

Rees Howells: How Prayers Played a Role in Ending Hitler's Reign of Death

"The world became our parish and we were led to be responsible to intercede for countries and nations." –Rees Howells

On Dec. 26, 1934, Rees Howells received a vision from the Holy Spirit in the middle of the night. It was 3 a.m., and the Lord began to call him into faith for world evangelism and the completion of the Great Commission.

Rees was an intercessor with powerful testimonies of answered prayer, so he took this very seriously. He knew it would naturally require him to take direct responsibility to see it come to pass. His burden of prayer shifted from local concerns to that of national and international focus. Rees became a man with a world vision—the "Every Creature Vision" as Jesus gave His disciples in Mark 16:15.

From Inspiration to Provocation

We're all on a mission, whether we choose to act like it or not. What is universal to everyone endeavoring to follow Jesus and advance His kingdom is the need to live a life of faith and radical obedience.

When I arrived at my missionary assignment in Washington, D.C., I was introduced to the life of Rees Howells—a man somewhat hidden in the past century. In decades past, the biography *Rees Howells: Intercessor*, published in 1952, has inspired a generation of praying people to elevate their faith-filled prayers for global impact. It was 66 years ago this week—on Feb. 13, 1950—that Rees Howells encountered his Savior face-to-face in heaven.

No doubt, many readers could probably find this old classic collecting dust on a lonely bookshelf. There are so many new books on the market today, presenting exciting theories for the modern church; few people read the old books. However, this book gripped me. Its words came alive and provoked me like never before.

The book tells of a man whose prayers and intercessions shaped the world around him and extended around the globe. The gospel advanced. Wars were restrained. Wicked leaders and regimes were overturned. Maps were redrawn. The impact of his hidden life of prayer, along with the community of believers under his leadership in Wales, Great Britain, is immeasurable throughout the 20th century.

Imagine the impact on the world if every believer aspired to a life of prayer like that of Rees Howells!

Abiding in the Vine

Rees Howells grew in a life of faith through small things and then bigger things. Tests of obedience were met with simple willingness to empty himself—his own opinions, attitudes and pre-conceived ideas—and abide in Christ. So often many fail to realize that abiding in the vine is the only way to enter into a life of fullness, power, direction and fruit.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, ESV).

As faith grows through the experiences of testing and obedience, the believer is led into a life of prayer for God’s purposes to be made manifest in the earth. What we call the Lord’s Prayer is better understood as “the disciple’s prayer,” for it is the way Jesus teaches us to pray.

“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is

in heaven'" (Matt. 6:9-10, ESV).

Jesus taught us to pray dangerous prayers. Think about it. His prescribed method is to lay hold of the reality of God's perfect will in heaven and invoke it into the suffocating atmosphere of our world in conflict. There is no qualification placed on the size or nature of the crisis.

No situation is too small or too big. Our prayers are meant to inject the possibilities of heaven into every sphere of darkness and decay that surrounds us—whether that's an illness in our family or a refugee migration disrupting the borders of nations.

The Heartache of Delay

Yet when there seems to be a delay in the materialization of answered prayer, we're often left scratching our heads wondering: *What went wrong?* The pain of disappointment can quickly lead to sudden changes of personal direction, abandonment of our assignment or the far worse outcome of disillusionment and apathy. I have heard way too many sad stories from Christians who gave up, thinking, *Prayer didn't work.*

Granted, we all have to evaluate the content of our prayers. Are we praying in agreement with God's written Word? Are we praying prayers inspired by the Holy Spirit, or are we mainly hanging on to our own wants and desires? Once we determine that to the best of our understanding, we are praying according to God's will, how do we handle the ache of delayed answers?

Rees Howells discovered the secret life of abiding in Christ—resting in His Word and His promises. From that place of security and power, he was taught by the Holy Spirit to sustain a life of contending for the promises to be made reality.

It is in that tension that another factor comes into focus that can cause significant delay to our answered prayers. The apostle Paul pulled back the veil to the invisible realm when he said, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12, ESV).

The prophet Daniel actually provided us our first glimpse in Scripture of this epic conflict. In Daniel 10, he was led to pray and intercede over a matter of international importance, and 21 days later, an angel arrived with an answer from heaven.

However, it was revealed that the answer to his prayers had been immediately dispatched—but a demonic principality over that part of the world had withstood the answer all that time. Daniel's 21-day fast was a divine partnership to see God's purposes made manifest in the earth.

Obstacles and Opposition

Rees Howells knew that prepared messengers and the Word needed to be thrust out with fresh intensity, but he and his students soon learned just how ferocious the invisible realm of opposition could be.

Almost as soon as the vision came for the gospel to go to every creature, there was a conspicuous rise of evil dictators—Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini—who posed real threats to the nations of the earth. Rees Howells came to understand that these wicked leaders and governmental systems were Satan's strategy to halt the gospel's advancement.

In a short period of time, the whole world was swept into war. Hitler was crushing nation after nation under his seemingly unstoppable war machine. Scores of people were dying, and the fate of the world was hanging in the balance.

When Hitler's focus turned on Britain in 1940, very little stood in his way. Never losing sight of the "Every Creature Vision," Rees and the young people at the Bible College of Wales were called to contend for spiritual victory so that real battles on the ground could be won.

Under the black clouds of world war, Rees Howells declared: "The Holy Spirit does not know doubt, misery or worry, these are of self. ... Unless we believe in a test we have never believed. If I only take a thought that the devil is stronger than the Holy Spirit, I can close this book (the Bible) once and for all."

