

Christ Reformation Church

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The Language of Faith: Sermons On Prayer

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

“A Practical Method of Daily Prayer”

June 30, 2013

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Psalm 73

Introduction-

The following instruction for prayer is taken from a chapter in *A Puritan Theology* by Joel Beeke, Reformation Heritage Books, 2012. The chapter highlights the writings of an English

pastor whose name is well known to us – Matthew Henry (1662-1714). Most of you probably have his Commentary on the Whole Bible, but few people know that Henry also wrote a book on prayer.

Matthew Henry was an English Puritan born the same year that Puritan ministers were ejected from the Church of England for refusing to conform to prescribed forms of worship. His father, Philip Henry, had already lost his pulpit in 1661. The period of the 1660s to the 1680s was a dark time of persecution for the Puritans. Though frail in health, Matthew Henry distinguished himself intellectually early in life, reading the Bible to himself when he was only three. He initially studied to be a lawyer, but the Lord had other plans for him. From age 24 to 50, Henry served as pastor of a church in Chester, having been privately ordained by Presbyterian ministers such as Richard Steele. The church began in private homes but over time grew to 350 communicant members plus attendees.

Henry spent 8 hours a day in study, sometimes rising at 4AM. In addition to serving his own church, he preached monthly in five nearby villages and to prisoners. Henry's first wife died in childbirth, and 3 of the children from his second wife died in infancy.

Henry began writing his Bible Commentary at age 42, drawing from the well of his years of expository preaching and research in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French. He spent the last two years of his life serving a prominent church in London. Henry died after falling from his horse, leaving the task of writing his commentary on the New Testament epistles to 13 of his ministerial friends.

In 1710, Henry published *A Method for Prayer with Scripture Expressions Proper to be Used Under Each Head*. In 1712 he preached sermons that were published as *Directions for Daily Communion With God*. Those books reveal Henry's passion for biblical spirituality, for it was incredibly difficult for a busy pastor and author of a massive Bible commentary to find time to also write about prayer.

Here then are thoughts taken from Henry's second book:

Directions for Praying All Day

Henry wrote in his diary, "I love prayer. It is that which buckles on all the Christian's armour." Since the Christian must wear God's armor at all times, he must pray without ceasing. According to Henry, the access that Christians have to God in Christ gives them:

1. A **companion** ready in all of their solitudes (aloneness) so that they are never less alone than when alone. Do we need better society than fellowship with the Father?
2. A **counselor** ready in all their doubts...a guide (Ps 73:24) who has promise to direct with his eye, to lead us in the way wherein we should go.
3. A **comforter** ready in all their sorrows...to support sinking spirits, and be the strength of a fainting heart.
4. A **supply** ready in all their wants. They that have access to God have access to a full fountain, an inexhaustible treasure, a rich mine.
5. A **support** ready under all their burdens. They have access to him as *Adonai* [my Lord], my stay and the strength of my heart (Ps 73:26).
6. A **shelter** ready in all their dangers, a city of refuge near at hand. The name of the Lord is a strong tower (Prov 18:10).

7. **Strength** ready for all their performances in doing work, fighting work, He is their *arm every morning* (Is 33:2).

8. **Salvation** insured by a sweet and undeceiving earnest....If he thus guides us by his counsel he will receive us to glory.

Since God has made Himself available to us in such rich fullness, we must go to God throughout the day. Henry wrote, "David solemnly addressed himself to the duty of prayer three times a day, as Daniel did; 'Morning and evening, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud,' Ps 55:17. Nay, he does not think that enough, but 'seven times a day will I praise thee, Ps 119:164.'"

Accordingly, Henry wrote three discourses of directions for prayer:

- Beginning the day with God
- Spending the day with God
- Closing the day with God

Begin Every Day With God

David wrote in Psalm 5:3, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." Henry wrote, "It is our wisdom and duty to begin every day with God." He spent much of his discourse motivating us to prayer. Henry

reminded us that we can pray with assurance that "wherever God finds a praying heart, he will be found a prayer-hearing God." If we pray to God as Father through Christ the Mediator according to God's will revealed in the Bible, then we CAN know that He has heard us and will answer according to His kindness. *God requires us to pray to remind us of His authority over us and His love and compassion toward us.*

We always have something to talk to God about. He is a dear friend, so it is a pleasure to know Him personally and to walk with Him intimately. He is also the Lord of us and everything that touches our lives. Shall a servant not talk with his master? Shall a dependent not talk to his provider? Shall one in danger not converse with his defender?

Let no obstacle hinder you from coming to God. Though he is in heaven, He will hear your cries from the depths (Ps 130:1). Though God be fearsome, He grants believers the Spirit of adoption to have freedom with Him (Rom 8:15). Yes, God already knows what you need, but He requires your prayers for His glory and to fit [ie, prepare] you to receive mercy (Ezek 36:37-38). Though you are busy with many things, only one thing

is necessary: to walk with God in peace and love.

