

## Surprised by the Prayers of an Encourager<sup>1</sup>

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It was 5:00 in the morning as I reached for the stack of mail which my assistant had placed on my desk the previous afternoon. Exhausted by a pressure-filled day, I had left the pile untouched and gone home instead. After a short and almost-sleepless night, I had now returned to my office at Fresno Pacific University.

My assistant always opens and sorts my mail, laying the most important letters on top. The first was a card from a woman in Reedley, California, whose name I didn't recognize. In a handwritten note, the woman (Nancy) wrote that she would be praying for me throughout the day on January 21 even though she had no idea what I would be facing. Nancy explained that she hadn't selected the date; it was a "God-appointed." She simply wanted me to know that whatever came up on "my day," she would be praying for me.

A printed note inside the card gave additional details. Nancy, I learned, takes all the Christmas cards she receives each year, and numbers them. Every morning, she takes the next card in the sequence and prays throughout the day for the person who sent it. Although we had never met, her family supports Fresno Pacific, so I had sent them a Christmas card—which is how I made her prayer list. Nancy underscored the fact that she doesn't select the day on which she will pray for a particular person. She asks God to do that because He knows what she couldn't possibly couldn't, the specific needs of each person on her list.

After looking at the date on which Nancy would be praying for me, I glanced at the calendar and realized that I had opened it on "my day." The tears started running down my face because I understood immediately why God had selected it. I thought that Nancy should know as well, so I wrote a note explaining that my mother had died several hours earlier, a few minutes before the start of "my day."

Throughout that day as I made travel arrangements, connected with my scattered siblings, took care of urgent business on my desk and delivered the banquet speech for a gathering of educational leaders in the community, I felt an enormous sense of peace. I worked efficiently and effectively, remembering that someone was praying for me in Reedley.

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Several days later, our family gathered in Minnesota to celebrate my mother's full and rich life. At 88, her death was a blessed release from pain so we did what families do at moments like these; we laughed, cried, told stories and cleaned up her house before returning to our respective homes across the continent.

Back in my office in Fresno a few days later, I found another card from Nancy in response to my note. She thanked me for sharing my story, told me that she had been praying for my family, and then asked: "Have you looked at your 'Ewert book?'" (This was a family history some relatives had assembled and distributed to the family.) She had—and discovered that her grandmother and my grandfather were twins. I checked my copy of the book; she was right. God had sent a cousin I didn't know existed, to pray for me on the most difficult day of the year!

Everyone needs prayer and encouragers during these challenging times. When we invite God to use us, the Holy Spirit will prompt us to reach out to those who need our comforting touch. It can make a difference to us as well as to them. Who knows, you might even meet a cousin you didn't know existed!