



A METHOD FOR PRAYER
By Matthew Henry

A
METHOD FOR PRAYER

WITH
SCRIPTURE EXPRESSIONS
PROPER TO BE USED UNDER EACH HEAD
1710 EDITION

CONTENTS

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SCRIPTURE EXPRESSIONS
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I AM in the midst of the paradise of God

BY
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LONDON
1710.

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Book description

This Prayerbook is the Puritan writer Matthew Henry's world renowned Christian classic 'A Method for Prayer' -the 1710 edition. It was created as a Bible companion and reference for daily devotions, with modernized spelling and all the cross references from Matthew Henry's original. It is professionally typeset in a classic prayer-book format with wide margins. With added devotional prayers and Bible study aids from the publisher/author of this new expanded edition.

-Featuring a collection of 700 short devotional prayers to the Godhead of Jesus Christ called 'My Affection' (that is, proclamations and praises of his many names, titles and attributes; being with you in worship and adoration before his throne, as you think upon them throughout the day and meditate in the night watches; God has said in Philippians 4:8 & Psalm 63:6.)

-An Introduction to My Affection, by John Owen.

-A poetic setting of Psalm 119.

-A Glossary containing 2400 words of the King James Bible.

-A Daily Bible reading plan.

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-**The Table of Contents/Outline & My Affection & Glossary, enlarged.**

-**An Introduction to My Affection, by John Owen, added.**

TO THE READER

RELIGION is so much the business of our lives, and the worship of God so much the business of our religion, that what hath a sincere intention, and probable tendency, to promote and assist the acts of religious worship (I think) cannot be unacceptable to any that heartily wish well to the interests of God's kingdom among men: For if we have spiritual senses exercised, true devotion, that aspiring flame of pious affections to God, as far as in a judgment of charity we discern it in others (though in different shapes and dresses, which may seem uncouth to one another) cannot but appear beautiful and amiable, and as far as we feel it in our own breasts, cannot but be found very pleasant and comfortable.

Prayer is a principal branch of religious worship, which we are moved to by the very light of nature, and obliged to by some of its fundamental laws. *Pythagoras's* golden verses begin with this precept; Whatever men made a god of they prayed to, Deliver me, for thou art my god, *Isaiah 44:17*. Nay, whatever they prayed to, they made a god of -*Deos qui rogat ille facit*. It is a piece of respect and homage so exactly consonant to the natural ideas which all men have of God, that it is certain those that live without prayer live without God in the world.

Prayer is the solemn and religious offering up of devout acknowledgments and desires to God, or a sincere representation of holy affections, with a design to give unto God the glory due unto His name thereby, and to obtain from Him promised favours, and both through the mediator. Our English word prayer is too strait, for that properly signifies petition, or request; whereas humble adorations of God, and thanksgivings to Him, are as necessary in prayer, as any other part of it. The Greek word *Proseuche* from *Euche* is a vow directed to God. The Latin word *Votum* is used for prayer: *Jonah's* mariners with their sacrifices made vows; for prayer is to move and oblige ourselves, not to move or oblige God. *Clemens Alexandrinus, Strom 7. p. 722. Edit. Colon.* calls prayer (with an excuse for the boldness of the

expression) *Homilia pros ton Theon*, it is conversing with God: And it is the scope of a long discourse of his there to shew that his *ho gosnoticos*, i.e. his believer (for faith is called knowledge, and p. 719. he makes his companions to be *hoi homoiolos pepis teucotes*, those that have in like manner believed) lives a life of communion with God, and so is praying always; that he studies by his prayers continually to converse with God. Some (saith he) have their stated hours of prayer, but he *para holon euchatai ton bion*, prays all his life long. The scripture describes prayer to be our drawing near to God, lifting up our souls to Him, pouring out our hearts before Him.

This is the life and soul of prayer; but this soul in the present state must have a body, and that body must be such as becomes the soul, and is suited and adapted to it. Some words there must be, of the mind at least, in which, as in the smoke, this incense must ascend; not that God may understand us, for our thoughts afar off are known to Him, but that we may the better understand ourselves.

A golden thread of heart-prayer must run through the web of the whole Christian life; we must be frequently addressing ourselves to God in short and sudden ejaculations, by which we must keep up our communion with God in providences and common actions, as well as in ordinances and religious services. Thus prayer must be *sparsim* (a sprinkling of it) in every duty, and our eyes must be ever towards the Lord.

