THE DAILY BREAD

The Fiat of the Beloved



Praying with the Women of Scripture

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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Praying with the Women of Scripture

Companions on the Way of Prayer

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INTRODUCTION

Women Who Knew How to Pray

Many women want to pray but feel they do not know how, that prayer is a skill they never quite learned, a conversation they do not know how to begin, and so they carry a longing to be close to God alongside a quiet sense of inadequacy before the actual practice of prayer. They may say prayers, the familiar words learned in childhood, but the living conversation with God that prayer is meant to be often feels beyond them, and they do not know where to begin or whom to ask. This book offers an answer that the Scripture itself provides: that a woman can learn to pray from the women who prayed before her, the women of the Bible who knew how to come to God.

The Scripture is full of women who prayed, who came to God in every circumstance of a woman's life, in longing and in grief, in desperation and in joy, in surrender and in courage, and in their coming to God they show every woman after them how to pray. These women are not distant figures to be admired from afar but companions on the way of prayer, sisters who went before and who show the way, each one teaching, by how she came to God, something every woman needs to know about prayer. To pray with the women of Scripture is to learn prayer not from a manual but from women who knew how to come to God, and to find in them companions for a woman's own prayer.

Lord, teach us to pray. — Luke 11:1

The disciples once asked Jesus to teach them to pray, recognizing that prayer is something to be learned, and this book takes up that request by turning to the women of Scripture as teachers of prayer. We will pray with Mary, who teaches surrender; with Mary Magdalene, who teaches the prayer of seeking; with the woman who touched the hem of His garment, who teaches desperate faith; with Hannah, who teaches the honest pouring out of the soul; with the woman at the well, who teaches the prayer of thirst; with Ruth, who teaches faithful commitment; and with Esther, who teaches the prayer of courage and intercession. Each of these women shows a woman today how to come to God, and together they form a company of sisters who teach, by their own coming to God, how to pray. This book is not about the women of Scripture as history but as companions, and each chapter offers not only their story but a way to pray with them, so that a woman learns prayer from the women who knew it best.

CHAPTER ONE

Mary and the Prayer of Surrender

Let It Be Done to Me

The first and greatest teacher of prayer among the women of Scripture is Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose response to God at the Annunciation is the model of all prayer, the complete surrender of her whole self to God's will in trust and love. When the angel announced that she would bear the Son of God, Mary answered with the words that are the heart of all prayer, let it be done to me according to your word, and in that surrender she teaches every woman the deepest movement of prayer, the yes to God that offers the whole self to His will.

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word. — Luke 1:38

The Yes That Is the Heart of Prayer

Mary's words at the Annunciation, let it be done to me, are the model of all prayer because prayer, at its deepest, is the surrender of a woman's will to God's, the yes that offers her whole self to whatever He asks. Prayer is often thought of as asking God for things, and petition has its place, but the deepest prayer is not getting God to do a woman's will but surrendering her will to His, saying with Mary, let it be done to me according to your word. This yes, this surrender of her will to God's, is the heart of prayer, the movement by which a woman gives herself to God and receives His will as her own, and Mary, who said this yes perfectly, teaches every woman the prayer of surrender that is the deepest prayer of all. To pray as Mary prayed is to come to God not only to ask but to surrender, offering her whole self and her whole will to Him with the words, let it be done to me. The yes that is the heart of prayer is the surrender of a woman's will to God's, the offering of her whole self to whatever He asks, and Mary, who said this yes perfectly at the Annunciation, teaches every woman that the deepest prayer is not getting God to do her will but surrendering her will to His.

Surrender Without Understanding

Mary gave her yes to God without understanding all that it would mean, trusting God in the face of a future she could not see, and she teaches a woman to surrender to God even when she does not understand, to say let it be done without needing to know how it will all unfold. Mary did not comprehend how she would bear a child, what her life would become, or the sword that would one day pierce her heart, and yet she surrendered, giving her yes to God in trust before understanding, saying let it be done to me in the face

of a mystery she could not fathom. This teaches a woman that surrender to God does not wait for understanding, that she can say her yes to God while still in the dark about what it will mean, trusting the God who asks rather than demanding to see the whole road first. The woman who prays with Mary learns to surrender without understanding, to give her yes to God in trust even when she cannot see where it leads, saying with Mary, let it be done to me, before she understands how. Surrender without understanding is Mary's lesson, that she gave her yes to God trusting Him before she understood what it would mean, so that a woman learns to say let it be done to God even in the dark, trusting the One who asks rather than demanding to see the whole road first.

