

INTERCESSION

The summer after I graduated from high school, my father had surgery for a double hernia. The operation was performed in a small hospital in Asheville, North Carolina, near my parents' summer cabin in Hendersonville.

In those days, it was customary to employ a private nurse because there were very few hospital staff nurses available. The surgeon recommended a mountain woman by the name of Julia Baldwin.

Julia was typical of the raw-boned, hard-working women who live in the Blue Ridge Mountains. She came into my father's room the morning he was to have surgery. "Praise the Lord," she said, grinning. "Let's pray!"

I was embarrassed. It was a critical time in my life. I was getting ready to leave for college. I wanted a relationship with God, but I was afraid of what that might mean. Now here comes this ruddy-faced, middle-aged woman—bubbling like Alka-Seltzer in water.

She assumed, when she heard I was enrolled at a Christian college, that I had a relationship with Jesus. "Come visit my church," she said. "You'll love it."

There was no way to back out. The following Sunday, using my mother's car, I drove out to the little Christian and Missionary Alliance church. The service was just starting. The people were singing and clapping. I'd never heard this

kind of music. Julia was in the choir. She saw me come in, grinned and waved, motioning me to join her. I was terrified. People turned and looked. Then, incredibly, she came down out of the choir loft, took my arm, and suddenly I was up there—singing and clapping my hands with the rest of the congregation.

I loved it! It was the first time in all my life I had been in a church service with vigor, and the people responded vocally—with even more vigor. I had only heard of folks who said "Amen!" in church. Now I was surrounded by them. That morning of my 18th year, sitting in the little choir loft of a Christian and Missionary Alliance church, something sparked in my heart. This was what I had been looking for and didn't even know existed. I ventured out and said my first hesitant "Amen!" It felt good.

After church, Julia took me to her house. I still remember the location on Merrimon Avenue. She

fed me lunch and talked about God. She was the only person I'd ever met who talked about Him in the present tense. She was also the first person I had ever wanted to tell all the sins in my life.

As I was leaving, she gave me a book with a green dust jacket. It was called *Rees Howells, Intercessor* by Norman Grubb. "It will save your life," she said.

I mumbled my embarrassed thanks and left. I waited 19 years before I opened it. I had had an experience with the Holy Spirit and was eager for everything from God. Reading the life of Rees Howells convinced me that prayer was the key to the door of heaven. All things were mine if I prayed.

Incredibly, though, I did not keep on praying. I spent more time talking about God than I did talking to Him. Gradually, I was dying.

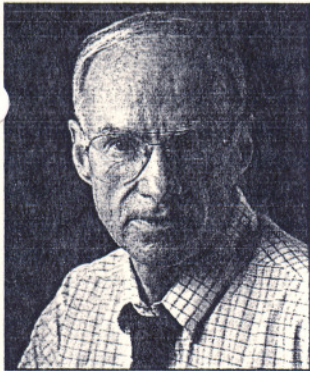
A diagnosis of cancer, however, has an amazing way of sorting priorities. Prayer, once again, became all important. Strangely, while my wife, family and thousands of friends were praying for me, I found myself praying for others.

At night, as I lay in bed, the cancer raging in my gut, I prayed for those praying for me. My wife, sensing my urgency, joined me in intercession: in the early waking hours before we got out of bed...as we drove the car...sitting in the doctor's office...if we heard a siren...when word came of others with cancer...for missionaries...as God brought names to mind. Intercession became—and has remained—a lifestyle, just as it was for Rees Howells.

Following the miracle of healing, someone reminded me of Job 42:10: "The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends." Intercession, it seems, often heals in both directions.

Early this morning, standing in front of my bookshelf, my fingers ran along the books and stopped on a green dust jacket, now ripped along the spine. I gently removed the book, holding it like an old, fragile friend. Scrawled in pencil on the cover page was a message written 41 years ago. "God has great things for you—through prayer." It was signed Julia Baldwin. ■

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