

Called *to* Pray

Astounding Stories
of Answered Prayer

LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD



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To Laura,
my sweet daughter who so enjoyed listening to these
wonderful stories as they were told to us by many of
our dearest friends and family. Also to all those who
shared their wonderful stories with us. Thank you!

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Introduction

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Colossians 4:2

A Wake-Up Call

Call upon Me in the day of trouble;
I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.

Psalm 50:15 NASB

Late one evening, I climbed into bed with nothing on my mind except deep and peaceful dreams. My husband was already snoring, and in mere moments, I joined him in slumber. I slept soundly until an unexpected inner voice cheerfully announced, “Time to get up!”

I smiled, feeling refreshed and glad for the good night’s sleep. I swung my feet over the bed and leaned down to pat my dog’s curly head. It was then I turned and looked at the clock sitting on my nightstand. To my surprise, the green digital numbers shined 3:00 into the early morning darkness.

Are you kidding me? I asked, wondering what had just happened. I never wake up this early unless I have a flight to catch and set my alarm.

“What’s going on, Lord?” I prayed. As if in answer to my question, the phone in my office began to shrill through the silence of the house. I jumped out of bed and raced to grab it before the call went to voice mail. My dog followed my flight down the hall as my nightgown flapped around my ankles. I had to get to that phone because I suddenly had the feeling I was awake for a divine purpose.

When I grabbed the phone, the voice of a person for whom I'd spent many months earnestly beseeching heaven said, "Maybe there is a God."

Stunned, I asked, "What do you mean?"

My young friend hesitated. "I think it's interesting that you would pick up the phone just now."

"What's going on?" I asked.

"I've been contemplating my life tonight. I've been wondering if God even exists, and if he does, if he cares about me. I know you never answer the phone this time of night, so I challenged God that if he is really here and if he really loves me, that you would pick up my call. You *did*."

I gushed, "You know what's so funny about that? A voice just told me it was time to get up. I was awake and sitting up in bed when you called. That is the only reason I heard the phone and answered it." I chuckled. "And you already know what a miracle that is. See? God *is* for you."

My friend, who had been unsure if he believed in God, was suddenly awake to the possibility that God is not only real but also loves him—a real answer to my prayers. Since that night, I'm happy to report that my young friend has come back to faith, and it all started with God prompting me to pray for my friend, then prompting me to wake up at 3:00 a.m. to take his call.

Many of us often are asleep to the idea that God wants to communicate with us personally, and as a result, we sometimes ignore what seem to be stray thoughts or concerns about friends, family, or situations. When worries arise, we often believe they are nothing more than the random musings of our imaginations, never awakening to the possibility that God is actually calling us to pray.

In the pages of this book, I will share powerful stories of people who answered God's prayer promptings and then went on to see miraculous results. I will also include Scripture passages and thoughts to inspire you to pray whenever God calls.

Answering God's call to pray will lead to miracles. In fact, God burdens our hearts for those we love just so he can prove his love and answer our prayers. What amazing grace!

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Thank you that you give me the burden to call upon you so you can answer my prayers. Teach me to listen to your voice and then to intercede as you lead me. Thank you that you are a God who calls us to pray.

In Jesus's name, amen.

1



Called to Pray for Protection

This I declare about the LORD:

He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;
he is my God, and I trust him.

Psalm 91:2 NLT

On the Wings of Prayer

When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for a number of days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 1:4 NASB

Charles Stanley tells a story about a pastor friend who suddenly found himself in a desperate situation. It seems that Jack was in such a hurry to fly a small plane from Miami to Fort Pierce, Florida, that he forgot to perform a fuel check before takeoff. So about 4:00 p.m., as Jack was winging through the clouds, his plane began to sputter as it abruptly lost altitude. When Jack looked down at his fuel gage, he realized his mistake, and his heart sank. Jack knew that he and his plane were going down. He also knew that the only thing he could do to prepare for impact was to try to find a suitable landing place so his journey wouldn't end in a ball of fire. But instead of spotting a nice landing strip from his high-altitude perch, Jack looked down at miles of trees, power lines, and houses as his plane continued its downward slide toward the earth.

At this same moment, one of Jack's parishioners was busy in her kitchen when she was hit by a terrible burden to pray for Jack. When she couldn't shake the burden, she headed for her bedroom

and hit her knees in prayer, crying and pleading with God on her pastor's behalf.

Meanwhile, Jack's gliding descent continued, and just as he was preparing for the inevitable crash into the trees, he blinked. Just ahead was a freshly plowed field. It would be a stretch to make it, but Jack pointed the nose of his plane toward that field and prayed.