In mental prayer thoughts are words, and they are the first-born of the soul, which are to be consecrated to God. But if when we pray alone we see cause for the better fixing of our minds, and exciting of our devotions, to clothe our conceptions with words; if the conceptions be the genuine products of the new nature, one would think words should not be far to seek: *Verbaque proevisam rem non invita sequuntur*. Nay if the groanings be such as cannot be uttered, He that searcheth the heart knows them to be the mind of the Spirit, and will accept of them, *Romans 8:26, 27.* and answer the voice of our breathing, *Lamentations 3:56.* Yet through the infirmity of the flesh, and the aptness of our hearts to wander and trifle, it is often necessary that words should go first, and be kept in mind for the directing and exciting of devout affections, and in order thereunto the assistance here offered I hope will be of some use.

When we join with others in prayer, who are our mouth to

God, our minds must attend them, by an intelligent believing concurrence with that which is the sense and scope and substance of what they say, and affections working in us suitable thereunto: And this the scripture directs us to signify, by saying Amen, mentally if not vocally, at their giving of thanks, *1 Corinthians 14:16*. And as far as our joining with them will permit, we may intermix pious ejaculations of our own, with their addresses, provided they be pertinent, that not the least fragment of praying time may be lost.

But he that is the mouth of others in prayer, whether in publick or private, and therein useth that *parrosia*, that freedom of speech, that holy liberty of prayer which is allowed us (and which we are sure many good Christians have found by experience to be very comfortable and advantageous in this duty) ought not only to consult the workings of his own heart (though them principally, as putting most life and spirit into the performance) but the edification also of those that join with him; and both in matter and words should have an eye to that; and for service in that case I principally design this endeavour.

That bright ornament of the church, the learned Dr. Wilkins, bishop of Chester, hath left us an excellent performance much of the same nature with this, in his discourse concerning the gift of prayer; which, some may think, makes this of mine unnecessary: But the multiplying of books of devotion is what few serious Christians will complain of: And as on the one hand I am sure those that have this poor essay of mine will still find great advantage by that: so on the other hand I think those who have *that* may yet find some further assistance by *this*.

It is desirable that our prayers should be copious and full: Our burdens, cares, and wants are many, so are our sins and mercies. The promises are numerous and very rich, our God gives liberally, and hath bid us open our mouths wide, and He will fill them, will satisfy them with good things. We are not straitened in Him, why then should we be stinted and straitened in our own bosoms? Christ had taught His disciples the Lord's prayer, and yet tells them (*John 16:24*) that hitherto they had asked nothing, *i.e.* nothing in comparison with what they should ask when the Spirit should be poured out, to abide with the church for ever; and they should see greater things than these. Then ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. We are encouraged to be particular in prayer, and in every thing to make our requests known to God, as we ought

also to be particular in the adoration of the divine perfections, in the confession of our sins, and our thankful acknowledgments of God's mercies.

But since at the same time we cannot go over the tenth part of the particulars which are fit to be the matter of prayer, without making the duty burdensome to the flesh which is weak, even where the spirit is willing (an extreme which ought carefully to be avoided) and without danger of intrenching upon other religious exercises, it will be requisite that what is but briefly touched upon at one time, should be enlarged upon at another time: And herein this storehouse of materials for prayer may be of use to put us in remembrance of our several errands at the throne of grace, that none may be quite forgotten.

And it is requisite to the decent performance of the duty, that some proper method be observed, not only that what is said be good, but that it be said in its proper place and time; and that we offer not any thing to the glorious majesty of heaven and earth, which is confused, impertinent, and indigested. Care must be taken then more than ever, that we be not rash with our mouth, nor hasty to utter any thing before God; that we say not what comes uppermost, nor use such repetitions as evidence not the fervency, but the barrenness and slightness of our spirits; but that the matters we are dealing with God about being of such vast importance, we observe a decorum in our words, that they be well chosen, well weighed, and well placed.

And as it is good to be methodical in prayer, so it is to be sententious: The Lord's prayer is remarkably so; and David's psalms, and many of St. Paul's prayers which we have in his epistles: We must consider that the greatest part of those that join with us in prayer will be in danger of losing or mistaking the sense, if the period be long, and the parentheses many, and in this as in other things, they that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak: Jacob must lead as the children and flocks can follow.

As to the words and expressions we use in prayer, though I have here in my enlargements upon the several heads of prayer confined myself almost wholly to scripture language, because I would give an instance of the sufficiency of the scripture to furnish us for every good work, yet I am far from thinking but that it is convenient and often necessary to use other expressions in prayer besides those that are purely scriptural; only I would advise that the sacred dialect be most used, and made familiar to us and

others in our dealing about sacred things; that language Christian people are most accustomed to, most affected with, and will most readily agree to; and where the scriptures are opened and explained to the people in the ministry of the word, scripture language will be most intelligible, and the sense of it best apprehended. This is sound speech that cannot be condemned. And those that are able to do it may do well to enlarge by way of descant or paraphrase upon the scriptures they make use of; still speaking according to that rule, and comparing spiritual things with spiritual, that they may illustrate each other.

