

PRAYER by Ole Hallesby

Ole Hallesby writes in his preface that his book Prayer “does not presume to be anything more than a presentation of a few simple rules for the benefit of souls who are fainting in prayer.” But what the reader finds instead of rules is much richer. Instead the reader is drawn into a relationship. To pray, according to Hallesby, is to “let Jesus come into our hearts.” To spend time reading Prayer is to spend time with someone who very clearly allowed Jesus to come into his heart time and time again.

Hallesby begins by defining prayer in concepts that frequently begin with the words “prayer is nothing more than...” and paints beautiful pictures of how simple prayer is. Yet his understanding of the challenges of the Christian is evident in subsequent chapters, which include headings of “Difficulties in Prayer,” “Prayer as Work,” and “Wrestling in Prayer.” He invites us as we consider these challenges, not to follow any “simple rules,” but instead to open the door to Christ, who is knocking at our hearts door. He reminds us that the work of prayer is not ours, but God’s – “...it is not our prayer that moves the Lord Jesus. It is Jesus who moves us to pray.”

And so Hallesby does not really offer us a “how-to” manual on prayer, or allow us to approach prayer as something we can achieve by our own efforts and discipline. We are encouraged merely to become more and more aware of our own helplessness in a way that leads us to be dependent on God through prayer. “Our helplessness has now become the quiet, sustaining power of our prayer life. A humble and contrite heart knows that it can merit nothing before God, and that all that is necessary is to be reconciled to one’s helplessness and let our holy and almighty God care for us, just an infant surrenders itself to its mother’s care.”

In Prayer, the person who is “fainting in prayer” is reminded of a Father who loves His children and desires to hear their joys and concerns, a Saviour who knocks and desires to sup with those who call on His name and a Spirit who intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. Because of who God is, we are reminded that in prayer, we find rest. Who doesn’t want more of that?

PRAYING WITH YOUR EYES OPEN by Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Pratt encourages us to examine God, ourselves and our prayers, grappling with the many questions people ask about prayer in the process of offering that encouragement. He thinks toward and with the reader through the lens of Scripture, relying heavily and directly on Psalms.

Pratt addresses many aspects of prayer. Two topics that are unique to his handling (considering the books being used for this Life-on-Life study) involve the emphasis on the tension between form and freedom in prayer and the concept of praying with “persuasive urgency”. He encourages us to see God as the subject of both our lives and our prayers (as do both other authors), developing for the reader the possibility of a “fascination with God”.

PRAYING BACKWARDS by Bryan Chapell

The subtitle of Chapell’s book is “Transform Your Prayer Life by Beginning in Jesus’ Name”. As Hallesby (in **PRAYER**) encourages us to pray-as-breathing, Chapell does, too:

The Bible gives us prayer examples to help us develop helpful habits, but refining the attitude of the heart is Scripture's goal. What begins as a mechanical pattern of prayer becomes a habit and then a natural part of our lives. And in this reflexive state of prayer –where prayer is as instinctive as breathing – our habits are not rules or rituals intended to satisfy the demands of God but rather the familiar doorways to a constant and spontaneous outpouring of the heart. These doors lead to devotional lives of unceasing prayer –constrained not by any legal compulsion but by love for the God who is always listening. (*I Thess. 5:16–18)"

***1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (New American Standard Bible)**

¹⁶Rejoice always; ¹⁷pray without ceasing; ¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.