Praying with Mary

To pray with Mary is to bring a woman's own life, with all its unknowns and its callings, to God and to echo Mary's surrender, saying over her own circumstances, let it be done to me according to your word. A woman can take Mary's words as her own prayer, speaking them over whatever God is asking of her, over the parts of her life she cannot control, over the future she cannot see, surrendering herself as Mary did with the words, behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me. This prayer of surrender can be prayed over a specific situation, a hard providence, an uncertain future, a calling she fears, offering it all to God with Mary's yes, or it can be prayed as a daily offering of her whole self to God's will. The woman who prays with Mary learns to make this surrender her own, to come to God not clutching her own will but offering it, echoing the handmaid's yes over her own life. Praying with Mary means bringing a woman's own life and callings to God and echoing Mary's surrender over them, saying let it be done to me according to your word, so that she learns to offer her whole self and her will to God as Mary did, whether over a specific hard providence or as a daily offering of herself to His will.

CHAPTER TWO

Mary Magdalene and the Prayer of Seeking

They Have Taken Away My Lord

Mary Magdalene, who came weeping to the empty tomb seeking the Lord she thought she had lost, teaches the prayer of seeking, the prayer of the woman who comes to God in longing and grief, searching for Him, and who is found by the One she seeks. When she could not find the body of Jesus, Mary wept and searched, and in her seeking she was met by the risen Lord, who called her by name, and in this she teaches every woman the

prayer of seeking God, of coming to Him in longing even in the dark, and of being found by Him.

Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned and said to him, Rabboni, which means Teacher. — John 20:16

Seeking Him in the Dark

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb in the dark, weeping, seeking the Lord she thought she had lost, and she teaches the prayer of seeking God even in grief and darkness, of coming to Him searching when He seems absent. Mary did not understand what had happened, she thought the Lord was gone, taken away, and yet in her grief she did not turn away but sought Him, coming to the place she last knew Him, weeping and searching for the One she loved. This teaches a woman that prayer is often a seeking in the dark, a coming to God in grief and confusion, searching for Him even when He seems absent or lost, refusing to turn away but pressing toward Him through the tears. The woman who prays with Mary Magdalene learns to seek God even in the dark, to come to Him searching when He seems far, bringing her grief and her longing and pressing toward Him through the confusion. Seeking Him in the dark is Mary Magdalene's lesson, that she came to the tomb weeping and searching for the Lord she thought she had lost, so that a woman learns the prayer of seeking God even in grief and darkness, pressing toward Him through the tears rather than turning away when He seems absent.

Found by the One She Sought

As Mary Magdalene sought the Lord, she was found by Him, for the risen Jesus met her in her seeking and called her by name, and she teaches that the woman who seeks God is found by Him, that her seeking is met by His finding. Mary was searching for a body, not expecting the living Lord, and yet in her seeking she was met, for Jesus came to her, spoke her name, Mary, and in that moment she knew Him and found what she sought, far more than she had looked for. This teaches a woman that her seeking of God does not go unanswered, that the God she seeks is also seeking her, and that the woman who comes to Him searching, even in the dark, is met and found by the Lord who calls her by name. The woman who prays with Mary Magdalene can trust that her seeking will be met, that the God she searches for in the dark is coming to find her, to call her by name and reveal Himself to the one who sought Him. Found by the one she sought, Mary Magdalene was met by the risen Lord who called her by name as she searched, so that a woman learns that her seeking of God does not go unanswered, that the God she seeks is also seeking her, and the woman who comes searching, even in the dark, is found by the One who calls her by name.