In beginning a time of prayer, Henry advised directing prayers with “a fixedness of thought, and a close application of mind,” like an archer shooting an arrow with a steady hand and an eye fixed on his target. The target of our prayers is always “God’s glory, and our own true happiness,” which, Henry cheerfully reminded us,

God has been pleased to “twist” together into one indivisible object in the covenant of grace, “so that in seeking His glory, we really and effectually seek our own true interests.”

Just as a shooter aims with one eye while shutting the other, so in prayer we must “gather our wandering thoughts.” When you pray, close your eye to the glory and praise of men (Matt 6:2) and the glitter and honors of this world (Hosea 7:14). In light of the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, Henry wrote:

“Let not self, carnal self, be the spring and center of your prayers, but God’ let the eye of the soul be fixed upon Him as your highest end in all your applications to Him; let this be the habitual disposition of your souls, to be to your God for a name and a praise; and let this be your purpose in

all your desires, that God may be glorified, and by this let them all be directed, determined, sanctified, and, when need is, overruled.”

Just as a letter must be properly addressed to reach its intended recipient, so our prayers must be addressed to God. Henry wrote, “Give Him His titles, as you do, when you direct to a person of honour....Direct your prayer to Him as the God of glory with whom is terrible majesty, and whose greatness is unsearchable.” Do not forget also that sweet name which Christ especially taught us to use in prayer, “Our Father who art in heaven.” Then take your letter and put it in the hand of “the Lord Jesus, the only Mediator between God and man....and He will deliver it with care and aped and will make our service acceptable.”

David testified in Ps 5:3 that the morning hours are especially good for prayer. Likewise, Henry observed that the priests offered a sacrificial lamb and burned incense every morning (Exod 29:39; 30:7) and singers thanked the Lord every morning (1 Chr 23:30). He cited these examples to indicate that all Christians who are spiritual priests in Christ, should offer spiritual sacrifices every morning to God. God who is Alpha, requires our first-fruits; therefore, we should give Him the first part of our day.

God deserves our best, not just leftovers of the day when we are tired and worn out.

Henry wrote, “In the morning we are most free from company and business, and ordinarily have the best opportunity for solitude.” God gives us fresh mercies every morning, so we should give Him fresh thanksgivings and fresh meditations on His beauties. In the morning as we prepare for the work of the day, let us commit it all to God.

Begin every day with God.

Directive Two: Spend Every Day With God

David wrote, “On thee do I wait all the day” (Ps 25:5). Henry said this waiting involves “a patient expectation” of God to come in mercy at His time and “a constant attendance” upon the Lord in the duties of personal worship. The saints need patient expectation, for they often wait through long, stormy days for God to answer their prayers. But they wait in hope. Henry quoted Church of England priest and poet George Herbert (1593-1633) in saying:

Away despair! My gracious God
doth hear;
When winds and waves
assault my keel,

He doth preserve it: he doth steer
Ev’n when the boat seems
most to reel.

Storms are the triumph of his art,
Well may he close his eyes, but
not his heart.

The Christian’s attendance upon God throughout the day is captured in the phrase *to wait upon the Lord*. “To wait on God, is to live a life of desire towards him, delight in him, dependence upon him, and devotedness to Him,” Henry wrote. We should spend our days desiring God, like a beggar constantly looking to his benefactor, hungering not only for His gifts but for He who is the Bread of Life. We should live in delight of God, like a lover with his beloved. “Do we love to love God?” Henry asked. Constant dependence is the attitude of a child toward his father on whom he trusts and on whom he casts all his cares.

A life of devotedness is that of a servant toward his master, “ready to observe his will, and to do his work, and in everything to consult his honour and interest.” It is “to make the will of his precept the rule of our practice,” and “to make the will of his providence the rule of our patience.” Henry thus stressed the disposition of the heart in praying without ceasing, or

waiting upon the Lord all through the day.

We must wait on God *every day*, both in public worship on the Lord's Day and in the work of our callings on weekdays and on days off. We must wait on Him in the days of prosperity when the world smiles on us and in the days of adversity when the world frowns on us. We must lean on Him in the days of youth and in the days of old age. We must wait on God *all the day*.

Are you burdened with cares? Cast them on the Lord. Do you have responsibilities to fulfill? Does your business know that God assigned you this "calling and employment" and require that you work according to the precepts of His Word? God alone can bless your efforts, and the glory of God should be the ultimate goal of all your work. Are you tempted to follow another way? Shelter yourself under His grace. Are you suffering? Submit to His will, and trust the love behind His fatherly corrections. Is your mind caught up in hopes or fears about the future? Wait on God who rules over life and death, good and evil. Henry's writings show us that every minute of every day contains ample reason to look to the Lord.

We put into practice this constant attendance upon God by exercising

private prayer with God repeatedly. Henry called men to secret prayer lest their prayers prove to be temptations to spiritual pride and self-display. He wrote, "Shut the door lest the wind of hypocrisy blow in at it."