The wheels of his plane touched the soft earth of the field, and the next thing Jack knew, the plane's nose cone was leaning on the trunk of a tree. Despite making contact with the tree, Jack's plane sustained no damage whatsoever. Amazed, Jack hopped out of his plane and walked away, glancing at his watch. His ordeal had lasted thirty minutes.

At the same time, Jack's praying friend felt her prayer burden for her pastor lift. She rose and returned to her kitchen, noticing the time was 4:30 p.m.

The next Sunday morning, this dear woman asked Pastor Jack, "Why did the Lord have me on my knees for you last Monday afternoon? What was going on?"

She was astonished by his report, but Jack was equally astonished that she had been called to pray. He now knew he had landed his plane on the wings of prayer as a result of a gracious God who had answered the urgent prayers of a friend. How grateful he was that those prayers had led him to safety.¹

Urgency can be a powerful component of a call to pray and can guide us into the immediate presence of the Father. However, we must take the urgent prayer burden seriously. Charles Stanley says, "Praying with a burden is probably the most neglected aspect of prayer. As a result, we often pray burdenless prayers. We repeat the same old requests over and over, but with no heart or sense of urgency."²

Don't neglect your burden for others. Hit your knees as soon as you realize God has you on call to respond to a burden he has placed on your heart.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

I invite you to burden my heart whenever you want to use me to pray for someone else. Teach me how to pray with a sense of urgency.

In Jesus's name, amen.

Disarmed

I was facing death, and then he saved me.

Psalm 116:6 TLB

An eighty-year-old woman named Sandy sat at my kitchen table one afternoon. She clutched a soggy tissue as she told me her story.

When I married Ted in a beautiful church wedding filled with roses, kisses, and wedding cake, I thought I'd signed up for a happily-ever-after life, but instead I got mountains of debt, one nine-month bout of morning sickness after another, and a husband who worked eighteen hours a day to pay for our two new mouths to feed.

And me? I was left with piles of dirty diapers and a crying baby on each hip as I battled what they now call postpartum depression.

I would have talked to Teddy about my desperate feelings, but he was never home or he was too tired to listen to my complaints, even falling asleep at the dinner table while I cried into my soup. I couldn't talk to my mother, not with Dad's failing health. So I tried to talk to the Lord, but as my babies continually screamed with colic, all I could manage to say to God was, "Don't you even care?"

I admit it. I was angry, discouraged, and feeling very alone.

One night, I'd had it. The kids had screamed all day, and the dinner I'd prepared for my husband still sat on the kitchen table, ice cold. About 9:00 p.m., the phone rang. Teddy said, "Sorry, Sandy. I just walked down to the diner to grab a bite. I'm back at the office now, still working on that report my boss needs in the morning. Don't wait up because I'll be a while."

Wait up? With two colicky babies, when did I have time to sleep? In fact, it had been about thirty-two hours since I'd been able to close my eyes. It took my last ounce of strength not to scream into the phone, "Don't you know I need you *now*?"

But instead, like a good little homemaker from the fifties, I said, "I understand, dear," as the proof of my hurt slid down my cheeks.

After we hung up, I shuffled around the house like a zombie, putting Ted's dinner in the icebox and changing the kids' diapers before making my way to the bedroom just as the clock struck ten.

When I opened the closet door, my eyes rested on the shoe box tucked away on the upper shelf. I pulled the box down and carried it to the kitchen table, where I carefully lifted the lid. I blinked at the silver glint of my husband's Colt Python.

I reached into the box and carefully picked up the gun by its polished wooden handle. I knew the gun was loaded, and I ran a finger over its barrel as I stared at the trigger.

It would be so easy.

Suddenly, the gun seemed like the perfect solution to my pain, and I began to agree with the voice soothing me. "This is the way out, the only way out."

I slowly lifted the gun.

"Pull the trigger."

I took a deep breath as the room before me blurred. What did I have to live for anyway? I was a terrible mother. And Teddy? He wouldn't miss me for long. In fact, it seemed to me he didn't miss me now.

I slipped my finger into position and squeezed my eyes shut.
“Sandy. Don’t!”

I opened my eyes and looked around. “Who’s there?” I asked in a quivering voice, willing the room to come back into focus. When no one answered, I laid the gun on the table and wiped my eyes with my apron. I called into the darkness surrounding me, “Hello?” I slowly stood. “Is anyone there?” I looked down at the kitchen table and realized what I had almost done. What was I thinking?

I carefully packed the gun back into the shoe box and slipped it into its hiding place on the closet shelf.

That night I cried myself to sleep, terrified of what I’d attempted to do.

The next morning, as I watched my husband walk toward the bus stop, the phone rang. I picked up the receiver, and even before I could say hello, my mother blurted, “What was going on with you last night? The Lord got me out of bed and had me on my knees calling out for you in prayer.”

