

Classics

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

By O. Hallesby



Now do you dare to pray, “Lord, teach me to pray”?

That is right, be honest. You are afraid of trials and afflictions. And I believe that both you and I are willing to admit that we are also afraid of God. Pure instinct seems to tell us that God is going to deal harshly with us. And the same instinct seems to tell us that we can rely on ourselves, and that we understand what is good and what is not. But remember one thing: neither you nor I will be happy before we yield ourselves to His pierced hands and say to Him:

Send me e'en where death defies me, Send me where oppression tries me, Through dark storms upon life's sea! As Thou wilt, beloved Savior, If but Thou wilt show Thy favor, Constantly my staff to be.

So few of us become sanctified and skilled petitioners because we do not continue in the school of prayer. The course is not an easy one, and the difficulties do not consist alone in the temporal and spiritual trials. There is something about this school which tries our patience sorely. Jesus Himself alludes to it on several occasions, especially in Luke 18:1–8, where He [tells His disciples] “that [they] ought always to pray and

not to faint" [KJV].

We become faint very easily. How many times have we not earnestly resolved in our own minds to pray for certain people and for certain causes, only to find ourselves growing faint. We were not willing to expend the effort. And little by little we ceased to intercede for others.

The Spirit and Skill

It is the Spirit of prayer who superintends the instruction in the school of prayer. It is not necessary to master a large variety of subjects in order to become skilled in prayer. I would mention briefly only the following:

In the first place, the Spirit must be given an opportunity to reveal Christ to us every day. Christ is such that we need only "see" Him, and prayer will rise from our hearts. Voluntary prayer, confident prayer. We know that Christ can answer prayer. We know also that it gives Him joy to do so. Prayer and intercession have become a delightful and fascinating means of cooperation between Christ and the praying soul.

In the second place, the instruction which the Spirit imparts aims at making us earnestly solicitous. Intercessory prayer is like an ellipse, which rotates about two definite points: Christ and our need. Comfort yourself with the thought that it is the Spirit who is working these things in your heart every day. It is not necessary for you to strive in your own strength to keep your eyes open to Christ and the needs of the world.

No, all you need to do is to listen to the Spirit as He speaks to you every day in the Word and through prayer about Christ and your need, and you will soon notice yourself making progress both in prayer and in intercession.

In the third place, the Spirit teaches us the necessity of

self-denial in connection with prayer. There is something about prayer and intercession which calls for more self-denial than any other work to which the Spirit calls us.

The greater part of the work of intercession is, of course, done in secret; and work of this kind requires the expenditure of greater effort than work which can be seen of men. It is astonishing to see how much it means to us to have others see what we do. It is not only that we all have a great weakness for the praise of others, but the fact that our work is appreciated and valued is a remarkable stimulant to us.

Furthermore, we all love to see results from our labors. But the work of prayer is of such a nature that it is impossible for us always to know definitely whether what happens is a fruit of our own intercession or that of others. Both of these facts call for a great deal of self-denial in connection with prayer.

That is why it is difficult for the Lord to get enough people to carry on this work. It is easy enough to get people to preach. But there are not many who are willing to take upon themselves the self-denying work connected with prayer, because it is neither seen nor appreciated by men.

On That Great Day My friend, when you begin to grow tired of the quiet, unnoticed work of praying, then remember that He who "seeth in secret shall reward [thee] openly" [Matt. 6:6, KJV]. He has heard your prayers, and He knows exactly what you have accomplished by means of them, for the salvation of souls. If not before, then on the Great Day, you will come bringing in the sheaves, the fruit of your labors.

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