And it is not to be reckoned a perverting of scripture, but is agreeable to the usage of many divines, especially the fathers, and I think is warranted by divers quotations in the new testament out of the old, to allude to a scripture phrase, and to make use of it by way of accommodation to another sense than what was the first intendment of it, provided it agree with the analogy of faith. As for instance, those words, *Psalm 87:7. All my springs are in thee*, may very fitly be applied to God, though there it appears by the feminine article in the original, to be meant of *Sion*: Nor has it ever been thought any wrong to the scripture phrase to pray for the blessings of the upper *springs* and the nether *springs*, though the expression from whence it is borrowed, *Judges 1:15. hath no reference at all to what we mean*; but by common use every one knows the signification, and many are pleased with the significancy of it.

Divers heads of prayer may no doubt be added to those which I have here put together, and many scripture expressions too, under each head (for I have only set down such as first occurred to my thoughts) and many other expressions too, not in scripture words, which may be very comprehensive and emphatical, and apt to excite devotion. And perhaps those who covet earnestly this excellent gift, and covet to excel in it, may find it of use to them to have such a book as this interleaved, in which to insert such other heads and expressions as they think will be most agreeable to them, and are wanting here. And though I have here recommended a good method for prayer, and that which has been generally approved, yet I am far from thinking we should always tie ourselves to it; that may be varied as well as the expression: Thanksgiving may very aptly be put sometimes before confession or petition, or our intercessions for others before our petitions for ourselves, as in the Lord's prayer. Sometimes one of these parts

of prayer may be enlarged upon much more than another; or they may be decently interwoven in some other method: *Ars est celare artem.*

There are those (I doubt not) who at some times have their hearts so wonderfully elevated and enlarged in prayer, above themselves at other times; such a fixedness and fulness of thought, such a fervour of pious and devout affections, the product of which is such a fluency and variety of pertinent and moving expressions, and in such a just and natural method, that then to have an eye to such a scheme as this would be a hindrance to them, and would be in danger to cramp and straiten them: If the heart be full of its good matter, it may make the tongue as the pen of a ready writer. But this is a case that rarely happens, and ordinarily there is need of proposing to ourselves a certain method to go by in prayer, that the service may be performed decently and in order; in which yet one would avoid that which looks too formal. A man may write straight without having his paper ruled.

Some few forms of prayer I have added in the last chapter, for the use of those who need such helps, and that know not how to do as well or better without them; and therefore I have calculated them for families. If any think them too long, let them observe that they are divided into many paragraphs, and those mostly independent, so that when brevity is necessary some paragraphs may be omitted.

But after all, the intention and close application of the mind, the lively exercises of faith and love, and the outgoings of holy desire towards God, are so essentially necessary to prayer, that without these in sincerity, the best and most proper language is but a lifeless image. If we had the tongue of men and angels, and have not the heart of humble serious Christians in prayer, we are but as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. It is only the effectual fervent prayer, the *Deesis energumene*, the in-wrought, in-laid prayer that avails much. Thus therefore we ought to approve ourselves to God in the integrity of our hearts, whether we pray by, or without a precomposed form.

When I had finished the third volume of expositions of the Bible, which is now in the press; before I proceed, as I intend, in an humble dependance on the divine providence and grace, to the fourth volume, I was willing to take a little time from that work to this poor performance, in hopes it might be of some service to the generation of them that seek God, that seek the face of the

God of Jacob: And if any good Christians receive assistance from it in their devotions, I hope they will not deny me one request, which is, that they will pray for me, that I may obtain mercy of the Lord to be found among the faithful watchmen on Jerusalem's walls, who never hold their peace day or night, but give themselves to the word and prayer, that at length I may finish my course with joy.

Matth. Henry.

CHESTER, Mar. 25.
1710.

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CHAPTER 1

ADORATION OF GOD 1

Of the first part of prayer, which is address to God,
adoration of Him, with suitable acknowledgments,
professions, and preparatory requests3

We must solemnly address ourselves to that
infinitely great and glorious being with whom
we have to do, as those that are possessed with a
full belief of His presence, and a holy awe and
reverence of His majesty, which we may do in
such expressions as these4

— *And we may thus distinguish ourselves from the
worshippers of false gods*4

We must reverently adore God as a being
transcendently bright and blessed, self-existent
and self-sufficient, an infinite and eternal Spirit,
that has all perfections in Himself, and give Him
the glory of His titles and attributes5

— *We must acknowledge His being to be
unquestionable and past dispute*5

— *Yet we must own His nature to be
incomprehensible*6

— *And His perfections to be matchless and without
compare*6

— *And that He is infinitely above us and all other
beings*6

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