

**“Five Men of Grace” by John Calvert. Thursday Morning Studies term 4, 2022**  
**Study 4**

**Matthew Henry and the practice of Prayer: 1662–1714.**<sup>1</sup> Best known for his Commentary on the whole Bible. Researched from his years of expository preaching and knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French. He died after finishing Acts, falling from his horse; the remainder was completed by friends from his notes. **George Whitefield** (1714–1770) often read through Henry’s commentaries on Scripture during his devotions.

---

**1: 17<sup>th</sup> Century: Monarchs;** Charles II, 1660–1685; James II, 1685–88, deposed, last RC Monarch. His 15-year-old Protestant daughter Mary II married William of Orange [known in Northern Ireland & Scotland as ‘King Billy’]; invited to take English throne, installed 1689. Battle of Boyne 1690. James defeated, exiled to France protected by Louis XIV. Mary died 1694, William in 1702. Queen Anne of England, Scotland & Ireland, 1702–1714. In 1707 the Act of Union between Scotland and England formed Great Britain. 1710, St. Paul’s Cathedral completed by Sir Christopher Wren. Queen Anne was followed by her third cousin, George of Hanover, George III; 1714–1727. **Composers:** J S Bach, 1685; Handel 1685, Isaac Watts 1674–1748; Great Plague of London, 1665 & 6, Great fire of London, 1666; Mount Vesuvius, 1666. **John Owen (1616–1683), John Bunyan; 1628–1688.**

**2: Great Ejection:** After restoration of Charles II; St. Bartholomew’s Day, August 24, 1662 [Black Bartholomew] in co-sequence of the Act of Uniformity passed by Parliament in May that year, more than 2,000 ministers were ‘ejected’ or expelled from their churches, residences, and incomes because they would not conform to the use of *The Book of Common Prayer* as the uniform order for worship in the Church of England.

**Matthew Henry**, an English Puritan, was born in 1662 a few weeks after his father **Philip** was ejected from the Church of England ministry, and therefore lost his pulpit for not conforming to prescribed forms of worship. Matthew was born in a Welsh farmhouse in Flintshire. Educated mainly by his father he was reading the Bible to himself when only three. He studied Law but God had other plans. From 1686 (aged 24) until 1712, after Presbyterian Ordination he pastored in Chester. The church began in private homes but grew to over 350. Henry sometimes rose at 4 am often studying eight hours a day.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joel R Beeke & Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, RHB, Michigan, 2012, 877 ff

His first wife died in childbirth and three children from his second wife died in infancy. In 1700 a meeting house was built for him in Crook Lane, and a gallery added six years later as another church group had joined them; communicants numbered 350. Matthew also held monthly services at five neighbouring villages plus regular preaching to prisoners in the castle. He published: *A Method for Prayer with Scripture Expressions Proper to be Used under Each Head* in 1710, which went through more than thirty editions.

**Directions for Praying All Day:** Henry wrote in his diary: “I love prayer. It is that which buckles on the Christian’s armour.” Since the Christian must wear God’s armour at all times, he must pray without ceasing. Then followed eight brief guides including four scripture references from his writing; *The Covenant of Grace*. Since God has made Himself available to us in such rich fullness, we must go to God throughout the day. He 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: and he shall hear my voice,*’ Psalm 55:17. Nor did he think that was enough; *Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments;* Psalm 119; 164. To emphasise this truth, Henry wrote three discourses of directions for prayer.

**Directive One: Begin Every Day With God.** 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 sought to motivate us to prayer and reminded us: that we can pray with assurance for, ‘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.

Let no obstacle hinder you from coming to God. He will hear your cries from the depths; Psalm 130:1, *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.* Though God be fearsome, He grants believers the Spirit of adoption to have freedom with Him; Romans 8:15; *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* God already knows what you need, but He requires your prayers for His glory and to fit you to receive mercy; Ezekiel 36:37–38. Though you are busy with many things, only one thing is necessary: to walk with God in peace and love.

**Directive Two: Spend Every Day with God.** David wrote, *‘on thee do I wait all the day’*, Psalm 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, dark, stormy days for God to answer their prayers. But they wait in hope. 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 toward Him, delight in Him, dependence on Him and devotedness to Him.’ He 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?’ Constant dependence is the attitude of a child toward his father on whom he trusts and on whom he casts all his cares.