“Really? What time was that?”

“About ten o’clock. Are you okay?”

I sucked in my breath and closed my eyes.

“Sandy?”

“I’m okay, Mom. At least, I am now.”

That morning, I realized God did care. He’d knocked my mother to her knees to pray for me in my most desperate hour. He called her to pray just so he could answer her prayer and save my life.

It’s clear that the Holy Spirit quickened Sandy’s mother to pray. In fact, if you have been listening to the tempter’s voice as he tries to command you to take your life, know that the Holy Spirit led you to this story. I believe God would say to you, “Live! I am with you. I will walk you to the other side of your pain.” Call out to the

Lord for help and tell the enemy to hush his evil whispers in the power and authority of the name and the blood of Jesus.

Sandy survived her pain and went on to live a marvelous life of hope and joy. So can you. You are called to live. You are also called to pray life over the hurting.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Thank you that you are calling me to live and that you have promised to walk with me through my troubled times. Thank you that my times of trouble won't last forever. I also take this moment to tell the enemy to hush his lies of discouragement and despair over me in the power and authority of the name and the blood of Jesus. I pray now for fellow readers, family members, or friends who are tempted to take their lives. I pray they will trust in you and live. Thank you that you will help these dear ones get to the other side of their pain.

In Jesus's name, amen.

The Nala Rescue

Now choose life, so you and your children may live.

Deuteronomy 30:19

Nala stood at the top of the escalator in the Colorado airport, studying the gliding teeth that carried the crowds toward baggage claim. She looked down at her long, flowing sari and wondered if the teeth would catch her hem and suck her inside the never-stopping machine.

She placed a tentative sandaled toe onto the grate, then pulled it back as a long line of grumpy travelers grew behind her. *Jesus, please send someone to help me.*

Suddenly, a kind voice asked, “May I help you?”

Nala looked up to see a pale-skinned woman with graying blonde hair wearing navy trousers and a blue buttoned-up shirt. “There’s no need to take the escalator,” the woman told her as she pointed at the back wall. “The elevator is just over there.”

Together the two women entered the elevator, and the woman pressed the down button.

“This is my first time away from India, and you are very kind. My name is Nala. Thank you for your help.”

The woman looked embarrassed, then smiled back. “I’m Jerri. Just glad I could help,” she said.

Soon, Nala found herself at baggage claim. She watched the other passengers retrieve their suitcases from the rotating carousel, but it wasn’t long before she realized her bags hadn’t arrived like the rest.

As she looked down the hall, Jerri walked up behind her. “Looks like you need more of my help,” she told Nala.

The two women went to the lost baggage office, and Jerri helped Nala fill out a baggage claim form. Before they said goodbye, Jerri asked, “Nala, do you have a way to get to where you are going?”

“My friends were supposed to be here to pick me up, but my original flight was canceled, and I am hours late. They may not know I’ve landed.”

“Have you tried calling them?”

“I have not yet figured out how to use the American pay phone,” Nala said.

Jerri whipped her cell phone out of her pocket and said, “Let me call them for you.”

Nala beamed. “Jerri, you are so kind.”

Soon, Jerri connected Nala with the person who was to pick her up. As Nala hung up, Jerri handed Nala her card. “If you have any more trouble, Nala, call me. I’m willing to drive you if you need me to.”

Again Nala thanked her new friend, wondering if she was part angel.

Nala’s party arrived and drove her to the teaching hospital where she was starting a six-week study program to help her with her job as a nurse back in India. Later, as Nala was telling her American friend Pam about Jerri, Pam asked, “Do you still have Jerri’s number? I’d love to call her and thank her for taking care of you.”

“I do,” Nala said as she fished Jerri’s card out of her pocketbook.

That afternoon, Pam dialed the number on the card. “Jerri speaking,” a voice on the other end of the line announced.

“Jerri, you don’t know me, but I’m a friend of Nala. I’m calling to thank you for being so kind and for taking such good care of her at the airport.”

There was a delay on the line before Jerri said, “It was my pleasure.”

“How was it that you were always at the right place at the right time?”

Jerri chuckled. “As a courier, I travel in and out of that airport daily. That’s why I was always where Nala needed me. But I’m the one who should be thanking her.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nala is such a beautiful and courageous person. Her radiant spirit made me realize that life was truly worth living.”

“Worth living?”

There was a long pause on the line before Jerri continued. “You see, I’d given up on life. The morning of the day I met Nala, I’d decided that after work I would drive my truck to a secluded place and commit suicide. Still, I couldn’t help but pray one last prayer. ‘God, give me a reason to live.’ He used my encounters with Nala

to help me realize that he loved me enough to send a beautiful, lonely stranger from halfway around the world—to save my life.”³

How brilliant is God that he could use two praying women to be the answer to each other’s prayer! Jerri’s answered prayer helped Nala find her way into America, and Nala’s answered prayer helped Jerri find her way to live.