Theory-based faith is one thing, but tested and proven faith is altogether different. God allows us to fight giants so that we know how to defeat giants. These are the kinds of experiences we need to be able to complete our end-time assignment, which will take place in the context of pressures unparalleled in human history.

"Now is the best time to test the Bible in wars, because we are in one ourselves." –Rees Howells

Intercessors Take Responsibility

The true nature of intercession is sacrifice. Rees Howells would point out there's a big difference between "prayer warriors" and "intercessors." Prayer warriors may pray with great intensity yet walk away before the job is done. Intercessors take responsibility to see things through, regardless of how long it takes.

Like Daniel, we too are called to spiritually participate in the hidden arena of conflict. Paul said we enter into the wrestling match, yet we fight with spiritual weapons (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The battle is the Lord's, but He calls us to partner with Him in the process. The praying church is the only thing that can affect that unseen dimension.

Paul wrote to his spiritual son Timothy and encouraged him to fight a good fight of faith while holding on to prophetic promises (1 Tim. 1:18). He then immediately exhorted the church to pray their dangerous prayers and extend them over national matters.

“Therefore I exhort first of all that you make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for everyone, for kings and for all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim. 2:1-2, MEV).

The church must ask the sober questions: “How much ground has the enemy stolen? How much have we given up by neglecting the ministry of prevailing intercession?” We all need to have a vision for God’s purposes that is bigger than our own personal destinies and lives.

Rees Howells and the company of believers with him accepted an invitation from the Lord to contend for His dreams to be realized in the earth. In their hearts and minds, the evangelization of the world changed from being merely words on a page into a divine mandate. They grabbed on to a heavenly dream, and then they gave themselves wholly to seeing it come to pass in the earth.

O to fight for our Father’s dreams!

Contending for Air Supremacy

As news of Hitler’s advance came over the radio and in the newspapers each day, Rees and his company of intercessors would press into prayer for God’s purposes to prevail.

Royal Air Force pilots were outnumbered four to one at the beginning of the Battle of Britain. On all accounts, it should have been a losing battle. However, when the Nazi advance was mysteriously turned away right when all hope seemed lost, Winston Churchill famously said of the small group of pilots

who had maintained air supremacy: "Never has so much been owed by so many to so few."

Those words ought to inspire us today—those who are contending in prayer for spiritual air supremacy, standing in the victory of the cross of Christ like Rees Howells and his company.

How thankful we are that God had this company of hidden intercessors, whose lives were on the altar day after day as they stood in the gap for the deliverance of Britain (Grubb, 283).

Passing the Torch

After Rees died in February 1950, his son Samuel Rees Howells stepped into his father's shoes, and he humbly carried the same vision and convictions for the next 54 years. Two new biographies chronicle how Samuel continued in the same principles of intercession of his father and engaged in prayer that shaped world events.

"In the past, Rees Howells had shouldered the greatest part of the burden, but now Samuel challenged all the young and seasoned intercessors by saying, 'Each one of us must carry equal responsibility for the Holy Ghost, for the Vision, for Every Creature.'" —Richard Maton in *Samuel Rees Howells: A Life of Intercession*

Once again, I am provoked by the hidden lives of faith and obedience revealed on the pages of these books. The dreams of the Father remain for our generation to take up. Who will step into this legacy of intercession in the 21st century? Are there any in this generation willing to give their lives fully to the task?

"The vision Rees Howells received added great emphasis on individuals, for their responsibility in world evangelization, which meant a full surrender and consecration, coupled with power for service. 'Go ye into all the world and preach the

Gospel to Every Creature,' became the motto of the Bible College of Wales.

"However, for decades they found themselves interceding against principalities and powers that were challenging God's plan to reach every creature through many great wars and conflicts. These intercessions were costly and draining. As the decades drew on, Samuel had to lead the College forward into the future, with the knowledge that the intercession to reach every creature would now stay with them for the rest of their lives." –Richard Maton, biographer

Picking Up the Divine Mandate

Every now and then your spirit gets arrested by a line in a book. The story of some historical person or event leaves a mark on you in some deep, unseen way. As it ruminates in your spirit, it creates a conviction—a hunger—to experience those same realities. You begin to think, If God did it before, maybe He will do it again in my own life.

Samuel Howells left this earth in 2004, after carrying his father's vision for more than five decades. This generation needs to pick up the unfinished business of Rees and Samuel Howells. Only with us can their promises be fulfilled (Heb. 11:39-40).

A new generation of intercessors must lay aside our own dreams and desires in favor of contending for God's purposes in the earth. As the nations of the earth are reeling from conflict and groping in darkness, God wants to raise up a people of faith and prayer who know how to contend for victory and the advancement of His kingdom.

The Howells Project

I want to invite you to explore in-depth this life of faith and prayer, revealing how to impact the world around us. For four weeks in late spring, we will look to the biblical

principles of Rees and Samuel Howells to help guide this immersive experience—which will take place in Washington, D.C., and also at the Bible College of Wales founded by Rees Howells.

Dutch Sheets calls this small campus in Wales where we will be staying “one of the deepest wells” to draw from on the planet. This is sure to be an experience unlike any other, as we worship, pray and receive from our Father in the very place where intercessors once contended to end world wars. Then we’ll take what we’ve gained back to our own capital city. Heaven knows America needs prepared intercessors right now.

“You won’t emulate Rees Howells unless you’ve done it in the small things. You won’t learn it by theory. You may know all the theory of the life of faith, but you won’t walk it unless you’ve been tried.

“Don’t try and get weak deliverances. Don’t try and influence people, but influence God. The experiences that you will derive from those processes will never cease. The value will stand you in good stead in the future.” —Samuel Howells

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