Are you burdened with cares? Cast them on the Lord. 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. In addition: Henry called us to family worship in which we train our households in Godliness. 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. Do not waste time reading unprofitable books.

**Directive Three: Close Every Day with God.** *I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord only makest me dwell in safety*, Psalm 4: 8. We may end our days in contentment if we have the Lord as our God. “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 reposes 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.

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 return. Just as we lie down in our beds to rest, so we will lie down in death to rest in 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 extends beyond this life to eternal glory. 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 offences against us so that our hearts may be at peace with God and man.

Henry suggested we may fall asleep with thoughts such as these:

To Thy glory, O God, I now go to sleep. Whether we eat or drink, yea, or sleep. For this is included in whatever we do, - we must do it to the glory of God ... To thy grace, O God, and to the word of thy grace I now commend myself. It is good to fall asleep, with a fresh surrender of our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, to God; now, *'return to God as thy rest, O my soul; for he has dealt bountifully with thee'* ... O that when I awake I may be still with God; that the parenthesis of sleep, though lone, may not break off the thread of my communion with God, but that as soon as I awake I may resume it.

Henry directed the Christian to the wonderful experience of walking with God in prayer. Throughout the day we are invited to enjoy access to God given us by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2: 18; *For through Him (Jesus Christ) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.* Henry wrote; 'Prayer is our approach to God and we have access in it. We may come boldly ... come to speak all our 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.' This life of communion with God, and constant attendance upon Him, is a heaven upon earth.

**A Method for Praying the Scriptures.** When a Christian devotes himself to prayer, whether privately or publicly, his prayers should be copious and full because his burdens, concerns, needs, desires, and sins are many, and God's mercies are great. This commends the use of some method in prayer. Yet, there are times when a Christian's heart is so lifted up in prayer that a method would clip his wings. But those times are rare; ordinarily our prayers require a method, for we do not want to speak rashly before 'the glorious Majesty of heaven and earth.' The Bible shows us that our prayers should consist of short, clear, potent sentences (e.g. The Lord's Prayer) rather than a rambling stream of consciousness (or semiconsciousness) in which you forget what you are saying before your prayer is even done.

To help us form prayers that are better focused, Henry directs us to the source that is sufficient for every good work: the Holy Scriptures. Hear Him speaking to you ... God's Word must be the guide of your desires and the ground of your

expectations in prayer. At the heart of God's method is praying God's Word back to God. O. Palmer Robertson (American theologian) wrote, 'Prayer in this form is nothing more and nothing less than what the old Puritan's called; pleading the promises. God has made promises to His people. His people respond by directing those promises to the Lord in the form of prayer. Henry did not restrict himself entirely to Bible promises, however. Ligon Duncan (American Presbyterian scholar) notes of Henry; 'He ransacks the Scriptures for references to God's attributes and turns them into matters of adoration.' In every respect, Henry sought to fill the mouths of God's people with God's own words, although he acknowledged that; 'It is convenient and often necessary to use other expressions in prayer besides those that are purely Scriptural.'

Henry's method included adoration, confession, petition for ourselves, thanksgiving, intercession for others and conclusion. This pattern generally follows what is offered in the Westminster Director for Public Worship (1645). Henry's great maxim; **Pray the Scriptures**. Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813–1843); **Turn the Bible into Prayer**.

**John Calvin**: *We are taught by faith to know that all the goodness which we need and which we ourselves lack is in God and in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the Father has placed all the bounty of his blessing and grace, so that we may all draw from him as from a most plentiful spring. It therefore remains for us to seek from him what we know to be in him, and to ask for it in prayer and supplication. For to know God as the master, author and dispenser of all good things who invites us to seek them from him, yet not to turn to him or to ask him for anything, would get us nowhere ... Thus we understand that whatever God invites us to expect from him we are also commanded to ask for in prayer... It is not for his sake that he has ordained prayer but for ours ... We must lay aside any thought of our own glory, have done with any belief in self-worth and, ceasing to have any confidence in ourselves, let us in our humility and abasement give glory to God. Let us not claim the slightest credit for ourselves, lest in our absurd arrogance we be struck down before him.*<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translated from the first French edition of 1541 by Robert White, Banner of Truth Trust, 2016, 517, 8, 21