

John Boyd. Ace fighter pilot. Real-world, cutting-edge aircraft designer. Teacher of the already elite. Ground-breaking strategist. Antagonistic military misfit who ultimately helped change that very military. Robert Coram, Boyd's primary biographer, captures his truly unique story engagingly and exquisitely.

Colonel Boyd was a complex, fault-ridden, yet still amazing man, someone who impacted multiple spheres that he was appointed to in unusual ways, several times while being a virtual outsider with regard to those spheres. This podcast episode is tenth in a series on Boyd—go listen to the first nine!

In this current episode, we start by considering a phrase, a really old-timey phrase that—from a literature viewpoint—appears to originate in the Bible, both in word usage and in the actual doing. That phrase is “stand in the gap.” Webster's says *to stand in the gap* is “to expose one's self for the protection of something; to make defense against any assailing danger; to take the place of a fallen defender or supporter.” And certainly, *standing in the gap* is what happened in some of the most famous events in the Bible. So, I'm going to start with some rich Bible stories, then we'll get to John Boyd's pattern of that!

Ezekiel 22:30 (ESV) is where God says, “And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.” Of course, the King James version—widely-used-for-centuries—says, “stand in the gap,” which is why that phrase is famous. In ancient times, a wall of protection with a gap or breach left a community of people weakened and vulnerable. Here, God reports through the prophet Ezekiel that not one person had filled the gap for God's people seeking God's mercy in righteousness. Eventually, God allowed Babylon to sack Jerusalem.

But this idea of standing in the gap was not new in the time of Ezekiel. A very long time before that, Abram—later called Abraham—was called by God to leave all that was familiar behind. His nephew Lot did join him, but the two of them split up rather soon thereafter. When hostile kings, including the King of Sodom, captured Lot and his possessions, Abram rushed to the rescue. Abram *stood in the gap*, risking life and limb to rescue Lot. (Genesis 14) Even more interesting was Abraham's later interceding with God on behalf of Sodom, whose “sin was very grave.” Still, Abraham stood in the gap, doing for Sodom what no one was later willing to do for God's people in Ezekiel's time! And God relented and did not destroy Sodom. (Genesis 18) In these stories, Abraham stood in gaps both physically *and* spiritually! Crazy good!

And what about Moses? In Psalm 106:23, Moses is remembered for *standing in the gap* when the Israelites had worshipped the golden calf and forgotten God and His great works. “Therefore [God] said he would destroy [the Israelites]—had not Moses, His chosen one, stood in the breach before Him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them.” *That's* standing in the gap! The whole story is in Exodus 32:9-14. And how about the risk-taker Esther—her story entirely about *standing in the gap* for her people, the Jews?

OK, I strongly suspect you're ahead of me now, and I love that! Who was the ultimate Person who “stood in the gap?” It was Jesus, of course! You know that each person who has ever lived has had a giant gap in their personal wall of defense, a gap created by personal sin. Romans 5:6-8 says, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Indeed, this was the finished work of the Cross by Jesus, the eternity-impacting *standing in the gap* for every person who calls upon the name of the Lord!

And, now, this is amazing, too! On the Cross, Jesus was clearly already in His gap-standing mindset—in the very moment, specific to those around Him—as reported in Luke 23:34: “And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’” *That's* *standing in the gap*, by Jesus, right then and there! And Jesus continues to intercede *now* for “those who draw near to God through him” (Hebrews 7:25). All of that is a *Jesus-pattern of standing in the gap*! Astounding, too, is what Stephen did very early in the history of the church, when he was being stoned to death. Luke reports that in Acts 7:60: “And falling to his knees [Stephen] cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had

said this, he fell asleep.” There was Stephen, *standing in the gap*, just like Jesus! And how about Paul interceding for Israel as he writes in Romans 10:1 — “...my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” Yes, *standing in the gap is a pattern of key heroes in the Bible!*

Now, we are instructed to pray for all people (1 Timothy 2:1). Of course, that’s *standing in the gap!* But our privileges are not limited to prayer! How will unbelievers know about Jesus’s *standing in the gap* for them with His death and Resurrection without hearing that proclaimed by a believer? How about loving our neighbors as ourselves, *standing in the gap* when our neighbors’ defenses have gaps? All this can easily be wrapped together and described as the robust Christian life—a *life pattern of standing in the gap for others!* Because Jesus did it first and continues to do it fully, we now do it!