Praying with Mary Magdalene

To pray with Mary Magdalene is to bring a woman's own longing and grief to God and to seek Him in them, trusting that her seeking will be met by His finding, that the Lord will come and call her by name. A woman can make Mary's seeking her own, coming to God in her grief and her longing, searching for Him when He seems absent, refusing to turn away but pressing toward Him as Mary pressed toward the tomb, and trusting that she will be met. This prayer of seeking is especially for the dark seasons, when God seems distant or lost, when a woman must seek Him through grief and confusion, and it is prayed in the confidence that the One she seeks is seeking her, that He will come and call her by name as He called Mary. The woman who prays with Mary Magdalene learns to seek God in her darkness and to trust His finding, coming to Him in longing and waiting to hear her name. Praying with Mary Magdalene means bringing a woman's own longing and grief to God and seeking Him in them, pressing toward Him even when He seems absent, in the confidence that her seeking will be met by His finding, that the Lord who sought Mary will come and call her by name.

CHAPTER THREE

The Woman Who Reached Out

If I Only Touch His Garment

The woman who had suffered a hemorrhage for twelve years, who pressed through the crowd to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, teaches the prayer of desperate faith, the prayer of the woman who comes to God out of long suffering and reaches out to Him in bold, humble trust. Having spent all she had on physicians and found no cure, she came to Jesus in desperate hope, reaching out to touch even the edge of His cloak, and she teaches every woman the prayer of reaching out to God in bold faith from the midst of long suffering.

Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace. — Mark 5:34

Faith from Long Suffering

The woman had suffered for twelve years, had spent everything, had grown worse rather than better, and yet out of that long suffering she reached out to Jesus in faith, teaching the prayer of faith that comes not from ease but from the depths of long affliction. This woman knew suffering that would not end, the exhaustion of a chronic affliction, the disappointment of every remedy that failed, and yet her long suffering did not kill her

faith but drove it, bringing her at last to reach out to Jesus in desperate hope. This teaches a woman that long suffering need not destroy faith but can deepen it, that the prayer that reaches out to God from the depths of long affliction, worn down but still believing, is a faith that moves the heart of God. The woman who prays with this woman learns that her own long suffering can become the place from which she reaches out to God in faith, that the affliction that has worn her down can drive her to Him rather than away. Faith from long suffering is this woman's lesson, that out of twelve years of affliction and every failed remedy she reached out to Jesus in faith, so that a woman learns that long suffering need not destroy faith but can deepen it, driving her to reach out to God from the very depths of her affliction.

Reaching Out in Bold Humility

The woman reached out to touch even the hem of Jesus' garment, a gesture at once bold, pressing through the crowd to reach Him, and humble, daring only to touch the edge of His cloak, and she teaches the prayer that reaches out to God in bold humility, daring to come and yet coming lowly. There was boldness in her reaching, for she pressed through the crowd, overcame her fear and her shame, and dared to reach for Jesus; and there was humility, for she did not presume to ask directly but reached only for the hem of His garment, trusting that even the edge of Him would be enough. This combination of boldness and humility is the posture of faith-filled prayer, daring to come to God, pressing through every obstacle to reach Him, and yet coming humbly, not presuming but trusting in His mercy. The woman who prays with this woman learns to reach out to God in bold humility, daring to come and press through to Him, and yet coming lowly, trusting that even to touch the edge of Him is enough. Reaching out in bold humility is this woman's lesson, that she pressed boldly through the crowd and yet dared only to touch the hem of His garment, so that a woman learns the prayer that reaches out to God daring to come and pressing through every obstacle, and yet coming humbly, trusting in His mercy rather than presuming on it.

Praying with the Woman Who Reached Out

To pray with this woman is to bring a woman's own long suffering to God and to reach out to Him in bold, humble faith, daring to come and trusting that He will meet her reaching with His healing and His peace. A woman can make this woman's reaching her own, coming to God from the midst of her own long affliction, whatever it is, and reaching out to Him in faith, pressing through her fear and her discouragement to touch Him, trusting that even to reach for Him is enough. This prayer of desperate faith is for the long afflictions that wear a woman down, the sufferings that do not end, and it reaches out to God from their depths, daring to believe that He will respond, that He will

say to her as He said to this woman, your faith has made you well, go in peace. The woman who prays with this woman learns to reach out to God from her long suffering in bold, humble faith, and to trust that her reaching will be met. Praying with the woman who reached out means bringing a woman's own long suffering to God and reaching out to Him in bold, humble faith, daring to press through to Him and trusting that He will meet her reaching with His healing and His peace, saying to her as to this woman, your faith has made you well, go in peace.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hannah and the Prayer of the Poured-Out Soul

