

CRU PRESS

GREEN



THE SCHOOL OF PRAYER

O. HALLESBY

LORD TEACH US TO PRAY

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.*

By so doing you will be enrolling voluntarily in that school of prayer which the Spirit has established for such as do not know how to pray.

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 mentioned above. 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 says "that they ought always to pray and not to faint."

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.

It is the Spirit of prayer who superintends the instruction in the school of prayer. He does not offer a variety of subjects, but concentrates purposely on a few central things. 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. This is absolutely essential. 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 co-operation between Christ and the praying soul.

The instruction which the Spirit imparts has as its aim the removal of everything which hinders Him from revealing Christ in our hearts. We have spoken of this previously in the chapter on "Wrestling in Prayer."

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. The work of the Spirit in connection with prayer is to show us both, not merely theoretically, but practically, making them vital to us from day to day. 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. Many are anxious to preach and are offended if not asked to do so. And we who are asked to do so, are so zealous that when we once get into the pulpit it is difficult to get us out again. 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.

You may perhaps have prayed for some unconverted people in your neighborhood, perhaps for many years. Then a revival starts in your neighborhood, and the first ones to be converted are the very ones for whom you have been praying so faithfully. No one besides yourself, however, knows anything about that. You have kept it, as is right and proper, a secret between yourself and God. Consequently, no one talks about what you have been doing. But the name of the preacher who has spoken at the meetings is, on the other hand, on everybody's lips. All are loud in their praises of him and say, "My, what a great evangelist!"

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 you openly. 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.

In the fine and difficult art of prayer, intercession is undoubtedly the most difficult of accomplishment. As far as my understanding of these things goes, intercessory prayer is the finest and most exacting kind of work that it is possible for men to perform. None of us who had visited the institution in Mannedorf, mentioned above, doubted that Zeller was the leading man and the one upon whom the greatest responsibility rested for that great and varied work which was being done there. Zeller seemed to sense our feelings in this matter, so he told us one day about the one who was chiefly responsible for and the main factor in the whole work. It was an old woman who, together with one Miss Trudel, had been connected with the work from the very beginning. During that whole time she had persevered humbly in intercessory prayer. Now she was so old and weak that she was confined to her bed. But Zeller told us, with tears in his eyes, how she had literally lived in prayer and faithfully carried her co-workers to God on the arms of prayer from day to day.

Since intercessory prayer is such a fine and difficult art, it is not at all remarkable that it should require a long and rigorous period of training. It is true that the Lord leads His friends in various ways. And we must take care not to lay down rules for Him. But what we ourselves have seen, we need not be afraid to mention. As for me, I must say: The best and most faithful intercessors I have met learned the holy art of intercession only after many trials or great suffering. All that some of them could do at last was to lie in bed, scarcely able to whisk a fly away from their faces, like the woman in Mannedorf of whom I have spoken.

BUT HOW COULD THEY PRAY?

Though they lay unseen by men, nevertheless they were centers of spiritual power, and by their simple and persevering prayers they were the chief supporters of the Christian work which was being done in their neighborhood, their community, their country and even to the ends of the earth.

Every time I meet one of these unseen intercessors,



I am reminded of a great electric power plant. They, too, are often hidden away in some secluded valley. But they are, nevertheless, exceedingly important, a fact which we become aware of especially when they do not function. When that happens, our homes are darkened and our factories brought to a standstill.

One of the tenants on my father's farm was one of these faithful intercessors.

His name was Jorn. Our Lord had imposed severe limitations upon him from his birth. His eyes were weak, and as a result it was always difficult for him to earn a living. But he did fairly well nevertheless. According to good Haugean custom, Christian people saw to it that no brother need go to the poor commissioner. Trials and tribulations became Jorn's lot, and many a day was dark and dreary.

But he humbled himself beneath the mighty hand of God, and little by little, in the school of difficult experiences, he learned the holy art of prayer. He would pray for his home community day and night. And, in due time, God exalted him. He became the spiritual counsellor of the whole parish. People came to his little hut from the whole vicinity to get advice and help. And if Jorn could not help them in any other way, he could give them some of the unfeigned love of his own tender heart. Besides, he prayed for them; and as the years passed, many a soul left his humble dwelling with a lighter tread and a happier heart.

In the later years of his life he was very poorly. Two elderly Christian women, who were with him and cared for him, told me that he would be awake a great deal at night, and that, while thus awake, they could hear him pray for all the people of the parish. And he did not make as light of it as we are apt to do. As a rule we are always in a hurry, so we take them all in one group to the Lord and ask Him in one prayer to bless them all.

But old Jorn didn't do it that way. He mentioned each one of them by name, as in his thoughts he went from house to house. Even children whom he had not seen, but who he knew had been born, he felt that he had to carry to the throne of grace upon the arms of prayer.

How much such people do mean to us! How empty their places become when they are gone!

There was also something remarkable about the way Jorn left us. Every one thought that his passing would

be like a beautiful ascension, and believers vied with one another for the privilege of being with him and watching over him; but our Lord very neatly foiled them in the expectations they had set for themselves. Jorn died without anybody witnessing his death; the one who happened to be watching over him was out in the kitchen to get something when it happened.

Jorn's funeral was the largest ever held in my home community. He had no relatives there, having moved into the parish; but people came from the whole neighborhood. And they stood at his casket and wept as though they had lost a father. Even ungodly people, who had never cared to hear the Word of God, came to his funeral; and they, too, wept. Even in death, Jorn was a blessing to others. Both his life and his death were a fulfillment of the words of Scripture, "Ask, and ye shall receive."

Excerpt from "Prayer," by O. Hallesby. Reprinted by permission Augsburg Publishing House.