Now, how about John Boyd? His career reflected a *vocational* life pattern of standing in the gap for others! Here are some telling highlights of Boyd tenaciously creating a long-term pattern of standing in the gap for others! We may know a story or two about Boyd—but seeing his nuances and pattern is our goal here!

First, the accepted wisdom in the world’s air forces was that elite fighter-pilot dogfighting in the air was really just an “art.” But dogfighting was a skill demonstrably mastered by Boyd above the skill-level of everyone else, and he proceeded to create a manual documenting the “science” behind his approaches. Of course, this equipped pilots better than ever before when their lives were at stake, and Boyd’s teaching was ultimately adopted around the world by elite air forces. Boyd was solving a “gap in the wall” of pilots that their own bravado often worked to claim they didn’t have! Like when an astute parent raises a child, Boyd reduced key vulnerability before people even recognized their need. That’s *standing in the gap!*

Next, aircraft design. Fighter pilots’ safety—their very lives—was always the ultimate concern for Boyd the designer. But the military-industrial decision-makers often lobbied for heavier, less maneuverable planes laden with bells and whistles of dubious marginal value, making those planes more vulnerable to being shot down—and too many pilots serving in Vietnam had been shot down and even died. Boyd *stood in the gap* for elite but vulnerable fighter pilots, even without their knowing about aircraft design battles!

Third, because of the revolving door that often logically happens between military officers looking to retire out of military service into government contractor positions, the deals structured between companies and service branches can look a bit too cozy. Boyd and his disciples believed a lot of military expenditures were unnecessarily gold-plated and also that military effectiveness was often hampered. Boyd stood up for U.S. taxpayers with little chance of taxpayers even knowing who he was, then or later. That’s *standing in the gap* for millions of people! Unfortunately, few politicians who are in a position to act like Boyd truly stand in the gap in the interests of taxpayers, but instead pursue their own interests and electability.

Lastly, late in Boyd’s career when his theories about war were not particularly welcomed by many of the military brass, the Marines embraced his thinking—with a number of Marines convinced he saved lives by their adoption of his ideas. Most powerful was Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney’s adoption of Boyd’s theories, which are credited with the quick victory and low loss of life of deployed troops in the First Gulf War. To do that, Cheney overrode the plans of old guard leaders in favor of Boyd! So, applying Boyd’s approach to war overcame deficiencies in standard defense plans. That saved lives! Standing in the gap.

Jesus has a faultless pattern of standing in the gap. And John Boyd had a commendable life pattern of standing in the gap—for fighter pilots, for taxpayers, for full-blown military operations. Now we’ve seen that the spiritual, physical, and vocational impact from standing in the gap can be huge. That reveals we have real, *ongoing* opportunities to stand in the gap for others—whether or not they even know we’re doing it, now or later. That’s fine, because God will handle *all* our deeds justly. And, as we know, the downside of His justice was exquisitely handled at the Cross, and the upside rewards of His justice for standing in gaps will come soon! So—spiritually, vocationally, maybe even physically—how about pursuing a *life pattern of standing in the gap?* What a life that can be!

## A&A: Application & Action

1. *Standing in the gap* sounds heroic, and sometimes it is! But often, it's about the daily execution of raising children...or mentoring a worker...or discipling a believer...or loving a neighbor in great distress. Are those less heroic, in the sense of the fullness of the Christian life that God wants for us? Discuss.
2. John Boyd was in conflicts with people a whole lot. So was Jesus. Standing in the gap oftentimes requires being willing to be in conflict or stress situations with others, whether spiritual conflict or actual flesh-and-blood nastiness. As before the Lord, are you ready and willing to be in any wise conflict or stresses necessary to serve the Lord and others well? Elaborate.
3. Every season in every era and every place has conflicts brewing. What potential specific upcoming conflicts do you perhaps see for yourself ahead spiritually? Vocationally? Family-centric? Specifically indicate what you're doing to prepare to represent the Lord well in these.