



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

A friend of mine, Al West, has just been to the brink of death — and back. Al is a hard-nosed journalist. After graduating from the U. of F. with a degree in journalism he spent time with the Orlando Sentinel and the Tampa Tribune. He was recognized as one of the best, and his feature stuff appeared regularly in the Sunday magazine sections.

About five years ago Al spent a couple of days with me, doing one of those “in-depth” interviews. We became fast friends and, when one of my book publishers decided to start a magazine, I recommended Al as editor. It required a move to New Jersey, but over the last few years he has turned the magazine into a first class item.

During this time our friendship, enhanced by our close working relationship, has deepened. We’ve been to Israel together, spent time together in the Orient and South Pacific, and this last summer we joined our families for a wild vacation in Jamaica. Al falls into one of those special categories reserved for only a few — the category of “friend.”

Two years ago Al discovered he had acute leukemia — a disease which is always diagnosed as fatal in adults. Immediately his friends gathered around him in prayer and within two weeks all the symptoms had disappeared. Although his doctor called it a recession, every test showed he was healed.

Last month the leukemia returned — like a roaring forest fire the white corpuscle count climbed from its normal 10,000 units to 350,000 units. The doctors put him in the intensive care unit of the hospital and frankly told his wife and publisher that he was dying. It was merely

a matter of time. They were keeping him alive only through blood transfusions.

Once again Al’s friends, thousands of them, started praying. I made a special trip to New Jersey, not only to be with him and his family, but to help put the magazine to bed. It was deadline time — in all departments.

Then suddenly things changed. Within three days his blood count dropped to normal. His hematologist, baffled, renewed his efforts to save him. But the tide had changed. The bone marrow test showed his body was no longer afflicted with leukemia. He was healed. The doctor released him from the hospital for Thanksgiving with his family. It was a special time.

Dying, Al told me, was like being swept out to sea. He had no strength to fight the giant waves that rolled over him. He was totally helpless — physically, mentally even spiritually. The only thing that kept him from drowning, Al said, was the knowledge that all around him, out there in the darkness, were thousands of friends lifting him up in prayer. In that dark hour, it was his only light.

I’ve never been to the brink of death, as Al has. But through him I’ve learned how important it is for us mortals to stick together, to hold one another up in prayer. For when you’re dying it doesn’t make much difference what church you belong to, what matters is we love one another enough to hang together, and to trust God to intervene in the laws of nature and, by His sovereign touch, bring healing.

He did in Al’s case. I believe He will in ours. If we ask Him.