories of coalition partners: inner circle, invested friends, self-interested allies, and opportunistic recruits. This tool is applied to the young servant's small-scale advocacy effort in the table below. In her case, "organization" is used interchangeably with "people." The young servant's effort came to fruition through the collaborative efforts of everyone in her coalition.

Making a coalition can provide many different resources for the advocacy effort, such as a network system, knowledge and expertise, and finance (American Foundation for the Blind, 2009). There are also the added



Table 2

**Power Prism Coalition Mapping Worksheet Applied to the Young Servant’s Advocacy**

Categories of Coalition Partners	Criteria for Consideration	Organizations You Have or Would Like to Recruit and Why
Inner circle	What organizations directly share your campaign mission?	Mistress, Master
Invested friends	What organizations embrace a vision that would be advanced if your campaign succeeded?	Mistress, Master, Syrian country
Self-interested allies	What organizations stand to better serve their membership if your campaign succeeds?	Mistress, Master, Syrian country/ army
Opportunistic recruits	What organizations have a good relationship with any of the key decision-makers you are seeking to influence? (Do some homework to identify groups that your key decision-makers trust and respect.)	Prophet in Samaria: Elisha (relationship with God)

advantages of having strength in numbers, as well as increased credibility, maximized resources, and shared ideas (Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest, 2007).

### 5. Implement Actions

The next step in advocacy is to be intentional in executing the decision once a solution has been found and the coalition has been built. Planning and strategizing are crucial in the process, but it should all lead to the effective implementation of the chosen solution to solve the problem. In this stage, the advocacy coalition or group brings the issues, solutions, and willingness

to work together to reach the advocacy goal. Synergic actions between coalition members are vital to the success of their efforts.

Though we cannot claim to know what the servant girl in the story was actually thinking or what her intentions were, there are several inferences that can be made. First, she accurately identified the issue and came up with a solution. She also expressed her desire to see her solution be implemented: “I wish,” she said. Considering the unequal power distribution between an Israelite slave and a Syrian commander, it would have been understandable if the slave girl had kept the solution to herself. Yet, she was proactive and took initiative in talking to her mistress. It is clear that there was some degree of commitment and personal investment in wanting to see her master healed. A coalition was effectually formed to execute her idea through her influence on her mistress. Successive actions took place and Naaman was healed after he was brought to the prophet as the young servant had originally suggested.

In implementing any action to address disability, Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities should be the governing principle. It indicates that all actions “must take a range of measures, with the active involvement of people with disabilities, to ensure and promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind” (United Nations, accessed on January 29, 2018). This principle underpins the best practices outlined by the UN in ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of development. Projects or advocacy efforts following best practice criteria should follow a rights-based approach, increase awareness of disability at all levels of society, directly impact and improve the quality of life of those with disabilities, be sustainable, and create and maintain effective partnerships (United Nations, 2011).

## 6. Evaluate Actions

The last step in advocacy is evaluation. Evaluation is “the process of determining the worth or significance of an activity, policy, or program. [It is] as systematic and objective as possible of a planned, ongoing, or completed intervention.”<sup>1</sup> It allows advocates to assess the progress of their advocacy work and identify the need for adjustment when accompanied with a good monitoring mechanism (Mansfield, 2010). Further, it provides a framework

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1. “Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management,” Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 21, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/2754804.pdf>



for knowing and identifying the impact produced by an intervention and for ongoing learning.

For that purpose, it is important to have evaluative criteria that specify the values to be used in assessing the impact to the common barriers that people with disabilities face. In other words, improvement in services and systems and positive social and physical conditions should be perceived by beneficiaries (Coffman, 2009). Advocating for people with disabilities is a matter of human rights; therefore, we recommend the five core guiding principles of the Human Rights-Based Approach be used as general or overarching evaluative criteria: human-rights normativity, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, and accountability (UNICEF Evaluation Office, 2012). If desired, these principles can dictate the evaluation process but also inform all steps of advocacy.

Another set of possible evaluation standards includes the four standards recommended in the Centers for Disease Control’s (CDC’s) Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health, since disability is a major concern for public health (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). The four standards—utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy—represent 30 standards that support program evaluation. Last, policy-centered advocacy can be evaluated using relevance, efficiency, efficacy, impact, and sustainability as guiding criteria (Weyrauch, 2012).

Aside from the evaluative criteria presented above, there are also three common evaluation practices useful for advocacy. First, *formative* or *process evaluation* focuses on the ways to improve the design and performance of an ongoing program (Morras-Imas & Rist, 2009). The second practice, which is called *summative, outcome, or impact evaluation*, is conducted at the close of a procedure, determining how well the results that were anticipated were actually realized. It is designed “to make an overall judgment about the effectiveness of a completed program, often to ensure accountability” (Global Environmental Facility Evaluation Office, 2010). The last practice is *prospective evaluation*. It “assesses the likely outcomes of proposed projects, programs, or policies . . . synthesizes evaluation findings from earlier studies to assess the likely outcomes of proposed new projects, programs, or policies” (American Foundation for the Blind, 2009).