As we continue in our prayers, God continues to use our prayers to light the way for others as well as for ourselves.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Guide me in my prayers in such a way that they not only direct me through my own life but also direct me to touch the hurting, give hope to the hopeless, and provide direction to those who don’t know which way to turn.

In Jesus’s name, amen.

Tornado Warning

You are a refuge from the storm
and a shelter from the heat.

Isaiah 25:4 NLT

Have you ever wished you could change the world? You can. Every life you touch, every difference you make, every prayer you pray makes the world a better place. Maybe that’s why I love what Max Lucado says about prayer: “When you speak, Jesus hears. And when Jesus hears, the world is changed. All because someone prayed.”⁴

So maybe prayer is right up there with feeding the hungry and reaching the lost because prayer touches God, and God responds with his grace and mercy.

When I feel a burden, I don't turn it into a worry. I turn to God.

That is exactly what happened the morning of April 11, 2012. Just as dawn began to brighten my bedroom, in my mind's eye, I saw what looked like a weather map with a long band of violent storms stretching from Oklahoma to Dallas. I heard a still, small voice whisper to my spirit, "Tornadoes are coming."

I sat up in bed, trying to rub the sleep from my eyes. "Is that you, Lord?" I asked.

"Pray against the tornadoes and death," he told me.

So I prayed. I prayed that the tornadoes over Oklahoma would dissipate and that there would be no loss of life with the tornadoes I felt *would* hit the Dallas area.

Later that morning, when I switched on the news, I saw the same weather map I'd seen in my awakening moments. I also saw footage of a massive tornado tossing around twelve-thousand-pound semis like they were Legos. I was stunned.

But despite what was going on in the Dallas area, it looked like Oklahoma had been spared from this assault. The next morning on ABC news, Katie Couric and George Stephanopoulos discussed the previous day's eighteen tornadoes in Texas, which included two major tornadoes with winds reaching 160 miles an hour. Katie said, "It was shocking that there were no deaths. Thank goodness."

George responded, "Thank goodness. But the pictures were mind-boggling."⁵

I watched more footage of the flying big rigs and images of exploded neighborhoods. Hundreds of houses had been hit, roofs had been ripped off intact houses, and walls had been pierced by beams. All this and no loss of life? Unbelievable.

All I can say is God answers prayers, and when God calls us to pray, those prayers can make a difference and change the world.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Please speak to me and show me how to pray and whom you want me to pray for. Bring people and situations to mind. Help me to remember that I'm to pray so I can help make a difference. If you are calling me to keep a prayer journal so I can record the details of all you have called me to pray about, I will do it. Thank you that in this way I can help change the world.

In Jesus's name, amen.

Prayer Proofed

I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking to me about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!

Isaiah 65:24 TLB

In my book *When You Need a Miracle*, I ponder whom God would consider to be today's who's who of the faithful. While I'm sure many evangelists and missionaries would make the list, there is someone dear to God's heart whom we might overlook. As I explained, "When you do see her, you might see her frail body; though God sees a mighty prayer warrior standing in the gap for others. You might see a drab face lined with wrinkles; though God sees the beauty of vibrant prayers of faith that push back the darkness over ministries and loved ones. You might see feeble knees; though God sees lovely knees that have worn a carpet bare through hours in prayer."⁶

This is an intercessor, a person who does kingdom work by spending dedicated time praying on behalf of others.

One morning, such a woman by the name of Bobbye Byerly was at home earnestly praying for her church when she felt what she calls an “emergency alert” or an “SOS from God” to pray for her pastor’s physical protection. She immediately began to pray, “Dear God, please send angels to minister, to surround him, and to save his life.”

After about an hour, the emergency alert lifted, and she went on to finish interceding for the needs of her church.

Later that afternoon, her pastor called, wondering if she had been called to pray for him that morning.

“Yes,” she stated. “What was going on with you?”

The pastor related that at the very hour Bobbye had felt the SOS hit her spirit, a gunman had burst into his office and pointed a gun at his head before proceeding to rob the church, dragging the pastor around at gunpoint. The pastor explained, “I didn’t let him get away before I let him know that he was invited to come back, without his gun, so he could get something a lot better than Communion trays and candlesticks.”⁷

The next time a name or place interrupts your thoughts, don’t brush it away as an intrusion. Embrace it as a call to pray, and pray! You may never know what fiery darts of the enemy will be diverted because of your obedience.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

I volunteer for your intercessory service. Help me to become more aware of your leadings and promptings to pray for others. I want to be a person you can use for this all-important kingdom work.

In Jesus’s name, amen.