I Have Poured Out My Soul

Hannah, who in her barrenness and grief came to the house of God and poured out her soul before the Lord, weeping and praying from the depths of her anguish, teaches the prayer of complete honesty, the pouring out of the whole soul before God, holding nothing back. In her bitter grief Hannah did not compose a polite prayer but poured out her soul, wept, spoke to God from the depths of her pain, and she teaches every woman that prayer can be the honest pouring out of all that is within her, grief and longing and anguish alike, before the God who receives it.

I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. — 1 Samuel 1:15

Honest Before God

Hannah came to God not with composed and tidy words but with the raw honesty of her grief, pouring out her soul, weeping, speaking from the depths of her bitterness of heart, and she teaches that prayer can be completely honest, that a woman can bring the raw truth of her soul to God. There was nothing polished about Hannah's prayer, for she wept so bitterly that the priest thought her drunk, and she spoke to God from the depths of her anguish, holding nothing back, pouring out her soul in all its grief and longing. This teaches a woman that God does not require composed and proper prayers but welcomes the honest pouring out of her soul, that she can bring Him the raw truth of her grief, her disappointment, her longing, her anger even, holding nothing back from the God who sees it all anyway. The woman who prays with Hannah learns that she can be completely honest before God, pouring out her soul in all its rawness, bringing the real truth of her heart rather than a tidied-up version. Honest before God is Hannah's lesson, that she

poured out her soul in raw grief rather than composing a tidy prayer, so that a woman learns that God welcomes the honest pouring out of her soul, the raw truth of her grief and longing, rather than requiring composed and proper words.

Pouring Out Rather Than Holding In

Hannah poured out her soul before the Lord rather than holding her grief inside, and she teaches the value of bringing grief to God rather than carrying it alone, of pouring out the soul before Him rather than bottling it within. A woman can carry her griefs and longings silently, holding them in, letting them sit heavy in her heart, or she can do what Hannah did, pour them out before the Lord, bringing them into the open before God, releasing them to Him rather than holding them in. This pouring out is itself a relief and a grace, for the soul that pours out its grief before God is unburdened in the pouring, released from carrying alone what it brings to Him, and met by the God who receives it. The woman who prays with Hannah learns to pour out her soul before God rather than holding it in, to bring her griefs and longings into the open before Him, finding in the pouring out itself a release and a grace. Pouring out rather than holding in is Hannah's lesson, that she brought her grief to God rather than carrying it alone, so that a woman learns to pour out her soul before the Lord rather than bottling it within, finding in the pouring out itself a release and a grace, unburdened by bringing to God what she would otherwise carry alone.

Praying with Hannah

To pray with Hannah is to bring the real grief and longing of a woman's soul to God and to pour it out before Him honestly, holding nothing back, trusting that He receives the poured-out soul and meets it with His peace. A woman can make Hannah's pouring out her own, coming to God with whatever grief or longing she carries, and instead of composing a tidy prayer, pouring out her soul, speaking honestly, weeping if she must, bringing the raw truth of her heart before God as Hannah did. This prayer of the poured-out soul is for the deep griefs and longings a woman carries, the barren places, the unanswered desires, the bitter disappointments, and it pours them out before God rather than holding them in, trusting that He receives them and that, like Hannah, she may rise from the pouring out with her face no longer downcast. The woman who prays with Hannah learns to pour out her soul before God in complete honesty and to trust His receiving. Praying with Hannah means bringing the real grief and longing of a woman's soul to God and pouring it out before Him honestly, holding nothing back, trusting that He receives the poured-out soul and meets it with His peace, so that like Hannah she may rise from the pouring out no longer downcast.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Woman at the Well

Give Me This Water

The Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at the well, who came for ordinary water and was offered living water, teaches the prayer of thirst, the prayer of the woman who brings her deep thirst to God and asks Him to satisfy it with the living water only He can give. Jesus met this woman in her thirst, both the ordinary thirst that brought her to the well and the deeper thirst of her restless heart, and He offered her living water, teaching every woman to bring her thirst to God and to ask Him for the water that truly satisfies.

