

Intercessor Interrupted

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Intro: When God seemed to say “no” to my most sacred request, I screamed at him until my throat went dry. Would the Lord still listen as I turned up the volume? Would his answer restore my trust?

Sunday, January 23, 2000 dawned clear and cold in the Colorado high country.

Fresh snow had fallen overnight, and the kids were jazzed for their snowmobile trip after church. As soon as the service ended, they hustled through the doors, anxiously dragging their chaperones away from lingering conversations. It was time to get a move on!

I found Catherine in the throng, and gave her a quick hug.

“Call me when you guys get back, and I’ll come get you. And wear your coat!”

With a teen’s indulgent smile, she hugged me back, and said she would.

Instead, the phone rang mid-afternoon. One of the dads, a burly, tough construction worker sobbed, “Catherine has been badly hurt, and we have called Flight for Life.”

She wasn’t badly hurt for long. She was dead. Before they arrived, Flight For Life was notified, and the copter circled around and headed home.

For the first few weeks, it wasn’t hard to see where God was working. The body of Christ rallied around us and kept us breathing. The love of Jesus that Catherine had openly expressed throughout her life brought twenty-five souls to salvation at her memorial service. We received beautiful expressions of sympathy, carefully chosen Scriptures of hope, and the prayers of thousands of believers. I know the Lord carried us through that time of numbness in the arms of the saints.

But as winter turned to spring, the numbness wore off. Her empty room and precious little belongings tortured us as reality set in. From the desert of grief came my questions for God:

“How DARE you take my daughter from me? I prayed protection over those kids for weeks before that trip! I prayed for Catherine her entire life. What about the hope and the future you promised for her?”

“So are you not all-powerful, or just not paying attention? Why should I pray if my prayers don’t make any difference?”

“If you’re such a good God, how could you let Catherine die?”

“Are you even there?”

When sharing their difficult circumstances, I’ve heard Christian speakers say they didn’t blame or doubt God. Well, I did. While asking the questions was not a sin, expressing my anger was. I beat my fists against his chest by throwing dishes in the woods, screaming at him until my throat went dry. Not exactly hushed tones on bended knee.

My former relationship with God was over. I could turn my back and walk away, or stretch my tattered faith around the Word. Hanging on to what I accepted as absolute truth, I prayed for answers to restore my ragged soul.

Gone were the days of flowery Christianese, replaced by the strangled sobs of grief. I prayed some paths through the Psalms, alongside the saints of long ago who also vented their rage and frustration to the Lord. Even Jesus asked, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But the turning point for my recovery lay in this portrait of suffering, a model of obedience I couldn’t ignore. While I didn’t think I could love God again, I could surrender my attitude and follow his lead.

Slowly, obedience brought order to insanity. Lifting my voice in worship pulled me from the pit, and giving thanks reminded me of my blessings. As weeks passed into months, the Holy Spirit spoke comfort through the promises Jesus made to his disciples, and ultimately, to me.

Hebrews 11:6 says that God rewards those who earnestly seek him, and my reward has come as a deeper, broader vision of Jesus. He simultaneously wept with me in my loss and welcomed my daughter home. Some of my questions were answered in Scripture, but the rest were gradually transcended by trust as the Lord revealed to me his tenderness, his sovereignty, and his love.

Our son will be sixteen this year. He feels called to missions, and will be traveling abroad. Can I trust God to protect my only surviving child? In John 10:27-28, Jesus says, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.” (NIV) Certainly prayers of protection are imperative, but whether in the body or home with the Lord, Catherine and Jesse are safe in the arms of God.

Now, more than ever, I am compelled to intercede for those who would be lost, for true tragedy is eternity without God. Of course I beseech the Lord to protect my family, and I’d love to see my son live long on the earth. But I have reached a point of trust and surrender, knowing that God is good and that he hears me. Through obedience, I can hear him too.

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