In addition, Henry called us to family worship in which we train our household in godliness. Henry strongly advocated family devotions in *Family Hymns* (1694) and *A Church in the House: Family Devotions* (1704). He promoted such devotions not to withdraw from the local church, but to strengthen the church by promoting godliness in the home. Henry practiced in his home what he preached. Every morning he reviewed a portion of the previous Sunday's sermon with his family and prayed with them. He catechized his children in the afternoon and taught the older children after the little ones went to bed. He considered family worship as a time for the whole family to come to God in prayer, seeking His blessing, thanking Him for His mercies, and bringing Him fractures in our relationships so He might heal them.

Pray for your children to grow in wisdom and to "wait upon God for his grace to make the means of their education successful," Henry said. He reminded parents that prayer begets patience, saying, "If they are but slow,

and do not come on as you could wish, yet wait on God to bring them forward, and to give them his grace in his own time; and while you are patiently waiting on him, that will encourage you to take pains with them, and will likewise make you patient and gentle towards them.

When you go to work, Henry wrote, your job “calls for your constant attendance every day, and all the day.” But do not neglect God in your work. Work in the presence of God. Open the doors of your shop with the thought that you are on God’s appointed road of obedience and you depend on God to bless you on it -

See every customer or client as a person sent by divine providence.

Perform every transaction in justice as if God’s holy eye were upon you. Look to God for the skill to make an honest profit by honest diligence.

If you take a book into your hands, be it “God’s book or any other useful good book,” rely on God to make it profitable to you. Do not waste time reading unprofitable books. When you sit down for lunch, remember that the Creator gave us the right to eat of His created provisions, but we must eat and drink for the glory of God. When you read, do so not out of vain curiosity but with love for God’s

kingdom, compassion for human beings, and the intent to turn what you learn into prayers and praises. When you visit friends, be thankful to God that you have friends and clothing, houses and furniture to enjoy with them. If you go on a trip, put yourselves under God’s protection –

See how much you are indebted to the goodness of his providence for all the comforts and conveniences you are surrounded with in your travels.

Wherever you go or whatever you do each day, search for abundant reasons for prayer and praise. As James wrote, if you are sad, then pray to God; if you are happy, then sing praises to God (James 5:13). That covers all of life.

Directive Three: Close Every Day With God

The psalmist David wrote “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou Lord, only makest me dwell in safety” (Ps 4:8). Henry said we may end our days in contentment if we have the Lord as our God. He wrote, “Let this still every storm, command and create a calm in thy soul. Having God to be our God in covenant, we have enough; we have all--

And though the gracious soul still desires more of God, it never desires

more than God; in him it rests itself with a perfect complacency; in him it is at home, it is at rest.”

When we lay down to rest at night, Henry advised us to lie down with thanksgiving to God. We should review His mercies and deliverances at the end of each day. “Every bit we eat, and every drop we drink, is mercy; every step we take, and every breath we draw, mercy,” he said. We should be thankful for nighttime as God’s provision for our rest, for a place to lay our heads, and for the health of body and peace of mind which allows us to sleep.

Bedtime also offers an opportunity to reflect upon our death and Christian hope. Henry encouraged us to think that just as we retire from work for a time when we go to bed, so we shall retire for a time in death until the day of resurrection. Just as we take off our clothes at night, so we will put off this body until we receive a new one the morning of Christ’s presence where no nightmares can trouble us. Henry’s focus on death was not unhealthy morbidity, but a realistic consideration in a fallen world where many people die each day with or without the Christian hope that exceeds beyond this life to eternal glory.

As the light of eternity breaks upon us even after the sun has set, we should

reflect upon our sins with repentant hearts, remembering our corrupt natures and examining our conscience for particular transgressions of the law. Henry taught us to continue to plead for repentance with godly sorrow, making fresh application of the blood of Christ to our souls for forgiveness, and drawing near to the throne of grace for peace and pardon each night. Let us commit our bodies to the care of God’s angels and our souls to the influence of His Holy Spirit who works mysteriously in the night (Job 33:15-16; Ps 17:3; 16:7). Then we may lie down in peace, resting our soul upon the intercession of Christ to grant us peace with God, and forgiving our fellow men of all their offenses against us so that our hearts may be at peace with God and man.

Conclusion

Matthew Henry directed the Christian, as does the Lord, to the wonderful experience of walking with God in prayer. From morning throughout the day and until our eyes close at night, we are invited to enjoy access to God given us by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:18 says,

Ephesians 2:18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Henry wrote, "Prayer is our approach to God and we have access in it. We may come boldly...come to speak out mind. We may come with freedom...We have access to his ear, 'tis always open to the voice of our supplications. We have access in all places, at all times." We need not wait until heaven to enjoy God. "What's heaven but an everlasting access to God, and present access is a pledge of it," Henry said. And he added, "This life of communion with God, and constant attendance upon Him, *is a heaven upon earth.*"

Lord, teach us to pray.