The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. — John 4:14

The Thirst Beneath the Thirst

The woman came to the well thirsty for water, but Jesus spoke to a deeper thirst beneath that thirst, the thirst of her restless heart that no earthly thing had satisfied, and He teaches that beneath a woman's ordinary thirsts lies a deeper thirst for God. This woman had sought satisfaction in many places, in the relationships her life revealed, and still she thirsted, still she came to the well, for beneath her thirst for water lay a deeper thirst that nothing earthly had filled, the thirst of her heart for God. Jesus spoke to this deeper thirst, offering not better water but living water, the satisfaction of the heart's deepest thirst, teaching that a woman's restlessness and her unsatisfied longings point to a thirst beneath the thirst, a longing for God that only He can fill. The woman who prays with the woman at the well learns to recognize the thirst beneath her thirsts, the deeper longing for God beneath her restlessness, and to bring that deeper thirst to the only One who can satisfy it. The thirst beneath the thirst is this woman's lesson, that beneath her thirst for water lay a deeper thirst of the restless heart for God, so that a woman learns to recognize beneath her ordinary longings and restlessness a deeper thirst for God that only He can fill.

Asking for the Living Water

When Jesus offered the woman living water, she asked for it, give me this water, and she teaches the prayer that brings the heart's deep thirst to God and asks Him to satisfy it with the living water only He can give. The woman, hearing of water that would truly satisfy, asked for it directly, give me this water, that I may not thirst, and in that asking she models the prayer of thirst, bringing her deep longing to Jesus and asking Him to fill

it with the living water He alone provides. This teaches a woman to bring her deepest thirst to God and to ask Him for the living water, the satisfaction of her heart that only He can give, not seeking it in the broken cisterns of earthly things but asking the One who offers the water that becomes a spring welling up within. The woman who prays with the woman at the well learns to ask God for the living water, to bring her heart's deep thirst to Him and ask Him to satisfy it, saying with this woman, give me this water. Asking for the living water is this woman's lesson, that hearing of water that would truly satisfy she asked for it directly, so that a woman learns the prayer that brings her heart's deep thirst to God and asks Him to fill it with the living water He alone gives, saying give me this water.

Praying with the Woman at the Well

To pray with the woman at the well is to bring a woman's own deep thirst to God, the restlessness and longing no earthly thing has filled, and to ask Him for the living water, trusting that He will satisfy the thirst of her heart. A woman can make this woman's asking her own, recognizing the thirst beneath her thirsts, the deep longing of her heart that she has sought to fill in many places, and bringing that thirst to God, asking Him for the living water, give me this water, that I may be satisfied. This prayer of thirst is for the restless, longing places in a woman's heart, the desires that nothing has filled, and it brings them to God rather than to the broken cisterns of earthly things, asking Him for the water that truly satisfies and becomes a spring welling up within. The woman who prays with the woman at the well learns to bring her deep thirst to God and to ask Him for the living water that alone can fill her heart. Praying with the woman at the well means bringing a woman's own deep thirst to God, the restlessness and longing no earthly thing has filled, and asking Him for the living water, trusting that He will satisfy the thirst of her heart with the water that becomes a spring welling up to eternal life.

CHAPTER SIX

Ruth and the Prayer of Faithful Commitment

Where You Go I Will Go

Ruth, who in loyalty and love bound herself to Naomi and to Naomi's God, choosing faithfulness when she could have turned back, teaches the prayer of commitment, the prayer by which a woman binds herself to God in faithful love, choosing Him and His people as her own. When she could have returned to her own land and gods, Ruth chose

instead to stay, to go where Naomi went and to take Naomi's God as her own, and she teaches every woman the prayer of faithful commitment, the binding of herself to God in steadfast love.

Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. — Ruth 1:16

Choosing Faithfulness

Ruth stood at a crossroads where she could have turned back to her own land, her own people, and her own gods, and instead she chose faithfulness, binding herself to Naomi and to Naomi's God, and she teaches the prayer that chooses God in faithful commitment. Ruth's choice was costly, for it meant leaving her homeland and her people, going to a land not her own, binding her future to an uncertain path, and yet she chose it, choosing faithfulness over return, commitment over the easier road back. This teaches a woman that faith involves a choice, a binding of herself to God in faithful commitment, choosing Him and His people as her own even when the choice is costly and the easier road leads back. The woman who prays with Ruth learns that prayer includes this choosing, this binding of herself to God in faithful commitment, this decision to go where He goes and to take Him as her own, made and renewed even when it is costly. Choosing faithfulness is Ruth's lesson, that at a crossroads she chose to bind herself to Naomi and Naomi's God rather than turn back to her own land and gods, so that a woman learns the prayer that chooses God in faithful commitment even when the choice is costly and the easier road leads back.

The Commitment That Binds

Ruth's words, your God my God, are a prayer of commitment, a binding of herself to God, and she teaches the prayer by which a woman makes God her own, binding herself to Him in steadfast love and claiming Him as her God. Ruth did not merely admire Naomi's God from a distance but claimed Him as her own, your God my God, binding herself to Him in a commitment that would shape her whole life, making His people her people and His God her God. This teaches a woman that prayer can be an act of commitment, a binding of herself to God, a claiming of Him as her own, your God my God, by which she makes His will her will and His people her people and gives herself to Him in steadfast love. The woman who prays with Ruth learns to make this prayer of commitment her own, binding herself to God, claiming Him as her God, giving herself to Him in a faithful love that shapes her whole life. The commitment that binds is Ruth's lesson, that in saying your God my God she bound herself to God and claimed Him as her own, so that a

woman learns the prayer by which she makes God her own, binding herself to Him in steadfast love and giving herself to Him in a commitment that shapes her whole life.

Praying with Ruth

To pray with Ruth is to make a woman's own prayer of commitment to God, binding herself to Him in faithful love, choosing Him and His people as her own, and renewing that commitment when the easier road tempts her back. A woman can make Ruth's words her own prayer, saying to God, your people shall be my people and your God my God, binding herself to Him, claiming Him as her own, giving herself to Him in a faithful commitment that she chooses and renews. This prayer of commitment is for the moments of choosing, the crossroads where faithfulness is costly and the easier road leads back, and it binds a woman to God in steadfast love, choosing Him again, renewing her commitment, saying with Ruth, where you go I will go. The woman who prays with Ruth learns to make her prayer of faithful commitment, binding herself to God in love and choosing Him anew when the easier road tempts her back. Praying with Ruth means making a woman's own prayer of commitment to God, binding herself to Him in faithful love and choosing Him and His people as her own, saying your people shall be my people and your God my God, and renewing that commitment at the crossroads where faithfulness is costly and the easier road leads back.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Esther and the Prayer of Courage

For Such a Time as This

Esther, who risked her life to intercede for her people, fasting and praying before she went to the king, teaches the prayer of courage, the prayer that strengthens a woman to do the hard and frightening thing God sets before her, and the prayer of intercession, the standing before God on behalf of others. Faced with a task that could cost her life, Esther turned first to prayer and fasting, drawing from God the courage to act, and she teaches every woman the prayer of courage for the hard calling and the prayer of intercession for those in need.

Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? — Esther 4:14

Prayer Before the Hard Thing

Before Esther went to the king, a step that could cost her life, she turned to prayer and fasting, preparing herself before God for the hard thing she had to do, and she teaches the prayer that strengthens a woman before a difficult and frightening calling. Esther did not rush into her dangerous task in her own strength but prepared for it in prayer, calling for fasting, turning to God before she acted, drawing from Him the courage and strength she would need for what lay before her. This teaches a woman that prayer is the preparation for the hard things God calls her to, that before the frightening task, the difficult conversation, the costly obedience, she can turn to God in prayer, drawing from Him the courage to do what she could not do in her own strength. The woman who prays with Esther learns to pray before the hard thing, to prepare for her difficult callings in prayer, drawing from God the courage and strength to act. Prayer before the hard thing is Esther's lesson, that before her dangerous task she turned to prayer and fasting rather than rushing ahead in her own strength, so that a woman learns to prepare for her difficult callings in prayer, drawing from God the courage to do what she could not do on her own.