The slave girl did not consciously perform an evaluation of her advocacy work, but in assessing the likely outcome of her intervention based on previous information, she was essentially conducting a prospective evaluation. From her past experience, she was confident that “the prophet would cure her master of his leprosy if only he would see him” (2 Kings 5:3). “She knew

that the power of Heaven was with Elisha, and she believed that by this power Naaman could be healed” (White, 1917; 245). In our present-day example of Pualei, advocacy efforts were also successful. Pualei’s disability had caused her to drop out of ninth grade and had left her almost completely bedridden and with no access to technology that could help her in communicating with the outside world. Ratliffe et al. (2012) used several criteria to guide their solutions, such as transparency, accountability, participation, and non-discrimination. They involved Pualei and her family in each step of their efforts and openly shared their plans. They did not treat Pualei and her family as passive participants but fully engaged them in their advocacy effort. In fact, their advocacy efforts would have not succeeded had they not managed to involve Pualei as an active participant. When the authors realized that American Samoa was greatly lacking in technology supports, they collaborated with the Developmental Disabilities Council and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to ensure accountability in providing for Pualei’s needs. At the end of their endeavor, Pualei became the first female wheelchair user to graduate in American Samoa.

Last, there are various tools that can be used to conduct an advocacy evaluation depending on the nature and the purpose of the evaluation. These tools include the Advocacy Capacity Tool (Bolder Advocacy, 2015), evaluation of short-term incremental objectives, and evaluation of strategic progress (Reisman, Gienapp, & Stachowiak, 2007).

The stories of Pualei and the slave girl are examples of successful advocacy efforts, but what would it have meant if Naaman had not been healed or if Pualei had not been helped? Would that mean that the advocacy work was a complete failure? Baccharini (1999) indicates that the success of a project can be understood through two domains: (1) project management success, which deals with the process of a project; and (2) product success, which focuses on the effects of the final product. He proposes that these two domains can be evaluated using the components of the logical framework model—inputs, outputs, purpose, and goal. More specifically, project management success is defined by inputs and outputs, while product success consists of the project’s purpose and goal. Success in both domains leads to overall project success.

Following this reasoning, we gain a better understanding of how to interpret success in advocacy. In this case, success can refer to how effective the advocacy effort is in terms of its inputs, outputs, purpose and goal. Success, then, becomes measured at every level and not just in accomplishing the overall goal of the project. Perhaps the advocacy endeavor was successful



in procuring the necessary inputs and achieving its desired outputs and purpose, but the long-term change has yet to be seen. As such, evaluating success in advocacy is largely dependent on what goals have been identified at every level of the advocacy effort, not just one overarching goal. Examples of successful outputs can include relationship building with power holders, coalition and network building, or conducting adequate research on the advocacy issue (Coffman, n.d.). Being successful in accomplishing project purposes can result in increased awareness of the advocacy issue or growth in support base. Similarly, examples of being successful in project goals can mean that the social and physical conditions of people have improved or that there are now improved services and systems.

In both the story of the slave girl and that of Pualei, it did not take long to see the significant and long-lasting changes brought about by the advocacy efforts. Ideally, every advocacy project would result in a significant impact. However, the reality of a lot of advocacy work is that seeing an impact, or long-term change, can take many years. For this reason, we reiterate the necessity of setting goals at every level of the advocacy project and performing evaluation in like manner.

## 7. Conclusion

The case of the young servant shows that advocacy does not need to involve big acts to be valid and have an impact. Small-scale advocacy, as we have described it here, can have as big an impact as a full-fledged advocacy effort, even if only in the life of one individual. It is imperative that the planning stage of the advocacy endeavor addresses every advocacy step in order to ensure the cohesiveness and streamlining of activities. Analyzing the amount of time and resources available will shape the advocacy effort and dictate what methods are employed. Though there are many tools available for each step of advocacy, the tools used will depend largely on the context and resources.

As Christians, we have a responsibility to our neighbor, and the Bible is clear on the importance of speaking up for the voiceless. Psalm 41:1 states, “Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble.” In many situations, it may not be feasible to take on large-scale advocacy efforts that might involve contacting legislators and lobbying and rallying up tons of supporters. But as the young servant girl demonstrated, being an advocate does not require extensive resources or special skills; it simply involves being open to God’s leading and using the knowledge and materials that are within reach.

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