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Naming Names

Christopher, Zach, John, Megan, Kaitlyn . . .

Sarah peppers her nightly prayers with names. The names she speaks belong to her past as well as her present. She recites them in short lists, tucked in her prayers like a family snapshot inserted in the fold of a Christmas card. The names roll off her tongue:

Clara, Ciera, Emy, Deja, Ms. Vickers . . .

Not all of the names she speaks now figure in Sarah's daily life. Some belong to family or close friends, but others are conjured from her memory, pulled to prayer like strands from a well-worn carpet. As to who makes it on her list, there is no apparent rhyme or reason. Each name simply appeared there and now returns almost nightly. Some on Sarah's list she's not laid eyes on for months, even years. Others, from her past, Sarah wouldn't know if they came up and pinched her. A few are no longer living—but she prays their names just the same.

The mere sound of these names on Sarah's breath is like a little resurrection. There, in mid-sentence, the dead rise in our hearts and for a flickering moment are back at our sides. In this way Sarah keeps them alive.

Grandma, Paul, Hugh, Mrs. Ladybug . . .

I've timed it out, and Sarah recites these names at roughly the rate of three per human heartbeat. But this of course is *my* heartbeat. With Sarah's it might well be closer to two names. What about God's heartbeat? The number of names Sarah could utter in a divine heartbeat would be greater, I think. Infinitely more! Wouldn't a single, pulsating instant for God hold more names than anyone could count? Couldn't it hold every name ever uttered, in every language, in every place and time? Isn't this the marvel of divine love: the will that none be lost, the sacred art of keeping? This I think is why, when Sarah prays, she names names. Names matter to Sarah because names matter to God.

Perhaps there exists a place where all the names are kept, where they light up like a neon sign or turn cartwheels each time they are uttered in prayer. Maybe their bearers even tingle inside, ever so slightly, whenever a child like Sarah speaks their names.

Ronda, Jayne, Sue, Miko, Katie . . .

But I'm taking no chances. Whenever I run into one of those souls whom Sarah mentions nightly by name, I let them in on Sarah's secret. "You know," I'll say, "Sarah prays for you by name most every night!" And they'll stare back, speechless with surprise, then break into a smile. How else can you respond to life's highest compliment?