Interceding for Others

Esther's prayer and action were for her people, an intercession on behalf of others in mortal danger, and she teaches the prayer of intercession, the standing before God and before others on behalf of those in need. Esther did not pray only for herself but risked herself for her people, interceding for them before the king and, before that, before God, standing in the gap for those who could not save themselves, taking their need as her own. This teaches a woman the prayer of intercession, the bringing of others and their needs before God, the standing in the gap for those in trouble, the taking of their burdens into her own prayer, and even, as God calls, the risking of herself for their good. The woman who prays with Esther learns to intercede, to bring others and their needs before God, to stand in the gap for those in trouble, taking their need as her own in prayer and, as God calls, in action. Interceding for others is Esther's lesson, that she prayed and risked herself for her people in mortal danger, so that a woman learns the prayer of intercession, bringing others and their needs before God, standing in the gap for those in trouble, and taking their burdens as her own.

Praying with Esther

To pray with Esther is to turn to God before the hard things He calls a woman to, drawing from Him the courage to act, and to intercede for others in their need, standing before God on their behalf. A woman can make Esther's prayer her own, turning to God before her difficult callings, the frightening tasks and costly obediences, and drawing from Him the courage to do them, trusting that He has placed her where she is for such a time as

this. And she can make Esther's intercession her own, bringing others and their needs before God, standing in the gap for those in trouble, interceding for them as Esther interceded for her people. This prayer of courage and intercession is for the hard callings and for the needs of others, and it draws strength from God for what must be done and stands before Him on behalf of those in need. The woman who prays with Esther learns the prayer of courage for her hard callings and the prayer of intercession for others. Praying with Esther means turning to God before the hard things He calls a woman to and drawing from Him the courage to act, trusting that He has placed her where she is for such a time as this, and interceding for others in their need, standing before God on their behalf as Esther stood for her people.

CONCLUSION

A Company of Sisters

The woman who wanted to learn to pray but felt she did not know how has, in these pages, sat at the feet of women who knew how to come to God. We have prayed with Mary, who teaches the surrender of the whole self to God's will; with Mary Magdalene, who teaches the seeking of God even in the dark; with the woman who reached out, who teaches the bold, humble faith that comes from long suffering; with Hannah, who teaches the honest pouring out of the soul; with the woman at the well, who teaches the bringing of the heart's deep thirst to God; with Ruth, who teaches the binding of herself to God in faithful commitment; and with Esther, who teaches the prayer of courage and intercession.

Together these women form a company of sisters, each one teaching, by how she came to God, something every woman needs to know about prayer. They are not distant figures but companions, sisters who went before and who show the way, and a woman is not alone in learning to pray but surrounded by this company of women who knew how to come to God and who teach her, by their own coming, how to come herself. When a woman does not know how to pray, she can turn to one of these sisters and pray as she prayed, surrendering with Mary, seeking with Mary Magdalene, reaching out with the woman who touched His hem, pouring out her soul with Hannah, thirsting with the woman at the well, committing herself with Ruth, taking courage with Esther.

So a woman need never feel that she does not know how to pray, for she has a company of sisters to teach her. Let her bring her own life to God and pray with these women, finding in each of them a companion for her own prayer and a teacher of the way to come to God. When she must surrender, let her pray with Mary. When she seeks God in the

dark, let her pray with Mary Magdalene. When she comes from long suffering, let her reach out with the woman who touched His garment. When grief overwhelms her, let her pour out her soul with Hannah. When her heart thirsts, let her ask for living water with the woman at the well. When she must choose faithfulness, let her commit herself with Ruth. And when she faces the hard calling or must intercede for others, let her take courage with Esther. These women knew how to come to God, and they are a woman's companions and teachers on the way of prayer, a company of sisters who show her, by their own coming, how to come herself.

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