

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT



The year I turned five I took to trying on my mother's shoes. I remember one pair in particular—shiny black patent leather, toes like the beak of a duck-billed platypus and four-inch heels, stilettos that could do some serious damage. When I stepped into them, I'd slide down until my entire feet were stuffed like putty into the toes. Then I'd shuffle across the linoleum, swaying my hips as I glanced at the armoire mirror to admire my style. Those shoes hurt like the dickens, and I never went very far in them—just back and forth, ankles twisting this way and that.

Every now and then, though, I'd catch a glimpse of someone besides my scrawny self in that mirror, someone sophisticated, bigger than life. Those were whispers of whimsy, dreams and dares of what I might someday be. But before long, tiring of the viselike grip on my feet, I'd don my scuffed saddle shoes and run off to race my brother in the field behind our house or play hopscotch on our sloping driveway. This I understood: While pretending to be someone I was not had

its moments of magic and mystery, the stuff of ordinary life was a lot more fun.

Something about the spiritual disciplines always makes me want to try on someone else's shoes, as if mine just are just too commonplace. Take, for example, intercession. Even the word itself sounds exotic—it conjures up visions of sophisticated saints with bigger-than-life qualities. And why wouldn't it? I think of Rees Howells, the miner who may very well have changed the course of World War II through his prayers. There's *Praying Hyde*, who spent untold nights weeping over souls in India until revival broke out in the nineteenth century, and David Brainerd, whose diary of prayer for Native Americans has impacted intercessors for centuries now. Legend has it that he would kneel outside the villages of those he longed to reach and become so lost in prayer that he could sink two feet into the snow without even realizing it.

I'm star-struck by intercessors of my generation as well. One woman I know prays separately for every single nation on earth—all 192 of them—at least once a month. There are those who faithfully lift up government leaders in the United States and beyond, and others who walk city streets daily, interceding for the needs there. Last week I received an e-mail urging me to join not one, but three different prayer ventures—21 days, 91 days, and a 40-day fast for consecration before national elections.

When I get wind of these things or read another book or hear the latest prayer story, before I know it I'm sliding down, being squeezed into some narrow place like putty. Trying to walk a mile in someone else's shoes, I wobble

along with dogged determination to endure the discomfort so I can be a *real* intercessor. I may even glance in the mirror to admire my style, hoping to see something besides my very ordinary self.

Why am I telling you this? For one thing, I want you to know from the start what kind of person I am. I'm not an expert on intercession, though I'm prone to dress up like one every now and then. Since God called me to write this book, I have compared myself endlessly to those I consider *real* intercessors, and always, I come up short. This is no false humility—it is the honest truth. I have a few good stories, but a lot more fits and failures over a lifetime of seeking to embrace the incredible ministry of intercession. Another reason I mention this is that I suspect you may struggle as I do. Perhaps you've even picked up this book with a mixture of misgiving and hope at the same time. That's exactly how I feel writing it.

Here's the thing. There's nothing wrong with setting our sights on being like those who really know how to pray, those who've learned to love the inner room so much that power seems to emanate from their very pores. These are the saints who can give us vision and hope—moments of whispered whimsy and dare-to dreams of what can be. But if intercession is ever going to come naturally and be as fun as I think God intends it to be, there's only one pair of shoes that will work for either of us. Like my saddle shoes oxfords of yore, our shoes may be scuffed and well worn, but they belong to us and can get us where we need to go every single day of our lives.

INTIMATE INTERCESSION

As you meander through the pages of this book, I pray you'll begin to see for yourself that your shoes fit you best in the places God wants to take you in prayer. If, while reading, you stumble onto some new path or discover an interesting insight about intercession that you'd like to try on for size, go ahead—but try to remain true to the simplicity of your unique calling in Christ. God doesn't take any pleasure in any of us trying to be someone we're not. Rest in His grace and enjoy yourself—there's not much else to it.

Oh, and by the way, if you catch me sashaying around and admiring my style—bear with me—I'll get over it soon enough.