

HEARING SOMEONE ELSE'S PRAYER

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

Picture a woman praying. Her lips are moving, but her voice is not heard. She is speaking in her heart. Someone observing her misjudged her.

But as he came to see the truth about her, he changed to a tone of respectful sympathy. He wished that God might grant her petition. The ending is beautiful. Her prayer was answered.

This Biblical story is from the first chapter of the book of Samuel. The woman who prayed was Hannah. She desperately wanted to have a child, and she prayed "in bitterness of soul." Eli the priest observed her and at first assumed that she was merely drunk. "For Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard" (verse 13).

How easy it is for us to regard other people with indifference and even contempt. Eli did not think of her as a human being praying to God. He merely scolded her for drunkenness. But Eli learned, and we can all learn a lesson.

Make the effort to think of another person as one who has a relationship with God. Think of other people as having prayers deep in their hearts, and see if you can find it in your own heart to say, "May your prayer be answered." This does not come naturally or easily, but it can bring about change.

Hannah herself was changed. It would be some time before she got what she prayed for, but something happened while she prayed, and afterwards "her face was no longer sad" (verse 18). A certain inward joy graced the face of Hannah.

Listen to what is said about prayer by theologian Emanuel Swedenborg: "Prayer, regarded in itself, is speech with God, and at the same time some inner view of the matters of the prayer, to which there answers something like an influx into the perception or thought of the person's mind, so that there is a certain opening of the person's interiors toward God."

This passage from *Heavenly Secrets* goes on to say that there comes forth in prayer "something like a revelation (which is manifested in the affection of the one that prays) as to hope, comfort, or a certain inward joy."

Further, Swedenborg shows when people are praying, God sees their hearts: "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (Samuel 1:16). You and I cannot see what is in a person's heart, but we can move away from the blindness of indifference.

Jesus alleviated human blindness. Once he touched a blind man and asked him what he could see. He answered that he could vaguely see people "as trees walking." Jesus

touched him again and made him look up. “And he was restored and saw everyone clearly” (Mark 8:25).

According to Swedenborg, these incidents are literally true, but they also contain spiritual lessons about things that can take place with us now. In indifferent states of mind, we are virtually blind to the existence of other people, but with the Lord’s help we can bring them into focus as human beings, children of God. When we come to see them clearly, we can treat them with love, and can wish they will receive what they pray for in their hearts.

Reprinted with permission from The Intelligencer-Record, Doylestown, PA, USA.